

# *The Popcorn Papers*

*A Movie Review*

*By*

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*"Brothers Separated by Gene Slicing"*



## *The Incredible Hulk*



**David:** We reviewne of this summer's biggest films: *The Incredible Hulk*. That is, besides *Indiana Jones*, *Iron Man*, *Wall-E*, *Get Smart*, *War Inc.*, *Sex and the City*, *Hellboy II*, *The Dark Knight*, *X-Files*, *Star Wars*, etc, etc. Ok, so, there's a lot of big films , which will make it that more fun to spend time in our favorite balcony seats this summer, but we will focus on old Big, Green and Mean himself, The Hulk.

**Kevin:** For those of you not familiar with the story, Dr. Bruce Banner (Edward Norton) is a geneticist trying to improve human DNA. An accident in the lab bombards his body with gamma radiation, turning him into the Hulk, a superhuman green goliath with severe anger management issues. He destroys the lab, injuring his girlfriend, Betty Ross (Liv Tyler), as well as her father, General Ross (William Hurt), a scheming bio-weapons officer who intends to use Banner's research to create super soldiers. While on the run, he finds that anger, pain or emotional stress can trigger his transformation, turning him into the Hulk until his rage dissipates hours later, leaving him human and unconscious.

The movie begins five years after the accident, with Bruce hiding out in a Brazilian barrio, working odd jobs while he continues to search for a cure for his condition. A chance accident alerts the general to his whereabouts, and he's on the run again. Returning home, he reunites with Betty and, after a vicious battle with the general's troops, they flee together. Meanwhile, the general has acquired the services of a shifty commando, Emil Blonsky (Tim Roth), to bring Bruce in. However, a super-strength injection coupled with a dose of gamma rays gives Blonsky to ability to turn into the Abomination, a Hulk-like creature that is even bigger, more powerful and sadistic. Now Bruce has to embrace his inner beast, for the Hulk is the only being that can stop the Abomination.

**D:** *The Incredible Hulk* is well done and is the film that you really expecting and hoping for. So short review, go see it, it's good.

Norton, who was very involved in the script, gives an understated, touching and convincing performance. The film probably owes a lot of its strength to following the acting of Bill Bixby in the 70's TV show. He isn't playing a hero, he's not playing tragic, he's just a smart, good person who is trying to do the best in a bad situation. The Hulk is a modern tragic incarnation of Jeckyl/Hyde, but unlike the inner demons driving Hyde, this monster is reacting to overwhelming, often societal forces that attack his attempts at improving life, or those he cares for.

But we need to step back and honestly say that the film's real draw is that the wounded character gets to become really, really big and really, really strong and gets to stomp on people who did bad things to him. This is not to be confused with Ang Lee's failed attempt to try and define the greater human condition and working out daddy issues in his appropriately panned 2003 version, which should be quietly forgotten.

**K:** The big appeal to Banner's character is his inherent sense of right and wrong. I mean, here's a guy who could play the martyr card easily and no one would blame him. He's completely alone, self-exiled from his country, constantly hunted, with no chance of ever seeing the love of his life again. The opening of the film shows how he doesn't just roll over. He is constantly looking all over the world for a cure for his condition. Meanwhile, this PhD is reduced to working in a bottling plant, and even then he helps fix the plant's outdated equipment without taking any more than his menial wage. He's making the very best of a horrible situation, and we instantly respect him for that.

However, the main strength of the character Bruce Banner is how easily we can identify with him. Sure, Superman and Batman are very cool, popular heroes, but since none of us are either aliens from Krypton or billionaire vigilantes, it's hard to put ourselves in their shoes. However, everyone, to one degree or another, has that inner rage inside us that we struggle to control, and everyone can relate to "losing their temper" or "seeing red". How many times have we wanted to run that inconsiderate driver off the road, or throttle the smug clerk at the DMV? Only the civilized side to our personality prevents acting on these impulses, and occasionally it doesn't, as evidenced by the everyday episodes of road rage. We are therefore easily able to identify with Bruce, all the more so since he must be more disciplined than us to prevent the Hulk from taking over. It will be interesting to see if the upcoming slew of comic book movies will be able to win the audience over in this way.

**D:** The things that make this movie work are the elements that are making most recent comic book movies work. It is about the people who react like real people in blown up, larger-than-life, perhaps goofy situations. It is the reason *Iron Man* worked so well, and the previous Hulk film did not. I think it is more subtle than just being able to say that the main character is just like the viewer. I believe that the exaggeration of circumstance with the characters striving for elements of stability within the exaggeration is what makes it work. There are two films in development that may make this case. *Green Arrow*, (rich costumed Robin Hood-type hero) and *Thor* (Nordic God of Thunder, wielder of the powerful hammer *Mjolnir*, transformed from the body of physically-limited doctor hobbled with a cane). *Green Arrow* will start with the Emerald Clad hero set up, arrested, stripped of all his toys and sentenced to a prison for super-baddies (i.e. Lex Luthor, The Joker, etc.). So we have an average man with a heroic heart who will have to spend the movie compromising his values and identity. He is a hero trying to break out of jail to do the right thing while cooperating and aiding people who do very, very bad things. Though the *Thor* script hasn't been leaked yet, the origin is of an average guy gaining the powers of a freaking Nordic War God and gets a weapon that

outclasses any WMD, and he can use them whenever he bugger all feels like it. I'm not saying it's doomed to failure but I think we are looking at the reason *Spider-Man* did well and the *Fantastic Four* did not.

This is what leads us to the possible future of comic book movies. First the current directors, writers, producers, heads of studios were often the kind of kid who read comics through the 80's/90's when the comic books themselves were really growing up as a literary work, this is when the name 'graphic novel' replaced 'comic book'. Now they can make their heroes and villains come alive on the silver screen, and it's worked. *V for Vendetta*, *X-Men*, *Hellboy*, *300*, and *Sin City* are all good for bubble gum-popping entertainment or perhaps something a little deeper. As long as the story is about the characters, it's great; when it becomes about the powers or the suit, it sucks. I offer *Batman and Robin*, *Catwoman*, *Steel*, *Swamp Thing*, *Howard the Duck* and oh so many others as evidence of the latter.

As we will continually see comic books making it to the silver screen (love them or hate them) they are this generation's serials; westerns, monsters, space dramas, and slasher films all had their runs and, like now, there were some really good ones, and there were some darn awful ones.

Kevin, we seem to be forgetting something... oh, yeah. Would you like to talk about anything that actually happens in the movie?

**K:** Yeah, we did get a little ahead of ourselves, didn't we? The beauty of this summer's version is that it achieves a strong, character-driven story without seeming to reach. The whole story operates very smoothly. After the opening sequence, when Banner is discovered by the general, we're off to the races. The strength of the movie is that it is mostly a chase movie. It has elements of *The Fugitive*, but with one major difference. Every time the government catches up to Bruce, they either hurt him or put Betty in harm's way, and here comes the Hulk and the majority of the action. It's only after the chase plot is resolved that the Hulk squares off against the Abomination. In this way the film, which has plenty of emotional depth thanks to the writing and performances, never needs to bite off too much at once. The result is a movie that runs shorter than two hours, but doesn't feel incomplete in any way. That's the sign of a good story.

As an added bonus, anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with the original TV series will see many nice touches that were influenced by it. It's been said that Edward Norton really wanted to pay homage to the series, and you can see it, from the look of the lab equipment to the trademark shot of Banner's green pupils that signal the start of his transformation. There are also cameos, bits of music and a very funny play on the famous line from the series. Those who aren't familiar with the TV show won't be lost, but anyone who is will appreciate those little moments.

**D:** Actually, Kev, given the most recent examples of *The Incredible Hulk* and *Iron Man*, it seems like the trend is heading toward exceptional stories. Hopefully it will continue, with the upcoming *Dark Knight* and the superhero-influenced *Hancock*. Hopefully. If not, well, that would make Kevin and me angry, and you wouldn't like us when... well, you know the rest.

## **Top 5 of Remakes That Were Better Than the Original INPO\***

*The Gumball Rally (1976) / Cannonball Run (1981)*  
*The Thing (1951/1982)*  
*The Fly (1958/1986)*  
*Little Shop of Horrors (1960/1986)*  
*Scarface (1932/1983)*  
*Lord of the Rings (1978/2001)*

\*In no particular order, duh.

## **The Popcorn Prognosticator! Films you might want to watch out for.**

*Hancock*  
*Wall-E*  
*Hellboy II: The Golden Army*  
*The Dark Knight*  
*X-Files: I Want To Believe*  
*Mongol*  
*The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*  
*Righteous Kill*  
*Taken*

*David D. Jones works with RE/MAX Equitygroup, in Portland Oregon and helps brilliant scientists, generals, and anyone who can toss a forklift like a softball find their perfect home, that they will never want to smash. Kevin Gutteron now lives in Brazil after turning into the Hulk and smashing every car on the 405 freeway. David and Kevin have been writing and making movies together since The Hulk had "With Special Guest Star; Rick Springfield."*

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