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# MOVIE

THE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE CINEMA



# SUPERMAN THE MOVIE



You'll believe a man can fly.

ALEXANDER SALKIND PRESENTS MARLON BRANDO · GENE HACKMAN in a RICHARD DONNER FILM

SUPERMAN

STARRING CHRISTOPHER REEVE · NED BEATTY · JACKIE COOPER · GLENN FORD · TREVOR HOWARD · MARGOT KIDDER · VALERIE PERRINE · MARIA SCHELL · TERENCE STAMP · PHYLLIS THAXTER · SUSANNAH YORK  
 STORY BY MARIO PUZO · SCREENPLAY BY MARIO PUZO, DAVID NEWMAN, LESLIE NEWMAN AND ROBERT BENTON  
 CREATIVE CONSULTANT TOM MANKIEWICZ · DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GEOFFREY UNSWORTH · EDITOR JOHN BARRY · MUSIC BY JOHN WILLIAMS · EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ILYA SALKIND · PRODUCED BY PIERRE SPENGLER  
 PRODUCTION DESIGNER RICHARD DONNER · PAMPHLETS "TECHNICOLOR" · AN ALEXANDER AND ILYA SALKIND PRODUCTION  
 DIRECTED BY RICHARD DONNER

After the commercial success of *The Three Musketeers: the Queen's Diamonds* (1973) and *The Four Musketeers: the Revenge of Milady* (1975), which were shot as one film and then released as two (to the consternation of many of the actors paid for only one), the producers Ilya and Alexander Salkind and Pierre Spengler lit another controversial fuse with the announcement of their intention to resurrect the ultimate all-American comic-book hero – Superman. The five years of planning that followed saw an excessive and, of course, expensive period of hype, beginning with full-page ads in *Variety*, laser shows and hot-air balloons before a shooting-script had even been agreed.

Coupled with this paid advertising was the enormous press and media coverage garnered by this momentous production, highlights of which include Marlon Brando's \$3.7 million fee, the search for a director and for a woman to play Lois Lane, and – the most saleable novelty – the search for Superman himself. Almost every leading actor in Hollywood was rumoured to have been offered the part, but the final decision was delayed until almost a month before production when predictably an unknown, Christopher Reeve, was cast.

After problems with the fee demanded by Steven Spielberg and the reluctance of expatriate English director Guy Hamilton to return to Pinewood Studios, the producers decided on Richard Donner as

director of *Superman, The Movie*. Riding high on the success of *The Omen* (1976), Donner eschewed all temptations to make a camp version. Wisely, he hoped that a modern audience would accept the limitations inherent in such fantasy entertainment and enjoy rather than mock the adventures of a being unencumbered with human frailties. As the director said:

'The main aim of our own interpretation is to uphold and enhance the American myth. It is real within its own framework.'

Fortunately for the production team of *Superman, The Movie*, the previous celluloid representations were, despite their popularity, very wooden translations of the DC Comics hero. They ignored the science-fiction element and relied too heavily on the truth and justice aspect. Kirk Allen, star of the Columbia serial, and television star George Reeves were tied mainly by low-budget handicaps, and became flying G-Men in search of a good script. The only real inspiration for the new film-makers were the magnificent animation effects created in Max Fleischer's Superman cartoons of the Forties. They were, and still are, wonderfully concise films, clearly displaying Superman's alien abilities in true DC style. Colourful and adventurous, they come closest to the current notions of 'man of steel'.

Aided and abetted by the most convincing actor who ever pulled on a pair of bright blue tights, Donner was also fortunate to have a



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'no expenses spared' special-effects department. Being veterans of *Star Wars* (1977), their patient work (it took years to create the illusion of flight) was certainly worth the wait, and the sequence when Superman saves Lois and catches a helicopter in mid-air is quite breathtaking.

What makes *Superman, The Movie* the best screen version to date is not the amazing effects, but the excellent acting from the benevolent aliens. Marlon Brando as Jor-El sets the mood perfectly, his awesome presence pervading the rest of the film after his early disappearance. His fatherly wisdom and fairness leave no-one in any doubt at all that Superman must be perfect. Through sheer hard work, Christopher Reeve conveys the essence of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shusters' original character. His Clark Kent – a bumbling innocent, shy and nervous – contrasts superbly

with his macho alter-ego, though this romantic, old-fashioned gallant is not quite believable as a match for Margot Kidder's Lois, whose persona is probably a victim of too many scriptwriters.

The other small disappointment in *Superman, The Movie* is that it is never really possible to believe that a man can fly. For all the faultless effects, the suspension of disbelief is often shattered by the stiff-limbed posture of Reeve, necessary for the complicated harness worn in the flying scenes. Regardless of the drawbacks (many of them self-inflicted by the anxious producers, who continued to face litigation from unhappy actors long after the film's release), *Superman, The Movie* is a masterpiece of Seventies science fiction, which relies heavily on the fantastic effects but boasts at least one great acting performance... from Christopher Reeve.

STEPHEN WOOLLEY



Just before the destruction of the planet Krypton, Jor-El, a member of the ruling council, and his wife Lara (1) launch their son in an earth-bound projectile (2). Minutes later their planet is spectacularly engulfed by a nearby sun. Due to molecular changes in the earth's atmosphere, the infant is invested with superhuman powers (3). He is absorbed into society, but when his foster parent, Pa Kent, dies, he decides to head for the Arctic wastes where – in a giant glacier – he is reunited with the spirit of Jor-El.

After twelve years, he returns to civilization in the guise of mild-mannered Clark Kent, reporter for the Daily Planet – a busy newspaper in Metropolis. Although ignored by colleague Lois Lane (4) in his alias as a newsman, he is adored by her and millions of others whilst

fighting crime and injustice as the flying hero Superman (5).

Diabolical villain Lex Luthor (6, right), aware of Superman's superior powers, plans to disable him with Kryptonite, a fragment of his planet, and then destroy parts of California. His evil plan is disrupted by Eve Teschmayer (6, left), one of his own assistants, who sympathetically releases Superman, but too late to prevent one of Luthor's deadly missiles from exploding. Superman miraculously repairs the country (7) and pulls Lois' car out of a rock-fall (8), only to find her dead. Distraught, yet undaunted, he circles the globe at unimaginable speed, reversing time itself, and with Lois once again breathing, he returns Luthor and his villainous accomplice Otis to the authorities. His mission complete, he is reunited with Lois, but still keeps his true identity from her.

Directed by Richard Donner, 1978

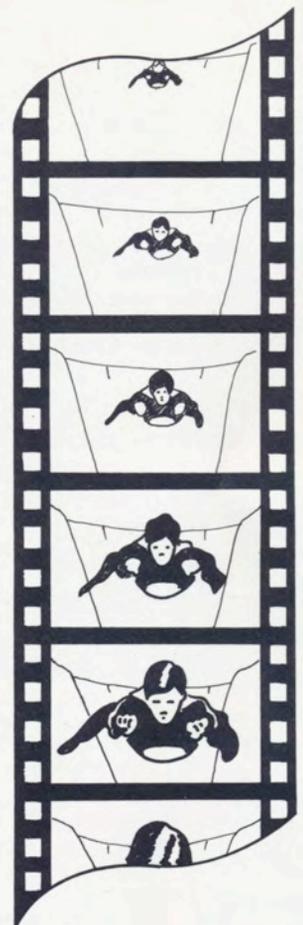
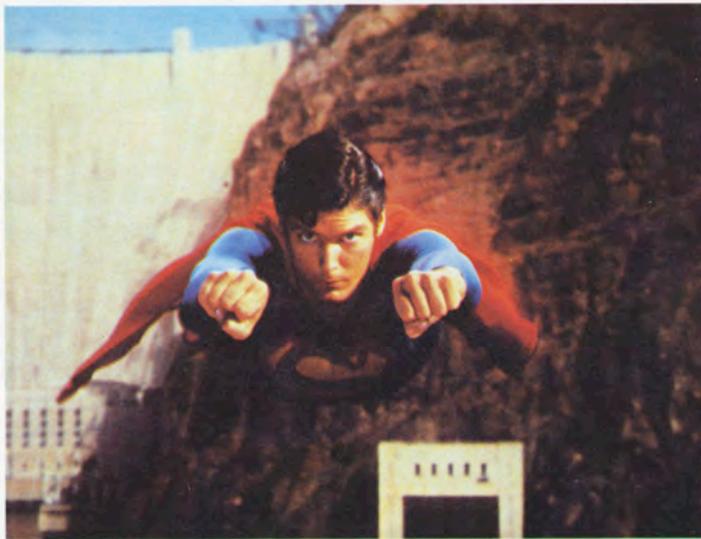
Prod co: Dovemead, for International Film Production. exec prod: Ilya Salkind. prod: Pierre Spengler. assoc prod: Charles F. Greenlaw. sc: Mario Puzo, David Newman, Leslie Newman, Robert Benton, based on characters by Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster. creative consultant: Tom Mankiewicz. photo (Panavision, Technicolor): Geoffrey Unsworth. model photo: Paul Wilson. creative sup/sp eff: Colin Chilvers. creative sup optical visual eff: Roy Field. creative sup mattes and composites: Les Bowie. creative dir process photo: Denys Coop. dir and creator model eff: Derek Meddings. sp visual eff des/main titles des: Denis Rich. creative sup sp visuals: Stuart Freeborn. Zoptic sp eff: Zoran Perisic. sup ed: Stuart Baird. ed: Michael Ellis. prod des: John Barry. sup art dir: Bill Brodie, Maurice Fowler. mus: John Williams, The London Symphony Orchestra. cost: Yvonne Blake. sup sd ed: Chris Greenham. flying co-ordinator: Dominic Fulford. stunt co-ordinators: Alf Joint, Vic Armstrong, Alex Stevens. r/t: 143 minutes.

Cast: Christopher Reeve (*Clark Kent/Superman*), Marlon Brando (*Jor-El*), Susannah York (*Lara*), Margot Kidder (*Lois Lane*), Gene Hackman (*Lex Luthor*), Ned Beatty (*Otis*), Valerie Perrine (*Eve Teschmayer*), Jackie Cooper (*Perry White*), Marc McLure (*Jimmy Olsen*), Trevor Howard, Harry Andrews, Vass Anderson, John Hollis (*elders*), Jack O'Halloran (*Non*), Maria Schell (*Vond-Ah*), Terence Stamp (*General Zod*), Sarah Douglas (*Ursa*), Glenn Ford (*Pa Kent*), Phyllis Thaxter (*Ma Kent*), Jeff East (*young Clark Kent*), Diane Sherry (*Lana Lang*), Jeff Atcheson (*coach*), Billy J. Mitchell, Robert Henderson (*editors*), Larry Lamb (*first reporter*), Larry Hagman (*missile-convoy major*), Rex Reed (*himself*).

projector



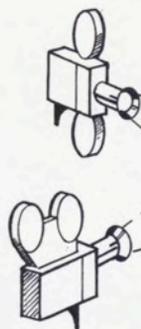
camera



### The Zoptic system How Superman flies

Top: a projector casts an image of a previously-filmed background scene onto a screen via a two-way mirror. Superman is held in position in front of the screen by concealed supports. The camera shoots through the two-way mirror and films both the projected background and the 'live' Superman.

Right: the projector and the camera are both fitted with zoom lenses which are synchronized. The process by which Superman is made to fly occurs in two separate, but simultaneous stages: the projector lens zooms in, causing the background to diminish in size. At the same time, the linked camera lens zooms in to compensate, so that the diminishing background (which would otherwise appear to get smaller) remains the same size as seen by the camera. Because Superman is 'live' he, of course, remains the same size but appears to get bigger as the camera zooms in (film strip, above right). The overall effect is of Superman 'flying' towards the audience. The effect is paradoxical, for what appears to move (Superman) is actually static, and what appears to be static (the background on film) has actually moved. Variations of this technique can make Superman 'fly' away or from side to side. Zoptic was invented by Zoran Perisic.



along the sidewalks in the background. For the scenes at the villain's headquarters in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), he used moving model guards and miniature helicopters to confuse the viewers' sense of scale.

Meddings' miniature work on scenes involving explosions and water is remarkable because neither fire nor water can be realistically scaled-down. To overcome this on *The Spy Who Loved Me*, he designed a 63-foot-long, 12-ton 'miniature' oil-tanker, fitted with water disturbers on the hull, which he filmed and sank at sea off the Bahamas.

### Adverse effects

When economic conditions in the Seventies dictated that high-budget American movies

should be shot in Britain, British technicians were able to provide high-quality results cost-effectively. That was a bonus for Hollywood producers, but it was not the reason they initially came to Britain. The profits from movies like *Star Wars* returned to America, where they helped develop the home effects industry. When, in the future, the exchange rate and other factors dictate that big-budget American productions are based abroad, it is unlikely that the effects work for those films will come to Britain if the British, whatever their native talent, do not have the technology to provide an all-round service. Without capital investment, Britain's big success story of the Seventies could fade away in the Eighties.

MARTYN SADLER