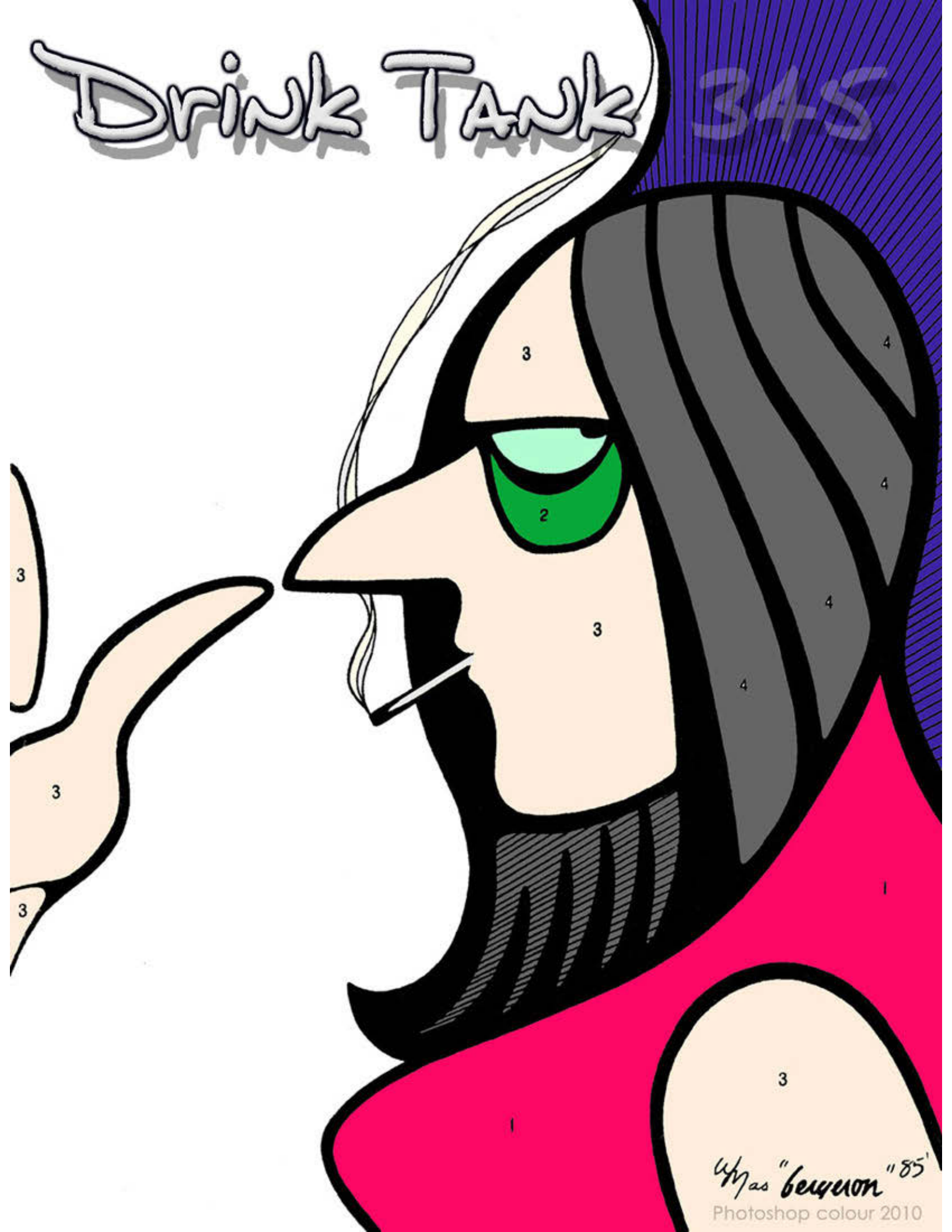


Drink Tank

345



Wm as "beynon" '85'

Photoshop colour 2010

That, up-front, is a Taral Wayne cover, done in the style of Richard Bergeron. Here's Taral on the piece!

"Colour by Numbers" is the first of the "Never Before Scene in Colour" series. I had pictured them as covers, though I wasn't sure I made myself clear. The b/w version of this was a cover of Marty Cantor's fanzine "No Award" number 7, published in September 2000. It took 15 years to get published! Why? It was drawn as a spoof of the mid-'80s Dick Bergeron brou-ha-ha that clouded Avedon Carol's TAFF race. Although it was a rather ambiguous piece, not in the least clear whether I stood on Bergeron's side or the Politically Correct side (there were several issues involved), nobody would publish it! The portrait is of Avedon herself, of course, presumably thumbing her nose at Bergeron. And the style is a spoof of Bergeron's all-but-patented art style. Strangely, Bergeron admired the piece. All the same, nobody would publish it until everything the parody was based on was forgotten ... rendering it pretty much useless. This was one of my early lessons about wasting my time trying to employ fan politics in fan art. If it's even noticed, it will not be appreciated. At one time I coloured a photocopy of the art with colour pencils, but this is a later colouring (2010) using Photoshop. It is more or less the same, but the colours are sharper and more pure."

I love this one! I think it's one of those pieces that works well without any knowledge of what it's really about, but even better with the backstory! I love that!

SO, this issue is largely about Man of Steel. It's the new Superman movie and I have a lot of thoughts and feels about it. I had to work out my thoughts in the form of writing, in various forms. It's what I do, you know? Sometimes I get in trouble for doing that, but it helps me think. I get it, it doesn't mean much to you if I work whatever's going on in my head, but it means something to me, and I like that, so I do it now and again.

Ok, maybe all too often...

I had surgery on Monday, but it was nothing special. Basically, I had an in-grown toenail. Lame, I'm aare, but then again, it was an impressive in-grown toenail. I Had a blood blister under my nail a month or so back, cut off a fair corner of the nail on my big toe and I thought all was well. Well... it weren't. Instead, somehow my nail started to grown fan-like instead of like a plank. I had no idea, but a week ago, I noticed a strange pressure and cut teh nail, a little too much, it turns out. I went into the doctor's on Monday after it was discoloured a bit too much for my taste. I hate hospitals, always have, so it's something significant if I do go in. I went in and the regular doctor said that I should go see a podiatrist, and she got me an appointment 8 minutes later. It took me longer to get down to the first floor than it did to get seen.

The nurse who showed me in was someone I knew. She was the mom of three girls I went to school with! Our families used to go to Yosemite every summer, and I don't think I'd seen her in 15 years. We chatted a bit as I was made ready for the Doctor, who looked at it, poked around a bit, said "wow, you did a number on that nail. You must be in a lot of pain."

"Not really; just when I touch that little nub in the corner."

So he numbed me up, and then started digging around in my toe. I tried to look away, but it was difficult. I did see what he was doin'. He dug a half-inch wedge from my toe. Apparently, it was growing towards the bottom of my toe in a gentle arc. you could see how much of it was inside the toe: roughly 90%. It wasn't too painful, and now it's SO MUCH BETTER! I've got to soak it, elevate it a lot, and not walk too much, especially in shoes, but it's nicer! I have to soak it a few times a day, but that beats having to find a way to never put any weight on that part of the toe!

Coming up is a busy time for me. There's an Iain Banks memorial issue that we're gathering stuff for, and the Hugo for Best Novel issue as well. And I've got a family Reunion and then Westercon. Busy, busy, busy...



THE DRINK TANK

ISSUE 345





Thoughts Like Clouds on Man of Steel

There are things one must do if you're dealing with Superman. You've got to make Superman feel heroic, that's the biggest thing. There's no question. Superman is nothing but a hero. There is no non-heroic element to Superman. It's important that you play with that, more than anything else. The ultimate failure of *Superman Returns* was that they completely made Superman out to NOT be a hero. In fact, they made him out to be a deadbeat dad, which sucked.

If you make Superman seem heroic, you're 2/3 of the way there.

Richard Donner managed to do it in *Superman: The Movie*, and again in *Superman II*. Less so in III (though I've always thought it was a lot of fun) and *The Quest for Peace*. Donner & Co. made Superman seem like a hero. For all the other sins of those Superman movies, and there were many, they made Superman out to be the greatest hero, the strongest hero, the most heroic hero. That's the key.

There are a few other things.

Krypton has to feel like the future. It has to feel like you're looking at what the Earth is going to be. Lois Lane has to be there, and she's got to be spunky as all get-out. You need to show how Clark Kent's human family raised him to be that hero. Most of all, you've got to show that Superman is the peak of humanity. That's a tough one, has a lot to do with the whole Hero thing, but he's an alien who is actually a better human than we humans could ever be.

If you do all that, you're probably going to make a good movie, and you're probably make the Fanboys happy.

Zack Snyder took a stab at it with *Man of Steel*. Snyder can be divisive. Some love the feel of his films, the high calibre rush he imbues his films with... not to mention lots of slo-mo. Plus, he throws in films that are visually distinctive, and deals with source material that is not his own better than most other directors. I hated *300*, but the reasons for that had more to do with Frank Miller's script than Snyder's stylistic touches, of which there were a billion. I hadn't read *300* first, and the story to me was just about the stupidest way you could deal with one of the most cinematic of all historical moments: The Battle of Thermopylae. It was a visually inventive movie, with great use of sepia tones and the slo-mo. The acting was decent, and there was a lot of manflesh, and really, visually, I can't fault it. It was incredibly true to Miller's graphic novel, and the film suffered for it. He followed that up with *Watchmen*, which I really enjoyed, and then *Suckerpunch*, a rolling stone which gathered no moss, or meaning, or importance, and had an almost infinite number of matters to offend everyone. Snyder's folks have always used a lot of slo-mo, desaturated colors, presented a dark, gritty, sometimes grimy, color palette. Now, when I heard that he was getting the chance to direct the new Superman, I was both terrified and interested. First, I knew what it would look like and that made me angry. On the other hand, I was interested to see what he did with the characters, and when I heard that Christopher Nolan was involved with the script, I was more excited.

And so, as the countdown to the film rolled along, JC of *Nerdvana Podcast*, and I had an on-going thing.



He was hyper-excited, he LOVES Snyder, and I was really worried, because to me, Superhero movies are bright affairs, Batman notwithstanding. Look at the way they designed *The Avengers*. Bright colors, even in the dark parts. It's one of the things I think they got right, while I had a lot more problems with other parts of the film, though I still have to say that I loved it. So, JC and I, we'd go back and forth about it every time I was on the podcast. I'd usually find a way to take a dig or two at it throughout the 'cast, and got a good dig on him on the last one. It was a good bit, which sadly we can't do any more. Sorrow.

So, JC got a bunch of folks together to go and see it at Midnight on Thursday. We had a good group together, which was a lot of fun. All too often, I go to the movies alone. Linda and I go to the movies together about once a month, unless there's a festival, and I see at least three movies on my own in-between. So, this was nice. Since we paid extra and used their party room, we got Popcorn, candy and Cokes delivered to us in the theatre, plus we got to be the first people in the theatre. THAT was awesome! I haven't done a Midnight new release (other than that at a festival) since *Angels & Demons*, and I'm glad I can wash that memory off now!

We watched the movie in a nearly-packed theatre. It rolled by and it was a good time. There is something about seeing a movie as soon as it opens, or before (I used to do a LOT of movie preview screenings) and this one was so impressive. There was a feeling in the crowd that added a lot of importance to the feeling of the movie. Battles had greater tension than if I'd seen it alone. There was cheering, there was applause, there was laughter, there was a unity. I've always wanted to see every movie with a crowd, and sometimes it's incredible how much it can help. *Superman Returns*, the awful last Superman film, scored a HUGE test audience score, something in the upper-90s, from an audience that was so excited. It turned out to be something less than a flop, but it certainly didn't turn out to be the hit that test screening indicated.

I went home, got in at almost 3am, and sat up thinking about it and trying to figure what I thought of the film. I knew the overall thought - *Good, Not Great*. That much was obvious the second the last frame crossed the screen, but why did I feel that way. I actually grabbed a notebook and drew a line down the middle, started writing down a series of words at various points on the page indicating where they fell: Good or Bad. It was a fun little way of laying out my thoughts.

Don't worry, this one is still all over the place!

Oh yeah, I guess it's now law that I must present you with a Spoiler warning. I will be talking about the ending, and about what happens in some detail.



The Good

Structure

A good script can deal with not being in order. I very much appreciated the way that screenwriter David Goyer, along with Nolan who came up with the story, moved non-linearly through the story. It's not nearly as non-linear as, say, *Pulp Fiction*, but they moved around a good bit. It allowed us to discover more about this Superman, especially since there's no one who doesn't have at least some knowledge of the Superman oeuvre. There were some very smart choices made about how to tell this story, and I liked that a lot. It kept me in with it the entire way.

That is one thing about adaptations and re-makes. There are a bunch of things that should be shown, but you can play with how you show them. It worked here, so beautifully. This is likely a part of Nolan's impact on the production, as he does a lot of re-working of timelines. It flowed, and at no point was I ever bored. That's important with a two and a half hour movie.

Krypton

OK, smart guys, here's the business. I heard that the script included Krypton as being alive and well. This turned out to be false, but what we did get to see of Krypton was spectacular! Here, the cinematography and the desaturation gave the proper look to the dying planet, and the way that they used a lovely handheld camera within such an effects-driven scene was ballsy and gave a sense of immediacy that was utterly important for the feeling of the opening portion of the film.

We're introduced to Zod there, and his utter dedication to keeping Krypton alive and safe. We meet Jor-El, their greatest scientist (other than the guy who blew up half their moon, but that's another story...) and his wife Lara, played by the amazingly brilliant and beautiful Ayelet Zurer, who I first saw and developed a massive crush on in *Angels & Demons*. She was great as Supes Mom, and when she faces Krypton's destruction with the determination of a Captain going down with the ship, it's a hugely effective scene.

It was lovely, the reason for its death so well-considered, and the ideas planted within it, really helped the film overall.

General Zod

There is something really special about Terrance Stamp's Zod from *Superman II*. It was purely psychopath and then it there was the sense that he was not only every bit as powerful as Supes, but he also had incredible tactical abilities. That was not the direction for Michael Shannon, an actor who I really enjoy and who is not well-enough known. The script gave him a goal, he was the defender of Krypton. There was something incredibly heroic about how Zod took on Superman, but not in the way that Superman is heroic. By Kryptonian ways, he was being heroic, he was avenging his planet's destruction, and more importantly, he wasn't at all crazy. He was pained, and facing the potential that there was going to be no new Krypton, he went all out. It's a difficult part to play, and Michael Shannon, known for going over the top at times, gave a performance that was wonderfully

nuanced, not exactly subtle, but not over-the-top. If I had to choose, between Shannon's Zod and Stamp's, I don't know which one I'd choose. They both have very powerful positives.

Zod is a big part of the movie, and his dedication may seem sociopathic, but really, he's just working it and working it hard! Two important things to note about Zod: he's got more to lose than Superman. He's the one who is completely orphaned, nothing left except the possibility of the resurrection of Krypton. He's lost everything he's sworn to defend (and they didn't really have to say that, but they did) and now he's got to bring back his purpose. That's simple, and it's a beautiful counter to Clark Kent (Kal-El) who is discovering his purpose, but at first is fighting it. More on that later. The other thing is that Zod is ultimately a snob. He sees anyone who doesn't share his dedication to Krypton as flies, which mostly means humans. Looking at the way he treats people, it's obvious that he doesn't care anything for them. He doesn't want people to worship him, he wants to re-establish Krypton and that's all he wants. It's a great concept!

Martha Kent

The Kents represent the best of humanity and humility. They're supposed to be simple folks who love Clark and want him to go to his destiny. In this one, they're played by Kevin Costner and Diane Lane. Diane Lane's one of the finest actresses we've got, and she's been doin' it for more than 30 years. In the way she interacts with Clark is tender, and dedicated. When Zod & Co. go out to take her, it's great. She's wonderful, and there's a moment, in the wrecked Kent house, an old Ford having been tossed through the roof, and Martha's on her knees, under the truck, looking for photo albums. It's a touching and tender scene and she's so good in it. She really does provide a good deal of heart.

Fight Scenes

OK, here's where the 'plosions come in. The fight scenes are spectacular! They're huge, on a scale bigger than any other Superhero film I can think of. Lots of buildings destroyed, and obviously lots of death, though almost none of it is shown. They're huge, well-orchestrated orgies of over-the-top brawling. Some are concerned because this is something that Superman is never supposed to allow: the amount of damage and death in the battles. Thinking about it, and I do these things, one side doesn't really have much control about how much collateral damage there'll be. He was fighting to defend his planet and his opponent was willing, and perhaps even desirous, of destroyin' stuff. He had to meet Zod's force with at least equal force, and he did just that. The fight scenes are epic, D.W. Griffith-level epic. HUGE and visually stunning, at least on the big screen. The final stand between Superman and Zod, in a train station, where Supes has Zod in a sleeper and Zod's using his heat vision





to try and fry a small family, is a HUGELY intelligent way to put Superman in a position where he has to kill 'im. It's also kinda strange as they've determined that they can both fly, but Superman has total control over Zod and could easily have jumped or flew up to get Zod out of range. But still, other than that, it's a great and powerful scene. Overall, the fight scenes were great.

Faora-UI

So, there's a place for the Psychopath Zod, no question. In Man of Steel, that role is playing played with incredible, almost lusty, craziness by the wonderful Antje Traue. She's great, and HAWT in every dimension! She's great, and she has a lot of the best insane criminal villain roles in her performance. She's evil, plain and simple. She doesn't have the honor of Zod, as weird as it is, but she has her own reasons: chaos and destruction. I am aware that she is a Superman character of long-standing, a man-hater who tortured and killed 23 men, and that seems to have been replaced by sheer psychopathia! She steals quite a few scenes and overall was the most memorable character. I hope she gets more Sci-Fi work, as she's proven she's great at it. Like Sam Rockwell great at it.

Superman's build

I do have some reservations about Henry Cavill, but I gotta say he's the first film Superman to have the body that I'd expect of a Superman. I mean hell, the guy was cut and HUGE! He looked like HHH during his muscular peak, and that is something very rare and it's exactly what I'd expect Superman to look like.

And yeah, I'd switch...





The Middling

The Script

Yeah, Structurally and pacing-wise, it was awesome. It didn't lose me anywhere along the way, and that's a good thing, especially when you're doing a movie that runs nearly 150 minutes. Other hand, dialogue? OK, a bit more natural than I am used to in Superhero movies. For example: watch something like Iron Man 2 and then compare with The Avengers. One feels forced in the way characters talked (which is required and works for something like Thor), and the other is much more natural. Here, the dialogue is OK at times, though Zod is given some very stilted lines. The same is true of Faora-Ul, but she turns them into daggers beautifully.

There are some choices that I just didn't get. They had Superman kill Zod, and they justified it in the script pretty darn well. They had Superman and Zod's fight devastate a few cities, which I was fine with, though it did go a little over the top. There was a lot of good stuff in the script, but there were sure things that not only bugged me, but that pulled me out of the story and the moment. But Superman also took revenge on a trucker (in a hilarious way, I have to admit, and that does go against the whole 'Superman is Heroic' thing. Sometimes, you gotta bend for comedy, but it did make me question the heroism of the guy we are always supposed to think of as the top-most Hero. That, more than the killing of Zod, had me questioning.

On the other hand, I have to say that of all the Superman films, this was easily the best script, but not without failings.

The Special Effects

OK, this one is tougher for me as it might be leaning slightly towards the bad if I didn't know that so many things I didn't notice were certainly effects. Krypton was AWEMAZING! I loved the look, the way they presented it, and almost all of it was CGI. I loved it, and thought it was the best presentation of Krypton ever shown. Some of the flying sequences were great, but some seemed so very plastic. The effects of the buildings being destroyed were great, but some of the stuff just didn't pass the test. It happens.

One of the flying scenes actually reminded me of late 1990s effects reels from companies like PDI. That's the level of sloppy I'm talking about. It's sad because the scenes were during the fights, and one of the flying passes, because you could see that the movements were too smooth, too unnaturally smooth, I guess. It's not an infrequent thing.

The Shooting

The cinematography of Man of Steel was at times very good, but at other times, it wasn't. I loved the use of handheld shooting, it gives immediacy and a sense of disquiet to the scenes they used it on, but at times, it got a little too Michael Bay-like, obscuring more than heightening the action. I liked the use of Steadicam, and the general shot selection was good, but at times, the shooting seemed to be more just the setting for effects than framing for the most emotional impact. I guess this is the era in which we live, where framing of action is

no longer the main concern. I am something of a fan of the guy who was the Director of Cinematography, Amir Mokri. There's a great shot, I know it's totally composite work, and it spoke very much of Alex Ross' work on *Kingdom Come*. Superman, hovering in air, his cape flowing in the wind. It's an amazing shot, very smart, very heroic. That shot should have carried the film into the heroic vein, but there was something missing in the...

Music

OK, here's the problem with this one. I'm not a big Hans Zimmer fan, though I think that his work on *Sherlock Holmes* was spectacular and some of the work for the recent *Batman* movies was great. The problem was while I thought that the score was very good, interacted with the action in good ways, heightened tension, and ultimately gave a fair bit to the film.

BUT...

There was no anthemic work. That's something I really think Superman needs, far more than *Batman* or *Spiderman* or whoever. There needs to be an anthem, one that not only gets replayed, but one that effects the audience and looms huge in the memory of the audience. It should be connected with the image of Superman so that every time you think of the image of Superman from the film, you immediately go to the music playing in your head. John Williams' music for the Donner *Superman* is probably the greatest example of a character being so deeply attached to an anthem. In fact, I'd say the only character who is as closely associated is *Indiana Jones* (same guy!), but in my head, it's always the Williams score I hear when I see/read *Superman*.

Zimmer isn't an anthem composer. I can't think of one of his films that has an anthemic feel. Maybe the closest he gets is *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Zimmer is excellent at working inside a film's universe, both the *Sherlock Holmes*, *Inception*, and *The Last Samurai* scores show that, but here, I think a really important part of the *Superman* world was missed.

Though, this was easily in the top ten for all Hans Zimmer scores as far as I'm concerned, I just wanted something with more umph.

Henry Cavill's Superman

This was a big thing for me. I barely bought him as *Superman*. Yeah, he had the look, so much better than any of the other *Supermen*, but he didn't have the *Gravitas* to me. I didn't buy his conflict as *Superman*, but I did buy him as *Clark Kent* at times. The moments when I really liked him were moments such as his defense of a waitress at a diner, or most impressively, when he has to watch his father get carried away by a tornado. He'll make a great *Clark Kent*, no question, but I'm not sure he's *Superman*. In a way, he's the opposite of *Val Kilmer* as *Batman*.



The Bad



Post-Processing

OK, it worked for establishing Krypton's look, but really, there are colors in the world and some of them are even bright! The constant lessening of color saturation, and often sepia-toning of images, are annoying at best. I'm not saying it has to be freakin' *Dick Tracy* (which I still maintain is one of the best Art Directed films of all-time), but at least having a naturalistic color pallet would be nice instead of the deadened colors we're given. A lot of this happens in the phase after flow editing. I HATED the way it looked other than the Krypton scenes. The reds all felt bloody, the blues were washed, and there was a tinge of blue to every shot. I know, I know, it's the future of film, and one of the reasons to desaturate to this level is that it makes effects look better, less recognisable, but it still annoys me and it does nothing to keep me from questioning weak effects. This was the greatest concern I had with the film going in, and it did annoy me quite a bit, but there was more to over-come it than I expected as well.

Of course, I've got to compare it to *Watchmen*, which had a darker tone to the film and where the desaturation was less offensive. I'd say that look-wise, *Watchmen* was considerably better because of a better cinematographer and more willingness to use the timeframes of various scenes to play with the level of processing.

Pa Kent

OK, not really Pa Kent, but Kevin Costner. I like his work, for the most part. Films like *Field of Dreams*, *JFK*, and perhaps most impressively, *Dances with Wolves*. He's a bit of an ego maniac, but who in Hollywood isn't these days? Here, the script says that he's the guy who understands that Clark has to keep his powers under-wraps, but that he also has to help humanity. It's an interesting take, I get it, and it feels realistic, but Costner plays it with all the warmth he can muster for a big paycheck. Where Lane as Ma Kent is exceptional, Costner as Pa is flat, quietly resigned to his role as sacrifice. When he dies, being a bigger hero than he'd ever allow Clark to be, it's as if he's just passing through, that he'd died long before and it was just now catching up with him. In a way, that can be a powerful methodology, but Costner seems kinda emotionally tone-deaf there. He's also at least 10 years older than they're portraying him (and Ma Kent at least 10 years younger!) and the years show on him.

I just didn't buy him as Pa Kent. That's what it comes down to.

The Positioning of Superman

Now, this was a problem. Superman was Heroic, but he also was in denial of his role for so long it felt he was so unheroic. He was more interested in living under the radar than accepting his role as Humanity's Best Hope that it felt like he was rejecting that role. This was a movie about Superman, but he didn't spend much time in it as if he WANTED to be Superman. That's a problem. Along with things like taking the revenge on the Trucker, killing Zod, being more-or-less willing to destroy large swaths of urban areas, and even that scene where he follows his father's advice to not save him from the tornado and instead letting him die. That really does make

Supes seem very weak in comparison. His father gave himself up when Clark could have saved the two of them so easily. In fact, he could have done it without it looking like he had any super powers at all, and yet he let his Dad go and be a hero. I'm still not sure why they went that direction and it did hurt the Heroism of Superman a very big bit.

Lois Lane

Now, the way they played Lois Lane in this one has changed as I've thought about it. Amy Adams is one of my favorite actors. She's been great in every kind of role she's ever attempted. From *Drop Dead Gorgeous* to *The Master* (and she deserved the Academy Award for that role!), she's always playing her characters with an eye towards emotional reality and impact.

She got that part, mostly, but the role of Lois wasn't right.

Lois is supposed to be a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and she does display some of that, but mostly, she's like a beat cop with a lead she's hunting down. When she's given something to do, she does it, but there's no major conflict in her role. She's there as the required love interest, yet there's little chemistry between her and Supes, and there's almost nothing like a feeling of intrigue to her interactions with him. True, the interactions between her and Lawrence Fishburne were nice, though I'm not 100% certain they really worked in the Universe that they're living in.

Now, she's not nearly as spunky as Margot Kidder's Lois. It would be hard to be spunkier than that, though the only time I felt like she matters to the film was in a fairly entertaining discovery/escape scene with Russell Crowe.

The Jumping-Flying Problem

The inconsistencies. The Flying-Jumping problem has existed for a long time in both comics and the movies, but here, there's a lot more serious an impact on my personal enjoyment. We get shots of him jumping as he's learning how to control his powers, and his force leads to great impact on the ground, leaving craters and such (though less so when he lands, which is odd), and then sometimes, he jumps and there's little to no impact on the ground. Sometimes he's jumping and sometime he's flying. I get that, there may be some good reason for choosing to jump instead of flying, but still, there needs to be some consistency, or some sort of explanation of why his actions sometimes effect the ground and other times don't. I'd actually have bought it if the first few times he impacted the ground, and the rest of the movie it didn't, as if he'd learned to control it, but it was all over the place. This was BIG for me, and I caught how many times he just took off like a rocket without a mark anywhere,



and the several times he pockmarked the Earth with his takeoff.

Little things like this are big in the eyes of Fanboys, and maybe the rest of the world doesn't see them, but it did pull me out and annoy me.

The Daily Planet

OK, we got a bit of the Planet, introducing Larry Fishburne as Perry White, and he was good but got little to do save for another crow-barred scene of him trying to help an intern out. The entire existence of The Daily Planet is forced on them by the entire history of the Superman Universe, but they did little with it. This saddened me.

Complete Lack of a Monkey

You love the Monkey, don't you?

Maybe I'm using very insider slang. The Monkey, also called the Cookie or the End-Gag, is a staple of the Modern Comic Book genre. It's a tag-on after the credits, almost always done for comedic effect. The two greatest Monkeys in history? The first Pirates of the Caribbean film (where the term comes from) and The Avenger's Schwarma scene. There wasn't one here, and folks were kinda expecting it. That's perhaps a sadder statement on the audience than the film.

Also, I don't think an actual monkey appeared anywhere in the film. Also, no ninja...

Portrayal of the Armed Forces.

This one is tough. It's too easy a trope to play with. The Military is always opposed to the Alien, even if they're working in the best interest of Humanity, and then they turn around and become their best friends. That concept started with Westerns in the movies, though I imagine it's been the case in literature for centuries. The thing is, here it never got on-track, the turn was a bit more understandable than many, but really, it actually felt like product placement, which I understand that it was. That usually doesn't bother me, but it did play a role in the ending where it felt like Superman should have done something on his own. It also ties into...

Deus Ex Machina

Now, there's a Doomsday Machine, two actually, that are employed to bring about the renewal of Krypton on Earth. The small group that were with Zod in The Phantom Zone. It's a bit strange that the Kryptonians would send Zod & Company off to the Phantom Zone with a set of devices that could be turned into powerful weapons by a small team. I guess it's possible, though we're told that Jor-El is the finest scientist on Krypton, though I think there was something about Zod having been involved with the building of it. I didn't quite grasp that.

Now, I tend not to mind deus ex machina, I grew up watching Gilbert & Sullivan and enjoyed the hell out of Stephen King's The Stand, but here, it just felt so very improbable, and even more convenient. The fact that there were two devices made it even weirder. I just didn't feel this one.



Some comparisons



I used to present a program during Cinequest called Critics for a Day. They'd bring in a bunch of 4th Graders, we'd watch short films and I'd lead a discussion about them where I was teaching them to be critics. It was a fun program, and one of the kids I had in one of the first years I did the program started a film blog a couple of years back. He has AWFUL taste, but still. The way I'd start is I'd show them a film, and then I'd ask them what they noticed about the film and we'd go from there.

In other words, I was building a generation of Formalist Critics, which is weird as I'm more of an Impressionistic Critic myself.

So, I did another experiment. This time, I asked myself to write down ten things I remembered about The first Donner Superman, then Superman III, and finally since a few days had passed, about Man of Steel. It has been a very long time since I saw those earlier ones, but I thought it was still worth a shot.

The Results

Superman: The Motion Picture

- 1) The chills from Superman flying through the air to the Dun-dun-dun dun dun, Dun dun dun theme
- 2) The credits that flew out at you
- 3) Christopher Reeves adjusting his glasses as Clark Kent
- 4) Lex Luther's suits.
- 5) The smarminess of Ned Beatty
- 6) Margot Kidder's cadence and stance when talking with Perry White
- 7) The Fortress of Solitude.
- 8) The pained performance of Marlon Brando as Jor-El.
- 9) Superman flying around with Lois in his arms.
- 10) The perfectly comic book-y Blue, Red, and Yellow Superman outfit.

OK, that's just off the top of my head. Now the same thing for *Superman III*

- 1) Richard Dreyfuss being funny as the technology genius
- 2) The scene where Dreyfuss rigged up the unconscious hand of the security guard to simultaneously insert the key card
- 3) Supes flying around with Richard Dreyfuss in his arms.
- 4) Dreyfuss using Tarantula as the replacement for the unknown element in Kryptonite.
- 5) Clark Kent having to face off against Superman.
- 6) The same credits as Superman I

And that was as far as I could get.

And now, *Man of Steel*

- 1) Michael Shannon as Zod addressing the Council of Krypton.
- 2) Superman hanging in mid-air addressing the US Army for the first time.
- 3) A bare-chested Clark saving the crew of an Oil Platform.
- 4) Faora-Ul saying 'A good death is it's own reward' to Christopher Meloni as she's about to rip him apart.
- 5) The struggle between Zod and Supes where Zod's about to fry a young family.
- 6) Johnathan Kent standing there as the tornado carries him off.
- 7) Diane Lane digging under the Ford to find her photo albums
- 8) Superman's uniform looking a lot like the new Star Trek uniforms
- 9) Russel Crowe and Ayelet Zurer as Supes' parents.
- 10) The moon of Krypton being all busted up.

OK, so what does that tell you. Well, one, *Superman I* and *Man of Steel* are much more memorable than *Superman 3*. The stuff I retained from *Superman* was iconic stuff. The flying through the air with Lois, the suit, the Music along with the Flying, the Credits, which were amazing for the time. *Superman* has all the stuff coming from the big characters. It's all either Superman, or Lois, or Clark or Lex. With most of it having to do with Clark/Supes. In *Man of Steel*, it's less about Superman and more about the entirety of the setting, more about the characters overall, and about the world that *Man of Steel* inhabits. While the *Superman III* list is almost entirely about snippets to do with Richard Prior.

The uniforms are both important. In 1978, it was about how comic book-like it was. Perfectly Blue, bleedingly red, totally yellow. There was no toning down, and it was so much like the comics come to life. The *Man of Steel* uniform is waffled, a deeper blue. It's less comic book, and like the new Star Trek uniforms, they seem to be more realistic, which is troubling for a comic book movie, I guess.

So, with that out of the way, I guess it's time for my Impressionistic Review of *Man of Steel*.

I enjoyed it. It was flawed, it was never boring, and it was good.

But not great.

The thing is, I felt less for Superman than in any other version of the Superman story, which isn't surprising as Zack Snyder is not a director who gives you characters to feel for. Look at *Suckerpunch*. It's a visual essay on what it means to make that movie you've had in your head for decades but only got the chance to make it once you've made it, much like M. Night Shaymalan's *Signs*. I don't usually want to feel much more for Superman than impressed. I want to see Superman doing Superman shit, as I've often said, and here I got some of that, but not a lot that made me feel for him. It might be that he let his Dad die in the tornado. I don't care if you're following what your father told you, no matter how high in esteem you hold him and his belief that showing your powers would cause terror, if you let him die instead of using your powers, you're not a character worth attaching to. I



get why they did it, but it hurt my desire to give more to Superman.

That said, I felt for many of the characters in *Man of Steel*, in many ways. Fear of Faora-Ul and Zod, respect for Zod, complete sympathy for Martha Kent, awe for Krypton. It was a film where I didn't feel much for Superman, but I was drawn into the world where Superman lives, and that was done far better than any Superman film prior. While there was a lot of stuff that bothered, it still comes down to the fact that Snyder & Co. made me feel the world, and that's important, and replaces a lot of what was missing in Superman himself when I think about it and the other versions. I'd say it was a smarter film than the others, and certainly more than *Superman Returns*. It gave me a forest where typically I'd only be focused on a single tree. This says good things about the follow-on films, and I do believe that we're about to get at least two of 'em.

What I walked out of the theatre with, Good, not Great is the perfect phrasing of my emotional take-away. I was blown away by some, annoyed by some, and ultimately, I felt that it moved me a decent bit, but what was supposed to move me, what I've always been moved by in the other Superman films, well, it didn't go far for me.

There is no form of Criticism where this is not a flawed film. The mise-en-scene has problems, the acting has problems, the script has problems, the setting within the Superman mythos has problems; there are flaws all over the place, but even with those in mind, it was an enjoyable film. The good outweighed the bad, but not enough to push it beyond. to make it great. It was a good first film in a series, certainly enough to deserve a sequel (though let's face it, it would get a sequel no matter how bad it was, as long as it brought in money) and probably to deserve a few viewings on my side. This is a film that may well improve with age. All of Snyder's film may, but right now, I'm sticking with my gut. A gut that says it wasn't bad, never boring, but still left something on the table that I hope will be picked up in the next films in the series.

I'll watch it again. I know I will. There's a lot of good stuff, and especially the way I watch movies, like now when I'm writing this, trying to fill out the layout, and I've got *Community* playing, listening to it and watching it only when I know things are fun on teh screen. I've seen this episode a dozen times, so I can half-watch it like this. There are terrible films that can be seen like this and are actually very useful. *Mama Mia*, *The New Guy*, *Youth in Revolt*, and even *Watchmen*. I can see this one goign in that rotation, which is excellent for DVD sales, I guess.

And maybe I'll find what I thought was missing.

