



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 16, 2011

## Summer Hit: Science Fiction Thriller “Super 8”

It seems it's been a while since a film such as J.J. Abrams' *Super 8* has been on the big screen. Produced by Steven Spielberg and packed with suspense and thrills, it has all the necessary elements to keep viewers engaged from beginning to finish. After a young group of friends witness a train derailment in the summer of 1979, they begin to notice a variety of strange events taking place in their tiny town. Their curious and adventurous spirits prompt them to investigate what is taking place. What they discover is beyond what they could have imagined.



Thirteen-year-old Joe Lamb (Joel Courtney) is already engaged in emotional turmoil after having lost his mother to an accident in a local steel mill four months previously. Unfortunately, his father, the local town sheriff, has been of little help. In fact, the two scarcely have a relationship, with just an occasional exchange of words. This tie is further strained when Lamb's father indicates that he wants to send Joe to a baseball camp for the summer.

Fortunately, Joe manages to find some solace in his friendships. And he has something to look forward to when he and his friends plan to make a Super 8 mm zombie film in the hopes that they will win a local film contest. Joe is delighted to learn that Alice Dainard (Elle Fanning), his crush, will be playing the female lead in their amateur movie. He is even more thrilled when he discovers that Alice does not appear uncomfortable maintaining a friendship with him.

Joe's life takes a turn, however, as he and his friends begin filming a scene for their movie at the local train station. A truck drives into an oncoming freight train, and the young people are nearly killed when the train derails. Disoriented and clueless about what exactly took place, they realize that their Super 8 holds evidence, as it continued to film even after the children left the scene. What was captured on camera is something that no one was supposed to see. And something that will change Joe's life forever.

Before long, strange things start to happen. Animals and people begin to disappear, as well as an array of appliances — prompting Joe's father, Deputy Lamb (Kyle Chandler) to lead a local investigation. Meanwhile, the U.S. Air Force has arrived in town to investigate the derailment of the train, and to oversee the cleanup of the accident. Immediately, the townspeople question the need for the military presence, and their curiosity is piqued as to what was on the train, and if there is a need for protection.

Meanwhile, the children embark on their own investigation. As Joe begins to put the pieces together of what took place that fateful night, he recalls that the truck seemingly drove with purpose onto the tracks. As he learns more details, he discovers that one of his schoolteachers may have more secrets than he realized.

As a science fiction thriller, *Super 8* has all the good stuff — thrills, suspense, wit, monsters, and the emergence of a true hero: Joe. Much of the film is also comprised of exciting action, with attacks from the monster/alien on civilians that are sure to raise the hair on your arms.



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Likewise, the structure of the plot is creatively organized and intriguing, as past events play a role in current events effectively. In fact, it is often the film's subplots that are the most engaging.

Some parents may be perturbed by certain elements of the film. For example, the villain turns out to be an Air Force colonel, which may be construed as anti-American, or at least anti-military. The violence in the film and the overarching fear factor may prompt parents of younger children to skip this particular movie, as it depicts the alien seizing people, chasing teenagers, and the virtual chaos that results.

The film also explores the importance of self-discovery, and examines a number of struggles to which most moviegoers can relate. There is a focus on leadership, support, love, and forgiveness that one would not necessarily expect to find in a movie of this nature. One important moral is that the moving on from past resentments and offering forgiveness to one who has wronged you is a healthy step in the process of healing.

Overall, *Super 8* is a great film. Action-packed, exciting, and creative, it may prove to be one of this year's hits.



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