

"IT'S BEYOND SUPER. IT'S SUPERB!"

Richard Corliss, **TIME**

"Superman's... Its imagery is bre... g." **Newsweek**

"A sleek marvel of fun." Owen Gleiberman, **Entertainment Weekly**

"Amazing Awesome!" Kellvin Chau

"The movie... ave to see." **Rolling Stone**

"Fantas..." Maria Salas, NBC-TV, MIAMI

"Full of action, and emotion." **Life & Style Weekly**

"The first big film this summer to live up to its hype." Leah Rozen, **People**

"An exciting emotionally engaging film." **Access Hollywood**

"...and relatable." Peter Travers, **Rolling Stone**

SUPERMAN RETURNS

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WHAT DOES BECOME A LEGEND MOST?

Superman Returns

review by George Sax



Brandon Routh in *Superman Returns*

When Warner Bros. reacquired the film rights to the Superman franchise in 1992, the studio's production execs must have thought it would be fairly easy to come up with a movie that could take advantage of the new, darker and nastier comics-derived superhero style established by Tim Burton's *Batman*. They couldn't have imagined what would ensue.

Now, this week, after 13 years of tempest-tossed, green-light/red-light games, fake starts, concept conflicts and confusion, the concrete fruition of this profligate meshugaas is being unveiled. If retirements and head-rolling result from the possible inadequate success of *Superman Returns* (some allegedly informed observers estimate the movie has to take in \$600 million internationally to turn a profit), it will be more a coda than a climax to this extravagant self-travesty of an industry saga.

To give you a small idea: The director known as McG (Joseph McGinty Nichol) refused to board a flight to Australia, where the movie was eventually made, because he doesn't fly over water. He was paid off with \$3 million. This was his second go at the project and he was one of five directors engaged—six if you count his two employments separately.

Forgive my digressive observations, but Hollywood is so often more interesting than its products, which is true of capitalism in general.

And what of *Superman Returns*? Well, it packs a surprising amount of entertainment for something that resulted from a caricaturedly tortuous corporate process. If it's not worth what it cost, it's still the best of the recent superhero extravaganzas.

Superman (portrayed now by newcomer Brandon Routh) is the first and most famous of pulpdom's fantastically heroic figures, and that very ur-status might seem to limit his contemporary utility as a pop product. He's kind of shopworn, conceptually. How can the Man of Steel, bound to Metropolis and *The Daily Planet*, function in a global environment?

Bryan Singer's movie deftly finesses and evades this problem, for the most part, by concentrating on the big guy's emotional problems, mainly his relationship with Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth). The story is ostensibly driven

by a grotesquely grandiose, and rather incomprehensible, plot by Lex Luthor (Kevin Spacey) to create a new, Atlantis-like continent through the use of crystallography and some purloined Kryptonite. But the real heart of *Superman Returns* is its hero's challenged, suppressed longing for Lois and her resentful, conflicted reactions.

Superman has to return because he's left her and Metropolis in the lurch. As the movie opens, there's an on-screen text that tells us, "When astronomers discovered the remains of his home planet, Superman disappeared." For five years, as it happens, for he went to see what was left.

On reappearing after his disappointing trip, he finds Lois has a boyfriend and a five-year-old son. Ahem.

The movie has its spectacle and special-effects-driven derring-do, and a little of the old *Daily Planet* he-she comedic raillery, but it's pitched toward the human interest side. Singer has been unexpectedly successful in sustaining an intense, almost swoony, sentimental atmosphere amid the movie's large-scale escapades. *Superman Returns* is really more a love story than a fantasy-action vehicle.

Singer not only works up the emo feel, he gets away with some scarcely subtextual, intergenerational, Christian Trinity stuff using, among other devices, voiceovers from the late Marlon Brando's role in the first Superman movie in 1978.

It's no more than slickly executed moonshine, of course, but the movie's achievement is to make it palatable. You can be both amused and involved.

Superman Returns is about as worthy a reworking of this old warhorse pulp material as anyone had a right to anticipate.

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