



Jumper

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Life without limits

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Film title: Jumper

Tagline(s): Anywhere is possible / Anywhere. Anything. Instantly.

Director: Doug Liman

Screenplay: David S. Goyer, Jim Uhls, Simon Kinberg (novels by Steven Gould)

Starring: Hayden Christensen, Jamie Bell, Rachel Bilson, Samuel L. Jackson, Diane Lane, Michael Rooker, Max Theriot

Distributor: Twentieth Century Fox

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Certificate: PG-13 (USA); 12A (UK)

[Image]

Warning: contains plot spoilers

If you had the ability to teleport anywhere in the world in an instant, it would certainly make it easier to get to work on time. But you would probably be able to think of more exciting things to do with your powers. Where would you go and what would you do? For David Rice (Hayden Christensen), the hero of sci-fi action film *Jumper*, these questions are not simply a fun discussion starter, but everyday choices in his extraordinary life. With a miserable domestic situation and few friends at school, David is an unhappy and

withdrawn fifteen-year-old when he first discovers that he has the power to teleport. Suddenly, his life changes forever, and it seems that nearly all his dreams are within his grasp. Millie (Rachel Bilson), David's high school crush, has grand ambitions about travelling the globe: 'Might as well dream big, right?' However, David's dreams are more universal human desires, even if they are actualised in a somewhat unusual manner. Feeling trapped and worthless, David dreams of being different and being free. He longs to experience something beyond his monotonous and miserable life, and discovering the ability to 'jump' seems to satisfy this dream in a big way.

In his opening voiceover, David Rice tells us, 'Once I was a normal person – a chump just like you.' From his choice of words we can infer that David doesn't see being normal as particularly desirable. When he is normal, David is ignored at home and bullied at school. Having discovered his power to jump, however, David doesn't have to be normal any more. He is special and different. He can attract any girl he wants, and make his former bullies regret their past actions. Best of all, David can be free of all his problems and unhappiness: 'This thing that just happened – it could set me free.' He decides to follow the example of his mother, who left when he was five, and leave his old life behind: 'If she could run away, so could I'. David uses this incredible teleporting power to escape any unpleasantness and 'skip the boring parts' of life. With his ability, he can do almost anything he wants, living a life without boundaries or restrictions. For David, 'nothing's off limits'. In his ability to jump, David has acquired the life that almost every one of us secretly wishes for. We don't want to be like everybody else; we want to be different and able to do things that no one else can do. And we want to be free to do what we want, without rules and restrictions. We want to experience the world, follow our dreams and live life to the full. As a jumper, David is truly 'standing on top of the world' and living the dream.

Eventually, however, David's actions start to catch up with him. He discovers that he is not alone, and that not all of his problems are easy to 'jump' away from. With some mysterious and well-equipped agents out to get him, David runs into someone with similar talents to his own, the battle-scarred Griffin (Jamie Bell), who doesn't seem too

friendly either. Welcomed to 'the war', David learns that he is part of an ancient feud between the genetically-gifted jumpers and their nemeses, the fanatical 'Paladin' sect who, we discover, can be blamed for most of the atrocities committed in the name of religion throughout the centuries. Although linked to Christianity in the film, referencing God as motivation for their actions and wearing uniforms reminiscent of ecclesiastical attire, the Paladin are merely a thin parody of popular conspiracy theories about secret church operatives, with no evidence of Christian values within their worldview. They are, however, formidable enemies to the jumpers, possessing technology, influence and expertise that put their battles on a level playing field despite the jumpers' amazing abilities. David's reluctant involvement in this war forces him to re-evaluate his dreams of being different and free. Roland (Samuel L. Jackson), the paladin who seems to be in charge of the operation to kill David, explains that his actions are necessary because, 'sooner or later you all go bad.' When David protests, he is assured that, 'you're not different'.

As events turn increasingly nasty, David must also question the way of life he has chosen and whether his freedom might not come with some responsibilities after all. Early in the film we see David watching disasters on the news where 'it would take a miracle' to save those in danger. He does not attempt to use his powers to make a difference in these situations, but instead chooses to make his life into an extended holiday. Later, however, it is made clear to David that 'there are always consequences.' Indeed, the voiceover for the trailer corrupts the classic Spiderman mantra to: 'with great power come great consequences'. David comes to understand that there are more important things than freedom, and that being different from the crowd is not what matters; he must be different from his fellow Jumpers too. Responding to these challenges, David starts to take responsibility for his actions, using his power to intervene when the people he cares about are in danger, and choosing to act according to some principles rather than conforming to the behaviour expected of him. As the film ends, however, we are left questioning whether anything has really changed in David's attitude to life.

We can only dream of having powers like David

that would set us apart from almost anyone else on the planet, but we all do have talents and gifts of our own. While it is possible to come away from a superhero film thinking of all the cool things we would do if we had similar skills, the best films of the genre inspire us to use whatever abilities we have to make a difference in the world. *Jumper* is not a particularly good example of such a film, in that Millie, the non-superpowered character, is almost always ineffectual when she tries to intervene in situations. However, if we recognise that everyone has unique talents, then *Jumper* may get us thinking about how we ought to be making use of those gifts – to be different in a way that really means something.

Jumper also challenges us to consider what it actually means to be free. At first, David sees freedom as the ability to do whatever he wants, without having to worry about his family situation or problems, or even the law. His encounters with Griffin and the Paladin change David's opinions, and he realises that true freedom is the ability to choose our own actions and destiny. David's family connections map out one future for him while his genetic code seems to prescribe a different destiny. Clinging to his freedom, however, David chooses his own path and is able to challenge the assumptions of the Paladin: 'I told you I'm different.' The film raises the question of whether all human actions are genetically and environmentally determined, or whether we can make truly free choices. The biblical view of humanity asserts that human beings have free will. Like David, we are able to make good moral choices and our actions are not wholly determined by factors outside of our control. However, the most fundamental moral choice that we need to consider, according to the Bible, is whether or not to continue doing whatever we want with our lives, or whether to submit to the authority of God. *Jumper* encourages us to reflect on the consequences of our desires to be free, and suggests that, if we do possess the ability to make genuine choices, despite our nature and upbringing, then we are already free in the way that matters most. The important question is how we will use that freedom. We don't have superpowers like David, but *Jumper* can still inspire us to act as heroes by asking how we can use the abilities we do have, and what choices we ought to make about our way of life and our identity.

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