

James Gunn's Memorable 'Super' With Rainn Wilson, Ellen Page

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 8, 2011 - 9:18am

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [Ellen Page](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [IFC Films](#) [5]
- [James Gunn](#) [6]
- [Kevin Bacon](#) [7]
- [Kick-Ass](#) [8]
- [Liv Tyler](#) [9]
- [Michael Rooker](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Nathan Fillion](#) [12]
- [Rainn Wilson](#) [13]
- [Super](#) [14]
- [Taxi Driver](#) [15]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – A much darker cousin of Matthew Vaughn's "Kick-Ass" by way of "Taxi Driver," James Gunn's "Super" is a tonally inconsistent comedy that nevertheless features one of my absolute favorite performances of the year so far and enough interesting ideas to warrant a look. If only those ideas were shaped into something a bit more coherent. "Super" could have lived up to its title.

Where Vaughn and the team behind "Kick-Ass" used the concept of the average-man-turned-superhero to craft a subversive live-action comic book of their own, Gunn's intentions are quite different. There's a reason that half of the word superhero has been cut off in the title of his film. This is not a movie about heroes or heroines, even if they might think they are such in their own demented minds. Instead, Gunn has made an always-interesting film about the dark pain hiding behind the mask of most of our comic book icons. What if a truly damaged soul copied that aspect of the costumed avenger and became a vigilante even crazier than the crime he's trying to fight? And what if said man had no perspective at all on one crime being worse than another?



Super

Photo credit: IFC Films

That second question is set up by the opening narration in which schlubby Frank (Rainn Wilson) tells us about the two most important days of his life — the day he helped stop a crime and the day he got married. That's it. Nothing in between. And he goes to those moments when he needs solace. So, when one is shattered as his wife (Liv Tyler) leaves him for the clearly-nefarious Jacques (Kevin Bacon), which Frank spells as "Jock," then our poor protagonist snaps. Inspired by a religious superhero (Nathan Fillion) that he sees on TV, he has a vision in which his brain is literally touched by the finger of God. He decides he has been chosen to be "The Crimson Bolt" and to fight crime in its many forms.

At first, The Crimson Bolt seems to be doing some good. He beats up drug dealers and child molesters with his handy wrench and the public seems intrigued but not necessarily moved to stop him. As Frank is building up to his big day — the one where he will defeat the evil Jock and get back the love of his life — he becomes close with a comic book store worker (Ellen Page) who ends up being his masked sidekick "Boltie." The problem is that Boltie is truly nuts, clearly eager to dispense the violence she has seen in numerous comic books for whatever reason she sees fit and with no repercussions. And her lunacy pushes Frank over the edge. It's not long before all perspective is gone and he's braining people for cutting in line. And when his vengeance gets serious enough to involve gunplay and murder in the final act, "Super" goes places that average comic book movies never dare.



Super

Photo credit: IFC Films

The problem is that it does so with as much reckless abandon as its hero. How are we supposed to feel about Frank? Should we be scared of him? Should we hope he realizes that he's gone well off the deep end? Or is this a parable, a fantasy piece about vengeance closer to Scorsese's *Travis Bickle*? The tone changes, from dark comedy to extreme gore to near tragedy, make for a final act that gets away from Gunn and that results in an undefined performance from Wilson. He's not bad here but he and Gunn never quite figured this character out enough to make him the memorable lead that a movie like "Super" needed to work.

On the other hand, Ellen Page hasn't been this good since "Juno." She is simply spectacular, going from friend to supporter to enabler of Frank's insanity by way of her own. Page simply eats the role alive, delivering lines like "*It's called internal bleeding f**ker! And then you DIE!*" with such manic glee that she becomes instantly unforgettable. She doesn't hold back once, and yet she also makes the character feel like more than just dark comic relief. The most unusual sex scene of the year should earn her year-end mention for supporting actress on its own. Page takes this character and does things with it that other actresses wouldn't have even considered. She's awesome.

I wish I could say the same about the entire movie. I like "Super." I like that James Gunn is trying new things within the genre as he did with the also-strong "Slither." He's an interesting director because he's not approaching his material in the same way as most of his peers. I wish the film was ultimately a bit more refined and a bit more consistent in its message. "Super" is saying something. I'm just not quite sure anyone knows what.

"Super" stars Rainn Wilson, Ellen Page, Kevin Bacon, Liv Tyler, Nathan Fillion, and Michael Rooker. It was written and directed by James Gunn. It is unrated and opens on April 8th, 2011 in Chicago.



[16]

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