



In a gravity-defying moment (left), Superman, played by American actor David Corenswet, embraces his romantic interest Lois Lane. Back to Earth (right), Lane, played by actress Rachel Brosnahan, in her office, while Superman (below) overcomes obstacles.



‘Look! Up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s Superman!’

For decades, this iconic phrase has been associated with the arrival of the *Man of Steel*, the first widely celebrated superhero in American comic book history. With his red cape billowing in the wind, the superhero has always been portrayed as indestructible.

However, 87 years after the first Superman tale appeared in Action Comics magazine in 1938, he now returns to the silver screen in a disheveled state: injured and lying in the Arctic snow. The situation worsens when Krypto, Superman’s pet Superdog, comes running like a bullet after being whistled for — only to pounce on his bloodied body, seemingly adding to his suffering.

This is the opening scene of *Superman*, DC Studios’ first feature film, which was simultaneously released in Chinese mainland and North America on July 11.

Recently, James Gunn, the film’s director and screenwriter, alongside producer Peter Safran, traveled to Beijing to promote the new Hollywood blockbuster, sharing behind-the-scenes stories with Chinese fans and media outlets.

Interestingly, the new Superman film has a notable connection to China, as Gunn revealed during the movie’s Beijing premiere. “Superman is a movie for everybody across the world, and it’s especially for the people of China,” he says.

Calling China one of the most important influences on his filmmaking, Gunn credited the country as the place where he discovered how — and why — he wanted to make movies. The 58-year-old director cites some Chinese films and filmmakers as formative inspirations, including Stephen Chow’s *Kung Fu Hustle*, Johnnie To’s *The Heroic Trio*, and classics starring action giant Jet Li or directed by Hong Kong art house auteur Wong Kar-wai.

Well known to Chinese audiences for his work on the Guardians of the Galaxy trilogy, the director reveals that his inspiration for writing *Superman* stemmed from a deep childhood connection to the comic book version of the character — one he says he loved even more than the versions seen in most films or television shows.

“I started with the question: What if Superman were real? What would his relationship with Lois Lane be like? What would his flaws be? Where would he be a little too cocky? A little too proud? A little too stubborn to get his way?” Gunn recalls.

In the new film, American actor David Corenswet stars as the titular

Superman soars back to screens

Director James Gunn says the film is especially for China which he cites as one of the most significant influences on his career, **Xu Fan** reports.



James Gunn, who directed and wrote *Superman*, shares behind-the-scenes stories with Chinese media during his Beijing promotional tour earlier this month. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

hero with Rachel Brosnahan playing Lois Lane, Superman’s love interest. The story explores Superman’s struggle to reconcile his alien origins as Kal-El of Krypton with his human identity as Clark Kent, the mild-mannered journalist at the Daily Planet. As he remains committed to using his powers for the good of humanity, he finds himself facing a new threat: tech billionaire Lex

Luthor, who hatches a plot to turn public opinion against him.

One of the key steps in preparing for the film was to cast the right actor to play Superman. Gunn reveals that he first saw Corenswet in the 2022 American period horror film *Pearl*, leaving him with an impression that Corenswet should audition for the role.

In the first round of auditions,

around 30 actors and 30 actresses were considered for the lead roles of Superman and Lane. From that pool, the director selected three pairings to undergo screen tests, mixing and matching the finalists to gauge which combination sparked the most compelling on-screen chemistry.

“David and Rachel — at the end of the day, I liked them the best. But

more than that, their chemistry was magnetic. They had very different dynamics: David is a little looser, kind of chaotic, while Rachel is very controlled. Together, that contrast made their personalities spark on film,” shares Gunn.

However, another big “star” who almost steals the spotlight from the flying alien superhero is his super-powered, red-cape-wearing pet,

Krypto. The dog, brought to life through computer-generated imagery, is modeled on a 3D scan of the director’s real-life pet, Ozu — named in tribute to the late Japanese film master Yasujiro Ozu.

Gunn adopted Ozu when the dog was just eight months old, choosing the scrawny, skittish puppy from among some 60 rescue dogs confined to a single backyard. The pup’s visible fear, he says, was what drew him in — a timidity that quickly vanished once Ozu settled in and seemed to take command of the household.

“He influences my life by destroying all my things. I adopted this terrible dog, and he came in and chewed up all my stuff, and he wouldn’t let me pet him. He was just casually being terrible: casually going outside, getting mud all over himself and doing all the bad things dogs shouldn’t do,” says Gunn, with a big smile.

“I thought, I’m glad he doesn’t have superpowers. And that’s when I put him in the movie. I just started writing the movie at that point. That was really the beginning — it was all spurred on by Ozu, who is my dog. He doesn’t know it, but he’s everywhere,” he adds.

Asked about Superman’s cultural legacy, Safran — who serves as co-CEO of DC Studios alongside Gunn — describes the iconic hero as “the origin of all superhero stories”, adding that the new film marks a breakthrough by presenting Superman as a “fully fleshed-out character” and bringing new emotional depth to the role.

Reflecting on his long-standing collaboration with Gunn since 1998, Safran says making a Superman film felt like a dream come true, the one he had envisioned for years.

“When people talk about superhero fatigue, I always say that it’s mediocre movie fatigue. People just want better movies in every genre. I think superhero movies maybe got a little bit lazy and relied on visual spectacle rather than real human stories with genuine emotion and empathy,” shares Safran.

“So, I think this generation is as excited as every prior generation about great superhero movies. And when you make one, like *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 3* or *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, the audience is really excited about it. I really believe that *Superman* can be part of that, and part of rebuilding the relationship between DC and that new generation, that new audience,” he says.

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Ne Zha 2 goes from home triumph to global quest



Left: *Ne Zha 2* premiered in Dubai with English and Arabic subtitles on July 15. WEN XINNIAN / XINHUA Right: A 4D version of the film on show in Beijing in February. CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA

Combining mythological storytelling with cutting-edge animation and emotional nuance, the film has become a cultural phenomenon in China and, increasingly, abroad. In a recent investor update, production company Enlight Media mentioned about the newly produced English-dubbed version; and the film has already been screened in over 30 countries and regions, primarily in its original Chinese audio with localized subtitles, including

more than a dozen in Europe.

Yin Hong, vice-chairman of the China Film Association, called the film “a milestone for Chinese animation”, saying that “it demonstrates the vitality of China’s creative industries, the enduring appeal of its cultural heritage, and the global potential of its storytelling”.

What began as a retelling of a rebellious boy-god from Chinese mythology has blossomed into a contemporary saga that resonates

across age groups and cultures. While rooted in ancient lore, the film explores modern themes such as destiny, social prejudice and identity, earning praise from both teenage fans seeking empowerment and older viewers drawn to its emotional catharsis.

“I believe that one day, new ideas, deeper meanings and new souls will emerge from the film, and the whole world will be able to appreciate it,” says director Yang Yu, also known as Jiaozi.

On the technical front, the film is a marvel, too. Featuring nearly 2,000 special effects shots and the joint efforts of over 130 animation studios, the film sets a new bar for Chinese animation quality.

At the 2025 Shanghai International Film Festival in June, Enlight Media chairman Wang Changtian predicted the film’s overseas box office could set a record for a Chinese film abroad that may stand for two decades.

Enlight Media has stated that merchandise related to the film now spans more than 30 categories and offers over 200 products, including blind boxes, plush toys, action figures, and more.

The film’s success has been a boon for China’s movie theaters. A cinema in Wangjing area in Beijing’s Chaoyang District credited *Ne Zha 2* with generating 40 percent of its revenue over the past five months. “Without it, we might still be struggling to find our footing,” the theater, which opened in mid-January, said in a WeChat post earlier.

Meanwhile, anticipation is building up for a third installment in the movie series. Responding to investor inquiries earlier this month, Enlight Media stated that *Ne Zha 3* will be held to even higher standards. “We will take great care to meet audience expectations,” the company said.

As China redefines its cultural presence on the world stage, *Ne Zha 2* stands as both a commercial juggernaut and a symbol of creative ambition. “It’s a miracle and a peak in Chinese cinema,” says Chen Xuguang, director of the Institute of Film, Television, and Theatre at Peking University. “A record that may remain unbroken for a long time.”