

**FEATURE
BY
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MAN OF STEEL SUPERMAN II

I remember taking a car ride with producer Ilya Salkind to Pinewood studios when *Superman — The Movie* was just in its final stages of post production.

Ilya was a worried man. He hadn't, at that time, even worked out exactly how much the movie was costing because much of *Part Two* had been filmed at the same time — should the film prove successful enough to warrant a sequel.

"I tell ya this," said Salkind to me as we pulled up outside his studio office, "if this film flops I'll probably shoot myself."

Well, *Superman — The Movie* went on to earn itself a sensational three hundred million dollars and Ilya Salkind didn't shoot himself after all. Christopher Reeve as Superman/Clark Kent became an international star and he was all set to go up, up and away in *Superman II* for which he received about half a million dollars plus a share of the profits. He also ended up with a baby boy, Matthew, from his girlfriend Gae Exton, born during production of *Superman II*, but I guess that's another story.

Anyway, the Man of Steel was back before the cameras during 1979 and 1980, but as Ilya Salkind insists, "*Superman II* is not a sequel, in the sense that a sequel is usually an afterthought, intended to capitalize on a surprise hit.

"This movie was planned — and announced — before the original *Superman* started production. It was, and is, a two-parter."

Preparation for *Part Two* was well under way early in 1979. Because much of it had already been filmed it posed problems that few, if any, motion pictures had previously experienced. Cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth died shortly after the previous *Superman* was in the can. His work in *Part Two* was carried on by Bob Paynter and so the rather confusing credit titles announce that the film was "photographed by Geoffrey Unsworth" while Director of Photography was Paynter.

Also, production designer John Barry, whose creations included the fabulous Fortress of Solitude and Lex Luthor's Grand Central Lair, passed from this world to the next, and you can bet he'll put in some re-designing there too. His vision of a world in which "wish fulfillment is reality" was carried forward by Peter Murton.

Then there was the problem over who would direct *Part Two*. *Superman — The Movie* had been begun by Guy Hamilton who was superseded by Richard Donner (who, if you didn't know it, was against casting Chris Reeve originally because he felt Reeve was too young for the part).

After a rift with the *Superman* producers Ilya Salkind and Pierre Spengler, Donner was fired from the project in March of '79 and replaced by Richard



Top: *Superman* (Christopher Reeve) uses his super-strength to stop a run-away bus during his battle with the three Kryptonian villains. Centre: *Non* (Jack O'Halloran) hams it up in *Superman's Fortress of Solitude*, egged on by *Luthor* (Gene Hackman), *Ursa* (Sarah Douglas) and *Zod* (Terence Stamp). Left: *Superman* with *Lois Lane* (Margot Kidder).

Lester. *Part Two* resumed shooting in August that year.

Originally, Lester insisted that his name be left off the credits because he had no hand in either the script or the casting, but was simply working on Donner's blueprint.

However, Lester still found it a challenging subject to put on film, and he compiled two enormous reference books to assist him in his venture.

"One was a glossary containing indexed cross-references to all the characters in the *Superman* saga and all the names," he explains. "Krypton — what does it mean? Super-dog — when did he first appear? And how do you take him for a walk? And so on. You get hooked on that kind of craziness.

"The other book has summaries of all the stories over 35-odd years of *Superman*. Both books were useful. They helped the writers and myself produce new areas of action. DC comics has control over the rights, so we had to stick to certain bounds as far as *Superman's* powers were concerned. But we could give him new adventures. And also, of course, any touches of humour or imagination that came to us."

Something else went missing in *Part Two*. Marlon Brando. One report says that the producers were unhappy with Brando's mental state, although he had already completed twenty minutes of film for *Part Two*. Chris Reeve thinks differently.

"I gather that if they'd used those scenes they would have had to pay Marlon a huge amount of money, as he had a percentage of the gross. So it's a business decision, not an artistic one. And that made me unhappy. The father-son relationship was very important to *Part Two*."

Instead, Susannah York, who played Supie's mum in the first movie, returned to refilm Brando's scenes and communicate with her son in the *Fortress of Solitude*. Susannah, a mother off-screen, once told me that she was happy to play *Superman's* mother because, "my kids all reckoned that if I was Supermum they all had to be Superkids." Well, she certainly didn't expect to be returning in *Part Two*.

"Despite the creative continuity that links *Superman* and *Superman II*," points out Ilya Salkind, "there are distinct differences between the films. *Superman* set up who our hero was and how he came here. Then it pitted his super powers against things and events — rockets, earthquakes, tidal waves.

"This time, his enemies are *people*. They have the same phenomenal gifts he does, but choose to use them for evil."

The *people* he is referring to are the trio of baddies whom you may recall were cast out of Krypton into exile at the beginning of *Superman*. In *Superman II* they escape their fate and find their way



to Earth to wreak revenge on the son of Jor-El.

Leading the trio is Zod, played by Terence Stamp. Adding some camp glamour to the proceedings is Sarah Douglas as Ursa. And playing Non, a sort of cross between a Wookiee and Jaws (in the Bond films, that is) is ex-heavy-weight fighter Jack O'Halloran.

Terence Stamp took his role very seriously. "If you set out to be tongue-in-cheek, the audience knows you're kidding and you lose credibility.

"So, I had to seek out the demon in myself — which had proven unnerving. I have found, for example, that if someone cuts me off in a car, I want to chase them and knock them around, to teach them a lesson."

Stamp was fascinated with two other facets of Zod's make-up. One was his "power trip" when he determines to rule the world. "Most criminals are in it for the money," says Stamp. "The really dangerous ones graduate to power. They either become underworld bosses or world leaders.

"But Zod doesn't even have pockets in his black Kryptonian outfit. He's strictly a power junkie."

The other side of Zod that intrigued him was the flying, care of Zoran Perisic's revolutionary process which, to put it very simply, has the actors dangling on a pole that sticks out of a back projection screen.

"Despite what Chris Reeve is always saying," emphasises Stamp, "it is dange-

rous. Your timing has to be perfect or you can break your neck up there.

"I like the risk because it adds an excitement — a split second reaction time — to our performances that wouldn't exist otherwise."

Sarah Douglas was put through her screen test flying around the studio in a special rig, to see if she could get the hang of it.

She found the sensation of flying "like nothing else in the world. While you're up there, it's absolutely exhilarating, but landing safely is tricky.

"I kept wanting to say things like, 'This is Sarah Douglas to Tower. Am I cleared for landing? Should I lower my flaps?'"

Previously, Sarah's roles were generally damsels-in-distress-types. Playing someone as evil as Ursa proved a challenge for Sarah who's only natural attribute to the role was her height.

"I walked around, saying to myself, 'I hate the human race. I hate men. Give me death and destruction.' It's just an actor's trick.

"I also practised sucking in my cheeks, accompanied by a baleful stare, which will make anyone — even a department store Santa — look mean. It worked, although it's very difficult to talk with your cheeks sucked in!

"I also found that tensing my neck muscles helped, although my ears tended to wiggle involuntarily!"

Her face was plastered with white make-up and she wore a tight black organza outfit "with daring little slits everywhere so you think you see me in places you don't."

The effect was so menacing that even Gene Hackman, back again as Lex Luthor, was fooled when he saw pictures of Sarah from *The Land That Time Forgot* in a corridor at Pinewood studios.

"My, what a pretty girl," remarked Sarah to Hackman.

Top left: *Eve Teschmacher* (Valerie Perrine) and *Lex Luthor* (Gene Hackman) discover *Superman's Fortress of Solitude*. Top right: *In the Fortress Lois* (Margot Kidder) and *Superman* (Christopher Reeve) enjoy a quiet meal. Below left: *Superman and Zod* (Terence Stamp) battle it out on *New York's 42nd Street*. Below right: *Superman is forced to step into a cabinet which will strip him of his superman powers.*



"She's okay," replied Gene, "but she's not in your class."

Pinewood was the home base for both Superman movies. There the offices of the *Daily Planet* were constructed. So was the awesome Fortress of Solitude. But this polar hideaway of Superman's was no ice-box, despite how it looked on the screen. In fact, because it was a palace of crystals, it had to be illuminated by so many "brute" spot lights that firemen were on hand throughout filming.

The firefighters had to constantly check the temperature near the roof which normally hovered around a hundred degrees.

When the thermometer soared beyond a hundred and thirty, filming was halted because the fire sprinklers in the roof were set off at a hundred and fifty degrees.

But even the Fortress of Solitude was outclassed by the movie's biggest set — an exact replica of New York's 42nd Street. It cost more than two million bucks to erect and stretched for 800 feet although it was built and photographed in such a way as to look like it ran from the Hudson to the East River.

This set included the offices of the *Daily Planet*, subway entrances, fashion boutiques, newstands, thirty lamp posts, 12 working traffic lights, a dozen fire hydrants, three phone booths and a traffic jam.

The studios also housed the hotel set where the film's most sacrilegious moments are enacted . . . when Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) discovers Superman's identity and the two fall head over heels for each other, to later wind up in bed in the Fortress of Solitude.

The hotel scene, which in the script is set at Niagara Falls, was in fact the first to be filmed between Reeve and Kidder following their long hiatus. Reeve was delighted with the sequence.

"It's a classic romantic triangle. The timid nice guy is smitten with the beautiful girl. But she loves the strong, daring hero. In this case, however, I'm both men, so I'm in the awkward position of being jealous of myself."

The love scenes are an integral part of *Superman II* and are its biggest flaw. Still, it gave Margot and Chris the opportunity to actually go to Niagara for some location shooting. Reeve was also whisked off to Norway to be filmed dragging his feet through the snow towards his Fortress. Another time, they flew him and a big unit to the island of St Lucia for just a few moments of film when Superman lands in a rain forest to pick a flower for Lois.

"I'd hate to think what it cost just to do that," says Reeve. But then, the whole operation cost something like sixty million dollars.

An interesting exercise while watching *Superman II* is trying to spot which

scenes were filmed with the earlier film which moments have the Dick Donner touch and which ones have the Dick Lester touch. You can feel pretty sure that much of the special effects stuff was shot during *Superman* and most definitely the scene when the villainous trio blast the faces of the American Presidents from Mount Rushmore and replace them with their own likenesses, was filmed during the original production.

It was Richard Donner who boasted, "We built Mount Rushmore and blew it up. It may have been a miniature, but those faces were six feet high."

There is also speculation as to just how much Lester himself filmed. He claims that there were something like half a dozen people directing *Superman II*. Certainly, in a film like *Superman* you can include people like Derek Meddings, who directed the miniatures and additional flying sequences, Zoran Perisic, who is credited as having directed the special effects on the Flying Unit, David Toblin and Robert Lynn who directed the 2nd Unit which is always a vital yet under-



Ursa (Sarah Douglas) keeps Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) as a hostage during the final confrontation with Superman.

rated part of the filming process, and Colin Chilvers who directed the overall special effects. Add Lester and Donner and that makes seven directors at least.

Now that the carnival is over and *Superman II* is at least in the can, it has to start all over again for *Superman III*. And it probably won't end there. Ilya Salkind made it very clear when he said, "We can go on making Superman films indefinitely."

And I'm sure they will, competing eternally with George Lucas it seems as he continues his *Star Wars* sagas which Anthony Daniels, who plays C3PO as if you didn't know, claims will keep him in work until he's 61.

The question on everybody's lips (it is, isn't it?) is will Chris Reeve play Supie in *Part Three*?

"If I like the script, there'll be no question about it. I'll never forget how

much I owe to *Superman*," says Chris who shortly before starting work on *Part Two* turned down the role of a gigolo because it was "too radical a departure from the Superman image."

"While I don't intend to make a life-long career out of Superman, I figure I owe it to the producers — and in a sense, to the audience — not to do a complete role reversal.

"Like most people of my age, I was brought up on Superman. I knew the classic stance — hands on hips, cape blowing in the breeze, bullets bouncing off his chest. That's the way six and a half billion people have loved Superman and I wouldn't dream of changing it.

"I must say, it was hard getting back into the role, especially having filmed *Somewhere In Time* between the two *Superman* movies. I'd forgotten in what good physical condition I had to be in. You know, when I first got the role I was hardly type cast. I sort of looked like Jimmy Stewart standing sideways.

"I had to put on 30 pounds of muscle. In fact, I found muscles I never knew I had."

Chris has certainly made the part of Superman very much his own, making Kirk Alyn and George Reeves look pale in comparison. He injected more than just brain and brawn into the role.

"Superman is a strange land, a solitary man with incredible powers, trying to fit into his adopted planet," says Chris "He has warmth and a great sense of humour. And while he has sworn to uphold 'truth, justice and the American way', there's nothing self-conscious about him. That's simply what he believes in, in a world filled with arch-criminals and evil geniuses.

"But," he concludes, "Clark Kent is more fun to play. There's more scope to the role because he is such an awful mess."



Below: Clark Kent (Christopher Reeve) pulls Lois Lane (Faye Dunaway) from the water after she hurls herself into the radiator to force Kent to reveal his identity as Superman. Right: Superman (Christopher Reeve) grapples with General Zod (Terrence Stamp) in the Fortress of Solitude.



Left: Lex Luthor (Gene Hackman) and Eve Teschmacher (Valerie Perrine) escape from prison in a balloon. Below: Perry White (Jackie Cooper, far left) is threatened by the three super-villains from the Phantom Zone, Non (Jack O'Halloran), Ursa (Sarah Douglas) and General Zod (Terrence Stamp). Luthor (Gene Hackman, far right) acts as cheerleader.

