

Superman: Guardian of Hope

Though Clark is near physically invincible, he suffers from mental disorders such as fear of being judged and anxiety over not being good enough.

Horrorifying things in life:

Demons, ghosts, schizophrenia

Dismemberment, disease, poverty, war

The plague that affects humanity seems to give different ailments to different people. For some, it gives them cancer. For others, it causes various bodily disorders, such as muscular breakdown. It can also exacerbate mental disorders. This plague is later found to be caused by an alien lifeform, which explains why humans cannot cure it. Clark later discovers that Krypton had discovered a cure to defeat the lifeform, but only for Kryptonians. Clark has to get scientists from different nations to put their research together and within a few weeks, discovers how to use this cure on humans. The scientists do not cooperate at first, but a secret group of them communicate with one another, defying their government's commands, as they were inspired by Clark's message to stop fighting and to work together.

At the end of the movie, Zod harnesses this alien lifeform as a weapon. Though the lifeform is microscopic, it can aggregate into a gigantic monster. Thus, Superman literally fights cancer and other medical diseases fist to fist, and defeats it. He discovers Kryptonian tech that allows him to access the 'Queen' of the lifeforms that supplies all the lifeforms with their energy that makes them immune to cures, and once he destroys the Queen, all the lifeforms become susceptible to the cure that the scientists on Earth have made. When fighting the lifeform, it infects Superman with a variety of illnesses, such as cancer, leukemia, etc. So Superman has to mentally overcome all these illnesses and defeat the monster. This is a realization of a child's hopeful thinking that human medical problems can be punched away. It shows that with belief, the impossible can be done.

The first half of the movie shows Clark being a boy scout, helping his community. Though many admire him, many also judge him for being different. This makes him less confident in helping people, and sometimes he even shys away from doing so. However, whenever there is danger, he cannot help but go through; he is simply conflicted when doing so and does not perform as well when helping, as he has self doubt. This causes him to fail several times, and makes him not want to help others because he feels he will do more harm than good.

This first half also deals with Clark traveling around the world and seeing all the horrific things in life, and being unable to stop them. After domestic terrorists destroy his hometown to pillage for painkillers to stave away the pain of the plague, he watches his childhood friends spiral down into destruction, unable to help them despite trying his best. The only one who manages to escape is Lex Luthor. The movie shifts from a very pleasant bubble into one where Clark sees malnourished bodies and corpses everywhere, criminals, injustice, people being misrepresented and ganged up on, etc. There is constant hopelessness before Superman emerges from the Phantom Zone; even if Clark accomplishes something, it's always torn down as having little impact when it's revealed that only the symptom was resolved, not the cause of suffering. The realism of this movie makes it PG-13.

One of Clark's weakness is chaos magic, and so he is tormented by horrific, magical entities from the Phantom Zone. This part is very much like a horror movie. The difference is that in this movie, the hero gains powers to not just defeat the monsters, but overwhelm them so that no part of them is frightening ever again. These monsters torment Clark, giving him hallucinations and making him not trust his own senses, as they were seeping into the world with the experiments scientists were conducting to try to pry open more and more of the Phantom Zone, where the monsters were trapped in.

Zod works with scientists the whole time, secretly manipulating them. The scientists wish to extract Kryptonian tech found in the phantom zone, while still trying to imprison Zod. Zod uses this chance to plan his escape. However, he did not introduce the plague. This is because the issues that humanity faces should be independent of Krypton- they should be purely caused by humanity's flaws. Thus, Superman must save humanity from itself by inspiring hope. Zod's release should be a symptom of human's flaws; Zod did not manipulate the problems that humans face.

The first alter ego that Clark takes is called Guardian. His childhood name he makes up is Superman, but he drops it when others make fun of it for being too cheesy.

Clark deals with his anxiety by hiding from others, traveling to isolated places in the world such as mountains, jungles, etc. He also keeps a journal about his travels and discoveries, which ties in to him becoming a journalist later on. The more he does this, however, the more people suffer. He tries to drown this out by convincing himself he will only do more harm than good, anyways.

When terrorists attack Kansas, Clark has to go around saving everyone. Pa is trapped, and tells Clark to save others first as others are in more immediate danger, and Clark promises Pa he will come back. But when he does, Clark hears Pa being torn in half from a distance. He rushes to find him, but it's too late, and all that's left is Pa's disfigured body. The ones who killed Pa were ones that Clark spared, as he vowed to not kill anyone. This makes Clark questions his own morals.

The hallucinations that Clark faces endangers people, as Clark may think he's fighting a villain when it's actually a civilian. A monster from the Phantom Zone is causing these hallucinations; this monster is allied with Zod. Zod does not attack humanity, but he does manipulate the scientists into secretly giving him more outside power to torment Superman. This is because Zod is aware that Jor-El's son escaped, and he wants to destroy him as he's the greatest threat standing in his way once he breaks out.

Superman defeats these chaotic, horrific-looking monsters (resembling clowns, dolls, mind destroying entities, etc) both within the Phantom Zone, and outside of it when some of them escape. This is symbolic of people punching away their mental disorders. The only way Superman could overcome them was with patience that strengthened his mind enough to learn how to resist their attacks.

Superman does find himself being dismembered by these monsters, but is able to regrow his body with the help of Kryptonian tech during battle. The greatest fear is pure hopelessness: the fact that science says that the universe will spiral into heat death, that there is no continuation after death, that there is eternal torment. During the movie, the audience feels this is what will happen, as despite how strong Superman is, logically everything points to pure hopelessness; all signs of 'miracles' turn out to be wrong and disproven.

There is a countdown in how strong the plague becomes. Clark's loved ones' conditions worsen every second, and there is nothing he can do. He also feels his own mind, and consequently how he feels over his body, slipping due to the torment from the Phantom Zone demons.

The demons are like something out of a surreal horror movie. There are jumpscare- silence, then sudden terror, and Clark is helpless. His life is often in danger. But this turns out to later all be in his mind.

Clark also has PTSD. Subtle sounds that remind him of bombs unnerve him, as there are many bombs he failed to stop. The Kansas attack is the first time in his life when he failed to save people. But later, he believes in himself so much that he is able to stop every bomb in Metropolis when Zod attacks it to attempt to gain control over the tech used to unleash more monsters from the phantom zone. The Phantom Zone is a nightmarish landscape, but does not resemble Hell or dark caverns. Instead, it is a surreal nightmare, shifting from a hall of mirrors to tortured images of loved ones wheezing to death, helplessly strapped to contraptions with their skin torn off. With the help of Kryptonian tech that he learns how to operate with the help of Jor-El's AI, he learns to reverse all of these horrors that the audience sees, both imaginary in his mind and real. Only Superman's Kryptonian energy and blood could jumpstart this abandoned tech to get it working.

Clark sees surreal scenes where he sees himself in third person, possibly indicating an out of body experience or hallucination. He does not know. Through his belief though, he is able to turn these nightmares into something trivial, comical, or heroic. These battles do not just occur within the Phantom Zone, but outside of it; whenever his mind hallucinates, he is able to fight against it with his belief. Slowly, over time, he defeats this illness, but it always bounces back and he is unprepared; it causes him despair, as he thought he beat it before but it never goes away. However, once he becomes Superman, he does destroy this illness, by literally punching it to death (Superman vows not to kill sentient beings, and these personality-void entities do not count as such). He does not destroy this illness with sheer strength- a one bullet solution- but through patience and hard work. If he did not work through this illness with time, he would not destroy the monsters. The physical battles are representations of final blows. During the movie, progress IS made that leads up to these battles; the battles alone are not the cure.

In Superman v Batman, Clark begins to realize that pure idealism has its flaws, and this makes him question himself. He wonders that if his pure idealism truly does not work, how can he deal with it? This is not resolved before his death. But it is explored in Justice League; Superman is forced to kill Lex, and cannot save Lois, no matter what. The 'realism' that Batman convinces him of attacks his belief in eternal optimism, and he descends into thinking that people cannot be trusted with hope; only he can. During the movie, evil Superman communicates with the deceased Superman in his head, and the two learn from one another. The deceased (original timeline) Superman learns what led him astray, and comes to realize that a balance between realism and idealism must be struck.

In Superman v Batman, Batman 'wins' because Superman realizes his flaws, but the two do not give enough credit to just how important idealism is. At the last moment, Batman does consider this so he saves Superman. Still, he is unsure if he made the right choice because this led to him being hunted down, and the truth being suppressed. Only in Justice League do they realize that idealism has its place,

or else something like evil Superman would come about. Justice League shows what would happen if Batman did not realize this at the last moment.