

Screen Themes: Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice & Ranking the Supermen

By John Turnbull

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Is Batman vs Superman really as bad as you've heard? Entertainment editor [John Turnbull](#) takes a look at the much maligned movie and considers the best Supermen of the modern age.

Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016) directed by [Zack Snyder](#)

A DIRECT sequel to 2013's [Man of Steel](#), Batman vs Superman starts out with Superman battling General Zod through the skyscrapers of Metropolis, as Bruce Wayne watches from below. The Kryptonian reign of destruction is shown from a human perspective, as the Wayne Enterprises building is destroyed and a number of staff are killed. Convinced that Superman has the power to destroy the world if he ever turns evil, Batman resolves to take him down by any means necessary.

If this sounds like an overly simplistic explanation of the plot, it is, because I have omitted the 17 additional storylines that clutter

up this movie and lead to the bloated 2½ hour running time. There is a great 100 minute movie buried within Batman vs Superman, but it's buried under a mountain of exposition, flashbacks and no less than four dream sequences, which seems excessive in anything outside a [Nightmare on Elm St](#) movie.

In the ongoing box office war between comic book rivals, Marvel represents the side of light, while DC represents the dark side. With the possible exception of the upcoming [Suicide Squad](#) (reportedly in re-shoots to up the fun factor) DC universe movies are dark, dour affairs, painted in a palette of black and grey. While this worked for the Nolan Batman movies, it was less successful in Man of Steel, where the most powerful hero in the universe was reduced to a moody drifter.

Focusing for a moment on the good things about Batman vs Superman; [Ben Affleck](#) is pretty bloody good as Batman. He is great as an older, borderline alcoholic Bruce Wayne, but acting under the cowl has always been hard, as [Val Kilmer](#) and [George Clooney](#) would attest. Affleck brings a grizzled nobility to Batman, willing to fight for an ideal even in the face of insurmountable odds.

[Gal Gadot's](#) Wonder Woman is fantastic, and the setup for her solo film (set during WW1) is one of the additional plot elements that doesn't feel forced. As you would probably expect, [Jeremy Irons](#) is great as Alfred, bringing a level of biting sarcasm and wit that hasn't

been present in previous incarnations of the role.

Last but not least, this movie looks great. Director Zack Snyder knows how to frame a shot, and when the action finally happens it is hugely entertaining. On the downside, however...

Writers Chris Terrio and David S Goyer do not appear to have a good grasp of the Batman character, and seem to have confused his motivations with those of Donald Trump. He is meant to be the world's greatest detective, but constantly seems surprised by things going on around him. The most egregious example of this involves the introduction of Wonder Woman, who Batman doesn't seem to know despite having an extensive dossier on her courtesy of Lex Luthor.

Which brings us to the issue of Lex Luthor. It isn't that [Jesse Eisenberg](#) is a bad actor. Far from it. The problem is that he plays ruthless businessman Lex Luthor like an ADD afflicted teenager. Luthor pulls strings and controls heroes like chess pieces, all for motivations which are entirely opaque, even on the second viewing. The only thing worse than Luthor is Doomsday, the final-act monster who looks like Mr Hanky on steroids. With a dumbed-down origin (did [Michael Shannon](#) get paid for that performance?) and powers that randomly change as the script demands, Doomsday is the perfect example of an element that could have been dropped from this film with no significant narrative impact. Early reviews have not been kind...

There are moments of perfection within this cracked shell of a movie, like the post-apocalyptic dream sequence that features a despotic Superman and Batman kicking Parademon ass in a trenchcoat, or the awesome moment when Wonder Woman joins the climactic battle against Doomsday. The problem is that these great moments are surrounded by endless hand wringing and out

of character beats like Batman killing people or Lois Lane having a bubble bath, because that really needed to be included in the movie for some reason.

At the end of the day the main problem with Batman vs Superman is the script, so concerned about setting up an extended DC universe that they forgot to tell a coherent story along the way. While muddled and overlong, Batman vs Superman really isn't a bad movie, and will probably make a billion dollars at the global box office. The best thing, however, is that it sets up something that I've been waiting for since I was a teenaged comic book geek; a Justice League movie.

Verdict: 6/10 — not as bad as you've heard, not as good as it could be

Ranking the Supermen

Many actors have slipped into the red and blue tights over the years, yet the "best Superman" discussion doesn't seem to ignite the passion that the "Bale vs Keaton" debate generates. For the purposes of comparison I'm going to omit Kirk Alyn and George Reeves (because many IA readers will probably be too young to remember them) and the various people who have played Superman in animated form (including Mark Harmon, Channing Tatum and Adam Baldwin). Based on those caveats, here are the top 5 Superman of this generation!

5. Dean Cain — aka romantic Superman

As the name would suggest, Lois & Clark was all about the relationship between intrepid reporter Lois Lane and bumbling klutz Clark Kent rather than the Man of Steel. Taking this into account, Cain was a likable Superman with a really weird looking suit, and the first season in particular was a solid translation of Lois & Clark's relationship from comic book page to screen.

4. Brandon Routh — aka Stalkerman

Much like Ben Affleck, Brandon Routh is one of the few actors to have two cracks at playing a Superhero, the second far better than the first. Affleck's take on Daredevil has been erased by his performance as Batman (not to mention blown away by the recent small screen adaptation), while Routh's turn as the Man of Steel isn't nearly as interesting as his take on The Atom in Legends of Tomorrow. Much like Batman vs Superman, Superman Returns is a decent performance derailed by a nonsensical script, this time involving Superman stalking Lois from space and neglecting his illegitimate son. Dick move, Stalkerman.

3. Tom Welling — don't call him Superboy

For a superhero show, Smallville took its sweet time getting Superman in the iconic red and blue outfit (revealed in the final shot of the final episode), preferring to focus on the trials and tribulations of teenaged Clark Kent, Lana Lang and Lex Luthor. Despite the lack of super-suit, Welling captured Superman's compassion and measured attitude to life — it's unlikely you would ever see this version of Superman say the line: "I have to convince him to help me. Or kill him."

2. Henry Cavill — aka the moody Superman with the abs

With Russell Crowe as a father and a world that is constantly dark, it's no wonder that Henry Cavill's Superman is moody. He spends the first half of Man of Steel living as a hobo and the second half destroying Metropolis, somehow managing to snare crack investigative reporter Lois Lane along the way. The only time Cavill's Superman cracks a smile is when he first learns to fly, and his moral journey from "reluctantly killing Zod" to "happy to kill Batman if he disagrees" seems a little extreme for a heroic archetype. Taking all

of this into account, Cavill brings a weary gravitas to the role, with the growing realization that he can't save everyone adding depth to his performance.

1. Christopher Reeve — aka the Superman who made you believe

From 1978, when he first donned the cape and boots for Superman: The Movie, to 1987 and the rather silly Superman IV: The Quest for Peace, Christopher Reeve was Superman. Trained as a pilot, Reeve's Superman was honest, noble, innocent and hopeful, and really made viewers believe that he could fly using the primitive special effects available in 1978. While some viewers were put off by Reeve's nebbish take on Clark Kent, it certainly made it more plausible that an investigative reporter like Lois Lane might take more than 30 seconds to figure out that Clark and Superman were the same guy...

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Ben Affleck's stuntman shares awesome behind-the-scenes photo from [#BatmanvSuperman!](#)
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(@BatmanNewsCom) [April 5, 2016](#)

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The image features a collage of three Australian coins. The top two are 2-dollar coins with a portrait of a man and the number '2'. The bottom one is a 1-dollar coin with a kangaroo and the number '1'. The background is a word cloud of 'EXPOSE', 'JACKSONVILLE', 'ASHBYGATE', and 'INVESTIGATE'. Below the coins is a blue banner with the IA logo, the text 'Independent Australia Investigate Australia', the website 'independentaustralia.net', and the slogan 'SUPPORT INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM FOR ONLY \$5 mth OR \$50 year'.

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