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# Comic Book Movies

David Hughes

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## About the Book

The superheroes are back! Since the 1970s, the film world has found inspiration in comic books and graphic novels. These days no summer is complete without a major blockbuster movie based on a comic: *Superman*, *Batman*, *Spider-Man*, *X-Men*, *Men in Black*, *The Hulk*. Modern special effects have made large-scale superhero epics possible, but the diversity of the comics being published is evident in today's cinema: *Ghost World*, *From Hell*, *Akira* and *Road to Perdition*.

This book looks in detail at twenty key titles, covering every step of the development from comic book panel to feature film frame, including production, sequels and spin-offs. From the massive and continuing success of the *Superman* and *Batman* franchises to ill-judged ventures such as *Mystery Men* and *Dick Tracy*, the book includes interviews with creative artists about the evolution of the movies from the original comics and speculates about future films.

## About the Author

David Hughes is the author of two other Virgin Film titles: *Kubrick and Lynch*, as well as *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made* and *The Illustrated Farscape Companion*. He has written for, among others, the *Guardian*, *Empire*, *GQ*, *The Face* and *SFX*.

*Other Virgin Film titles by the same author:*

The Complete Kubrick  
The Complete Lynch

# Comic Book Movies

David Hughes



*For Ingrid, the harshest critic of all*

# INTRODUCTION

When Virgin approached me to write this guide to *Comic Book Movies*, I was initially sceptical, since the last two books I had written for this series – *The Complete Kubrick* and *The Complete Lynch* – were designed to be exhaustive; *Comic Book Movies*, on the other hand, would cover only twenty of the many movie adaptations of comics and graphic novels, spanning a quarter century, from 1978 to 2003 (i.e. *Superman* to *Hulk*). It soon became clear, however, that a great many comic-to-film adaptations have failed, at least artistically, for reasons that I was eager to discover. Why should this be, I wondered, when the two media seem to have so much in common? As comics legend Will Eisner (*The Spirit*) observed, [1](#) ‘Films were really nothing but frames on celluloid, which is really no different from frames on a piece of paper. Doing *The Spirit* was no different to making movies.’ But was he right? [2](#) ‘A lot of people make this parallel between comics and film,’ writer and artist Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen*) demurred, ‘but I think it’s a completely bogus comparison. A comic’s script looks a bit like a film script and comic art looks a bit like storyboards, but there is no sound in a comic book and no movement. Also, with a comic book the reader can backtrack, you can reach page 20 and say, “Hey, that’s what that was all about in that scene on page 3,” and then nip back and have a look.’

Comic book movies have never been more popular. As this book went to press, no fewer than three Marvel-based properties were either in cinemas (*Daredevil*) or due for release (*X-Men 2*, *Hulk*); new films based on Superman,

Batman, Ghost Rider, Judge Dredd, The Fantastic Four, Sandman, Dr Strange, Luke Cage, Iron Man, the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen and countless other comic book heroes are in production or advanced stages of development; and a comic book-inspired biography, *American Splendor*, had won prizes at the Sundance Film Festival. As Stephen Norrington, director of the comic book adaptations *Blade* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, observed, <sup>3</sup>'The vibe feels much the same as when George Lucas and Steven Spielberg took black-and-white adventure serials and turned them into *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*. Now people take comics and turn them into big, A-class pictures like *X-Men* or *Hulk*.' Why this sudden fascination with comic book heroes? Perhaps because so many directors and studio executives grew up (as I did) on Marvel and DC comics – an entire generation learned about morality, heroism and the difficult choices faced by heroes not from the classics, but from *Spider-Man* and *The Hulk*, with mythologies as potent and powerful as those of the gods of ancient times. Whether the trend continues, as it did between the success of *Batman* in 1989 and the failure of *Batman and Robin* in 1997, remains to be seen.

Although limited to twenty titles, *Comic Book Movies* follows a format similar to the other books in the growing Virgin Film range, each chapter broken down into the following sections:

## **TITLE (Year of Release)**

### **Running Time**

### **Principal Credits**

**CAST:** A list of cast members and characters credited on the film . . .

**UNCREDITED CAST:** . . . and those who weren't so lucky.

**TITLE SEQUENCE:** A brief description of the opening of the film.

**SYNOPSIS:** A plot synopsis of the film - complete with spoilers, so you might want to cover your eyes while you read this bit.

**ORIGINS:** A comprehensive look at the source material for the film - be it comic strip, comic book or graphic novel - including character description and development where appropriate.

**PREVIOUS INCARNATIONS:** An exploration of any previous appearances of the character on screen (i.e. film or television), from Saturday morning serials of the 1940s to Saturday morning cartoons of the 2000s.

**DEVELOPMENT:** Since the development of a comic book property is often a more exciting story than its eventual production, this section looks at the various attempts to bring the property to the big screen.

**CASTING:** The casting process, and - where applicable - actors who were auditioned or attached at earlier stages of production.

**PRODUCTION:** A look at the production process of each film, from ground zero to big-screen super hero, drawn from interviews with relevant sources where applicable.

**COSTUME FITTING:** Since costumes play such a major role in most comic book movies, it seems appropriate to have a separate section devoted to the costume designers who attempt to make what is *de rigeur* to comic book fans - men in tights, for example - acceptable to movie audiences.

**MUSIC:** Composer and, where applicable, soundtrack information.

**CLASSIC QUOTES:** A favourite quotation (or two) from the film.

**DELETED SCENES:** Those scenes which, for a variety of reasons, did not make it into the final cut of the film.

**TRAILERS:** From early 'teasers' to full-blown 'Winnebagos' (trailers with everything including the kitchen sink).

**POSTERS:** Don't know your 'one-sheet' from your 'quad'? It doesn't matter - most posters for comic book movies are as simple as they get.

**TAG-LINE:** 'You'll believe a man can fly' and other copywriting gems.

**WHAT THE PAPERS SAID:** Critical responses from the US and UK, drawn from three major publications: *Variety* (because it's the industry bible), *Chicago Sun-Times* (because Roger Ebert is a comic book aficionado) and *Time Out* (because they're brutally honest).

**BOX OFFICE:** Performance from both sides of the Atlantic.

**AWARDS:** Awards and nominations from around the world.

**CONTROVERSY:** Although mostly aimed at kids, comic book movies have had their share of controversy - so here are some of the terrifying true stories torn from the headlines of yesteryear.

**TRIVIA:** Frankly, all the stuff that wouldn't fit into any of the other sections.

**APOCRYPHA:** When you're fighting for truth and justice it helps to have the truth on your side – so here you might find a few myths exploded.

**SEQUELS & SPIN-OFFS:** A detailed look at the sequels, spin-offs and TV serials spawned by the film in question, if not directly, then as a result of the source material's new-found popularity.

**FUTURE INCARNATIONS:** A look at possible future incarnations of the character(s) in question, including sequels and series in development.

**DVD AVAILABILITY:** Information regarding the various DVD editions available in the UK (Region 2) and US (Region 1) complete with a breakdown of additional features where applicable.

**FINAL ANALYSIS:** My own two cents, for what it's worth (about 0.02 Euros).

**EXPERT WITNESS:** A summary quotation from one of the major players involved in the comic-to-film adaptation.

# **SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE (1978)**

**143 mins (original version)/151 mins (2000 restored version)**

**Directed by Richard Donner**

**Produced by Pierre Spengler**

**Executive Producer Ilya Salkind**

**Associate Producer Charles F Greenlaw**

**Creative Consultant Tom Mankiewicz**

**Screenplay by Mario Puzo, David Newman, Leslie Newman and Robert Benton Story by Mario Puzo**

**Superman Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster**

**Music by John Williams Editor Stuart Baird**

**Director of Photography by Geoffrey Unsworth BSC**

**Production Designer John Barry**

**CAST:** Marlon Brando (*Jor-El*), Gene Hackman (*Lex Luthor*), Christopher Reeve (*Kal-El/Clark Kent/Superman*), Ned Beatty (*Otis*), Jackie Cooper (*Perry White*), Glenn Ford (*Jonathan Kent*), Trevor Howard (*First Elder*), Margot Kidder (*Lois Lane*), Jack O'Halloran (*Non*), Valerie Perrine (*Eve Teschmacher*), Maria Schell (*Vond-Ah*), Terence Stamp (*General Zod*), Phyllis Thaxter (*Martha Clark Kent*), Susannah York (*Lara*), Jeff East (*Clark at eighteen*) Marc McClure (*Jimmy Olsen*), Sarah Douglas (*Ursa*), Harry Andrews, Vass Anderson, John Hollis, James Garbutt, Michael Gover, David Neal, William Russell, Penelope Lee, John Stuart, Alan Cullen (*Elders*), Lee Quigley (*baby Kal-El*), Aaron Smolinski (*baby Clark Kent*), Diane Sherry (*Lana Lang*), Jeff Atcheson (*coach*), Brad Flock (*football player*), David Petrou (*team manager*), Billy J Mitchell, Robert Henderson (*editors*),

Larry Lamb, James Brockington, John Cassady, John F Parker, Antony Scott, Ray Evans, Sue Shifrin, Miquel Brown (*reporters*), Vincent Marzello, Benjamin Feitelson (*copy boys*), Lise Hilboldt, Leueen Willoughby (*secretaries*), Jill Ingham (*Perry's secretary*), Pieter Stuyck (*window cleaner*), Rex Reed (*himself*), Weston Gavin (*mugger*), Steve Kahan, Ray Hassett, Randy Jurgensen (*detectives*), Matt Russo (*news vendor*), Colin Skeaping (*pilot*), Bo Rucker (*pimp*), Paul Avery (*TV cameraman*), David Baxt (*burglar*), George Harris (*Mooney*), Michael Harrigan, John Cording, Raymond Thompson, Qz Clarke (*hoods*), Rex Everhart (*desk sergeant*), Jayne Tottman (*little girl*), Frank Lazarus (*Air Force One pilot*), Brian Protheroe (*Air Force One co-pilot*), Lawrence Trimble, Robert Whelan, David Calder (*Air Force One crew*), Norwich Duff, Keith Alexander, Michael Ensign (*newscasters*), Larry Hagman (*major*), Paul Tuerpe (*Sergeant Hayley*), Graham McPherson (*lieutenant*), David Yorston (*petty officer*), Robert O'Neill (*admiral*), Robert MacLeod (*general*), John Ratzenberger, Alan Tilvern (*controllers*), Phil Brown, Bill Bailey (*senators*), Burnell Tucker (*agent*), Chief Tug Smith (*native American chief*), Norman Warwick (*superchief driver*), Chuck Julian (*assistant*), Colin Etherington (*power company driver*), Mark Wynter (*mate*), Roy Stevens (*warden*)

**TITLE SEQUENCE:** Black and white curtains open on to a simple caption - 'JUNE 1938' - which then dissolves through to the cover of *Action Comics #1*, the comic in which Superman first appeared. A young boy's hand turns the page as he reads aloud: 'In this decade of the 1930s, even the great city of Metropolis was not spared the ravages of the worldwide Depression. In the times of fear and confusion, informing the public was the job of *Daily Planet*, a great metropolitan newspaper whose reputation for clarity and truth had become a symbol of hope for the city of Metropolis.' As the unseen boy's voice echoes away, the last

panel of the comic book image - depicting the offices of the *Daily Planet* - dissolves through to an identical live-action image. The camera tilts up towards the moon, and then continues out into space as the first titles fly toward us, in blue outline, except for the Superman 'S' logo which appears in its traditional red and yellow. The titles continue, now falling away from us as, the camera continues its journey through space, past the red outline of a boiling sun, we move towards the surface of the planet Krypton.

**SYNOPSIS:** On the planet Krypton, the Council sentences three insurrectionists - General Zod, Ursa and Non - to isolation in The Phantom Zone. Later, believing that the planet will shortly explode, Jor-El launches a spacecraft containing his infant son, Kal-El, towards Earth, a distant planet with a suitable atmosphere, and where his dense molecular structure will give him superhuman powers. Moments after launch, Jor-El's prediction comes true: Krypton is destroyed. The ship crashes in an American farming town, Smallville, where little Kal-El is found by Jonathan and Martha Kent and raised as their own son, Clark. Eighteen Earth years later, when Clark learns the truth about his heritage, he leaves the homestead and heads to the Arctic, where a vision of Jor-El appears before him, explaining his responsibilities on his adoptive planet. More years pass, and Clark Kent finds a job at the *Daily Planet*, where he meets and develops a crush upon fellow reporter Lois Lane, whom he later rescues from a helicopter accident - after switching his street clothes and glasses for a natty costume bearing his father's symbol. Later, he visits her at home, takes her for a flight over the city and allows her to interview him for a newspaper article in which she names him 'Superman'. Meanwhile, criminal genius Lex Luthor diverts two nuclear rockets from a missile testing site - one to Hackensack, New Jersey, the other to the San Andreas faultline, hoping that the latter will knock California

into the sea, increasing the value of his real estate on what would become the new West Coast. To stop Superman from preventing the disaster, Luthor lures him to his underground hideaway, where he exposes him to Kryptonite, the only substance known to cause Superman harm. Superman escapes, in time to prevent the first impact but too late to stop the second; the missile explodes, and as a consequence, Lois Lane is killed. Unable to cope with her death, Superman ignores his father's warning not to interfere with human history, and spins the world back on its axis, effectively turning back the clock, and saving the woman he loves. While Lois is left to ponder why Clark Kent is never around when Superman shows up, Superman delivers Lex Luthor to his new home: prison.

**ORIGINS:** Cleveland-born Jerome 'Jerry' Siegel and Canadian-born Joe Shuster were classmates at Cleveland's Glenville High School when they created their first comic book hero, a Tarzan parody called 'Goober the Mighty', and started an amateur magazine, *Science Fiction*, the third issue of which, published in January 1933, contained a Siegel short story entitled 'The Reign of the Superman', about a super-powered megalomaniac. Siegel subsequently realised that Superman might work better as a hero than a villain, and came up with the concept of a superhero who hid his true identity under the guise of a mild-mannered reporter. Although Siegel and Shuster subsequently created such characters as 'Dr Occult' and detective Slam Bradley, it was four lean years before comic book publisher Detective Comics (later DC Comics) offered them \$10 per page for a thirteen-page Superman story, which ultimately appeared in *Action Comics #1*, published in June 1938, with an ambitious coda: 'AND SO BEGINS THE STARTLING ADVENTURE OF THE MOST SENSATIONAL STRIO CHARACTER OF ALL TIME: SUPERMAN!' Although Siegel and Shuster were the only ones who truly believed this blurb, their words were prophetic: the adventures of

Superman immediately gripped the nation, turning the newly launched *Action Comics* into an overnight success, and quickly becoming the most widely read character in popular fiction. By January of the following year, Superman had his own nationally syndicated newspaper strip, written and illustrated by Siegel and Shuster, running uninterrupted until May 1966. Much of the Superman myth, including his origin, came from the syndicated strips, which fed the public's appetite for superhero stories, of which Superman was undeniably the first. His popularity endures today.

**PREVIOUS INCARNATIONS:** The comic book Superman was barely two years old when he made his radio debut in *The Adventures of Superman*, broadcast in February 1940. A year later, Vienna-born cartoonists Max and Dave Fleischer (*Gulliver's Travels*) brought him to the screen in a series of fourteen animated shorts widely regarded as classics of the medium. Then, in 1948, Kirk Alyn donned the red and blue costume - albeit in black and white - for Superman's first live action incarnation, a fifteen-chapter 'Saturday morning' serial, subsequently reprising the role for a sequel, *Atom Man vs Superman* (1950). In 1951, thirteen years after his comic book debut, Superman became the star of another fledgling medium, as George Reeves made his first appearance in the TV series *The Adventures of Superman*, which ran until 1957. A decade later, Superman conquered yet another medium, as the star of a hit Broadway musical, *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman*, with book by David Newman and Robert Benton, both of whom would go on to earn writing credits on *Superman: The Movie*. The stage show was adapted for television in 1975.

Just prior to the release of the film, Superman appeared with many other DC Comics heroes and villains in the William Hanna-Joseph Barbera animated series *Challenge of the Super-Friends* (1978), followed a year later by a series of half-hour shows entitled *The World's Greatest Super-Friends*.

**DEVELOPMENT:** Producers Alexander and Ilya Salkind (*The Three Musketeers*) originally optioned the film rights to Superman in the mid-1970s, signalling the seriousness of their intentions by signing two of the biggest stars of the time - *The Godfather's* Marlon Brando and *The French Connection's* Gene Hackman - and commissioning a screenplay from Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*. By 1977, however, *Superman: The Movie* had been in development for three years, and with barely three months to go before filming was due to begin - Brando was locked into an immutable start date - James Bond director Guy Hamilton (*Goldfinger, Diamonds Are Forever*) quit the project for tax reasons, leaving the film with two stars, a script and a start date, but no director - and, perhaps more importantly, no Superman. The Salkinds solved the first problem by hiring former television director Richard Donner, fresh from the success of *The Omen*. Donner immediately brought in a new writer, Tom Mankiewicz (*Diamonds Are Forever, Live and Let Die*), and a new production designer, John Barry (*Star Wars*), and effectively started from scratch. <sup>4</sup>'They had prepared the picture for a year,' he said, and not one bit of it was useful to me.'

Although Donner described Puzo's script as 'wonderful', he was afraid that, at 550 pages - which, although written to accommodate two films, was still more than twice the required length - it was impossibly ambitious; furthermore, rewrites by David and Leslie Newman and Robert Benton had let the story stray too often into the realm of camp, bordering on the over-the-top style of the *Batman* TV show. <sup>5</sup>'They had things in there like a scene where Superman is looking for Lex Luthor, and he sees a bald head on the street, so he flies down and grabs the guy. Well, the guy turns around and it's Kojak, and he says, "Who do ya love, baby?"' Thus, he and Mankiewicz started from scratch, insisting that 'it had to be bigger than life, but, at the same time, it had to have some reality within the framework of

the people'. For Donner, audiences had to believe not only that a man could fly – but that he was grounded in a living, breathing and largely realistic Metropolis, complete with *Daily Planet*, Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, Ma and Pa Kent, and the other trappings of the forty-year-old superhero saga. The most difficult task ahead was making Superman fly through a time warp from 1938 to 1978, where he would greet audiences who had just seen *Star Wars*.

**CASTING:** Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman had been signed to the project not just for their acting ability (both had just won Best Actor Oscars®, for *The Godfather* and *The French Connection* respectively) but for their box office clout (both films had been huge hits). Brando received an unprecedented salary – \$3.7 million for two weeks' work, resulting in barely ten minutes of screen time – yet, for the Salkinds, it was money well spent, as Donner explained: [6](#)'They didn't buy Marlon Brando the actor; they bought Marlon Brando the name. They bought him to back up their investment, and once he agreed to do the picture, they were able to raise the money on his name.'

The search for someone to play Superman became one of the most famous casting calls in history, with every actor from Robert Redford to Bruce Jenner linked to the role at one time or another. At one point, John Wayne's son Patrick was signed, but when his father was diagnosed with cancer, he was released from his contract. When Richard Donner came aboard the project in early 1977, he hired casting director Lynn Stalmaster and immediately began auditioning would-be Supermen, including a tall young actor named Christopher Reeve, whose sole film credit was *Gray Lady Down*. [7](#)'I thought he was a little young for it . . . and he was a little skinny,' Donner recalled. Nevertheless, Stalmaster kept putting Reeve's headshot to the top of the pile, and Donner eventually brought him to London for a screen test with each of the actresses shortlisted for the role of Lois

Lane: Stockard Charming (*Grease*), Anne Archer (future screen wife of Jack Ryan), Lesley Ann Warren (Lois Lane in the TV adaptation of the stage musical *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman*), Holly Palance (daughter of future *Batman* co-star Jack Palance) and the successful candidate, Margot Kidder (*The Great Waldo Pepper*). 'The minute he put on the costume, this tall, skinny kid just decided that he could do it,' said Donner. In addition, 'He really felt that he could put on the weight and build up.' With the help of fitness instructor and actor David Prowse - Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* films - he did, in three months. Nevertheless, said Donner, 'When I go back now and look at the tests - those old stills of Chris - I tell you, it was just blind faith.'

Keenan Wynn (*Dr Strangelove*) was originally cast as Perry White. When he flew into New York to begin shooting, however, he began having heart trouble, and was replaced by Jackie Cooper. Goldie Hawn and Ann-Margaret were the first two choices for the role of Eve Teschmacher, but the Salkinds refused to meet their salary demands.

**PRODUCTION:** Donner joined the production the first week in January 1977. Eleven weeks later, unable to move the start date due to Brando's limited availability, filming began on John Barry's crystal-inspired Krypton sets. When these scenes were in the can, the production was put on hiatus while pre-production chores such as casting, location scouting, construction and special effects trials - notably the all-important flying tests, which took eight months to achieve - were completed. Donner's visual effects team tried skydiving, suspending stuntmen from cranes, back projection and travelling mattes - until they finally hit upon the idea of a front projection system, which hung a projector and camera from a skyhook, while Reeve was suspended from wires, cables and pole arms invisible to the camera. <sup>8</sup>'It was the blind leading the blind,' said Donner, 'all experimentation. But I was very fortunate. I was surrounded

by a terribly talented group of dedicated film-makers, and somehow or other, we pulled it off.'

**COSTUME FITTING:** Superman's costume had changed little in the years since he first appeared, and costume designers Jerry R Allen and Yvonne Blake matched the look of the comic book perfectly. So keen was Donner to ground the Superman myth in reality, he and writer Tom Mankiewicz even addressed the question of why Superman, whose real name was Kal-El, would wear a costume emblazoned with the letter 'S', when he wasn't given the name Superman until after he was seen in the costume. Said Mankiewicz, [9](#)'So we decided to give everyone [on Krypton] a family crest with a different letter, which didn't really exist in the comic books.' This ingenious strategy is subsequently paid off when *Daily Planet* publisher Perry White asks his reporters to find out what the 'S' stands for, a question for which Lois Lane subsequently provides an answer.

The highly reflective costumes worn by the Kryptonians were the result of a fortuitous accident during tests for the flying unit. [10](#)'We noticed that the material lit up on its own,' Donner explained, 'so we tore the material into tiny pieces and glued it on to the costumes, and designed a front-projection box for each camera. There was a little light on each camera, and it would project into a mirror, bounce out in front of the lens, hit the costume, [and] millions of little glass heads would light up and bring the image back into the camera.'

**MUSIC:** *Star Wars* composer John Williams had been Donner's preferred choice to score *Superman*; but since Jerry Goldsmith had just won an Oscar® for Donner's last film, *The Omen*, he felt obligated to Goldsmith. In the event, Goldsmith was not available; thus, Williams stepped in, creating one of the most memorable themes in the history of film music.

## **CLASSIC QUOTES:**

**Lara;** 'He will defy their gravity.'

**Jor-El:** 'He will look like one of them.'

**Lara:** 'He won't *be* one of them.'

**Jor-El:** 'No. His dense molecular structure will make him strong.'

**Lara:** 'He'll be odd. Different.'

**Jor-El:** 'He'll be fast. Virtually invulnerable.'

**Lois Lane:** 'Any more at home like you?'

**Clark Kent:** 'Not really, no.'

**Lex Luthor:** 'It's amazing that brain can generate enough power to keep those legs moving.'

**Superman:** 'I'm here to fight for truth, justice and the American way.'

**Lois Lane:** 'You're gonna wind up fighting every elected official in the country!'

**Lex Luthor:** 'There's a strong streak of good in you, Superman. But then, nobody's perfect.'

**Superman:** 'Is that how a warped brain like yours gets kicks - by planning the death of innocent people?'

**Lex Luthor:** 'No. By *causing* the death of innocent people.'

**Lex Luthor:** 'We all have our little faults. Mine's in California.'

**DELETED SCENES:** In 2000, a total of nine scenes cut and one that was shortened) from the theatrical release were restored by Donner for the DVD release. The scenes, totalling eight minutes, are as follows:

- An extended scene between Jor-El and Council members, in which his pleas to evacuate Krypton fall on deaf ears.
- A scene in which the Council members report on Jor-El's unauthorised use of energy.
- A scene in which a young Lois Lane witnesses the teenage Clark Kent running faster than the speeding train on which she is travelling. Her parents in the scene are played by Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill, who played Superman and Lois Lane in the first live-action *Superman* serial.
- A scene in which Martha Kent opens up the house in the morning, calling Clark down for breakfast, unaware that he is in the garage conversing with Jor-El.
- A brief scene in which Jimmy Olsen meets Clark in the offices of the *Daily Planet*.
- A longer version of the scene in which Kal-El interacts with his father at the Fortress of Solitude.
- A brief scene in which Clark watches footage of Superman's rescue of Lois Lane on storefront TV sets, and a passer-by remarks, 'That'll be the day when a guy could fly, uh?' 'Oh, I don't know,' Clark responds. 'You'd be surprised.'
- A long scene in which Luthor tries to shoot, burn and freeze Superman as he enters Luther's lair, in order to test his invulnerability.
- A brief scene in which the Hollywood sign falls down, almost crushing a group of schoolgirls.

Two further scenes were not reinstated for the 2000 restoration:

- A scene in which Luthor asks Otis to ‘feed the babies’ – ravenous unidentified wild animals he keeps in a pit hidden behind a metal grating. A reluctant Otis lowers a huge slab of meat into the pit while Luthor (in yet another of his unconvincing hairpieces) plays the piano.
- A subsequent scene in which Luthor plays and sings ‘Baby Look At You Now’ at the piano while Otis reluctantly lowers Eve into the pit of wild animals, presumably for betraying him. At the last second, Superman flies in and saves her, bringing her back to confront Luthor. ‘By the way, Miss Teschmacher,’ he tells her, ‘your mother sends her love.’ Luthor sighs.

**TRAILERS:** The ‘teaser’ trailer, which contains neither footage nor music from the film, appeared in cinemas a full year before the film opened. As the teaser begins, the camera flies through a sky at sunset – presumably designed to represent the point of view of Superman in flight – as the names of the principal cast members fly out into the distance. Finally, the traditional red and yellow ‘S’ symbol – subtitled ‘THE MOVIE’ – follows the names into the distance, and then returns, this time as a comic book-style red and blue ‘SUPERMAN’ logo, followed by credits.

Although the regular trailer utilised John Williams’ music and a great deal of footage, it kept Superman himself out of the picture until the climax. Instead, it opened with a zoom into the surface of the planet Krypton, where Jor-El warns his fellow Council members of the planet’s imminent destruction. Meanwhile, a voice-over intones the following: ‘Once, there was a civilisation, much like ours, but with a greater intelligence, greater powers, and a greater capacity for good.’ We see the infant Kal-El launched into space, as Krypton begins to explode. ‘In one tragic moment, that world was destroyed. But there was one survivor.’ Ma and Pa Kent witness the arrival of the spaceship, and the little boy within it, as the voiceover continues: ‘Because of the

wisdom and compassion of Jor-El, because he knew the human race had the capacity for goodness, he sent us his only son. His name is Kal-El.' Superman stands in the Fortress of Solitude, and finally takes flight. 'He will call himself Clark Kent. But the world will know him . . . as Superman. This year, Superman brings you the gift of flight.' A title ('SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE') is followed by an extensive credit list.

**POSTERS:** The main US 'one-sheet' featured the Superman 'S' symbol in chrome against a vivid blue-grey sky, with a streak of red, yellow and blue piercing it like an arrow through a heart.

**TAG-LINE:** 'You'll believe a man can fly'.

**WHAT THE PAPERS SAID:** Despite the hype which had overshadowed its release, the overall critical response to *Superman* was favourable, with *Variety* describing the film as [11](#)'a wonderful, chuckling, preposterously exciting fantasy', praising Christopher Reeve and Margot Kidder, but dismissing Brando as 'good but unremarkable'. In the UK, *Time Out's* Martyn Auty noted that, [12](#)'by keeping the spectacular possibilities open . . . the film allows naïvety and knowingness to coexist. Only when it goes all out for cold Batmanesque villainy in the second half does it narrow its focus and lose its way.'

**BOX OFFICE:** Released in the US on 15 December 1978, *Superman* became one of the first multi-million dollar film franchises, grossing \$134 million in unadjusted US dollars – the equivalent of around half a billion today – and a total of \$300 million worldwide, making *Superman* the first *bona fide* blockbuster based on a comic strip.

**AWARDS:** *Superman* failed to convert any of its three Academy Awards nominations – for Best Film Editing, Best Music (Original Score) and Best Sound – into statuettes, and although the film was given a Special Achievement Award for Visual Effects, Donner was disgusted that John Barry’s art direction and Geoffrey Unsworth’s cinematography were not recognised. <sup>13</sup>‘If you look at the pictures that were nominated for best cinematography, it’s a fucking sin that his name wasn’t up there,’ he said bitterly. As for art direction, he added, ‘They put up pictures like *California Suite* – duplications of the Beverly Hills Hotel. *Big deal!* Just look at what John Barry did for *Superman*, and he wasn’t nominated either.’ Although it received nominations, *Superman* fared little better at the BAFTA awards, the British equivalent of the Oscars®: nominated for Best Cinematography, Production Design/Art Direction, Sound and Supporting Actor (Gene Hackman), only Christopher Reeve (Best Newcomer) took home an award. Science fiction fans were kinder: not only did *Superman* win a Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films received nominations in the categories of Best Actor (Christopher Reeve) Costumes, Director, Supporting Actress (Valerie Perrine), and won awards for Best Science Fiction Film, Best Actress (Margot Kidder), Music, Production Design and Special Effects.

**CONTROVERSY:** When Siegel and Shuster had sold the first Superman strip for a mere \$130 back in 1938, they had inadvertently signed away all rights to exploit the character, which went on to make millions for its publisher through comics, radio broadcasts, television and film serials and all manner of ancillary products, while its creators received only their salaries for as long as they continued to write and draw the syndicated strip. Siegel set out to partially rectify this when, in 1947, he returned from army service to

discover that DC Comics had been publishing a successful strand, 'Superboy', based on the exploits of Superman as a boy. Siegel and Shuster sued the publisher, but although they were awarded \$100,000 in compensation for unfair exploitation of Superboy, the courts denied their claim to ownership of Superman. In the 1960s, Siegel and Shuster returned to DC Comics at salaries of \$20,000 and \$7,500 respectively, but after another falling out, Siegel was forced to find work in a mailroom for \$7,000 per annum. It was not until the announcement of the *Superman* movie in 1975 that the pair felt it was payback time: and if the courts wouldn't support them, perhaps the court of public opinion would. Siegel sent a nine-page press release to a thousand newsrooms calling upon the public to boycott the film; Warner Bros, which by now owned both the film rights and DC Comics, were wary of the potentially damaging effects of negative publicity, offering Siegel and Shuster a yearly stipend (\$20,000) for life, and restoring the 'Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster' credit - dropped by DC in 1948 in protest at their first lawsuit - on all future Superman properties. Siegel died in January 1996, a few years after Shuster; but in December 1997, Siegel's widow - Joanna Carter, the original model for Lois Lane - filed a 500-page lawsuit under the US copyright office's new terms, which allow the creators and heirs of a property to receive fifty per cent of all future earnings from all media, commencing two years after the expiration of the previous sixty-year copyright term. Put simply, this meant that, from 16 April 1999, Siegel's heirs may be entitled to half the revenues from all Superman comic books, novels, video games, clothing, merchandise, and all other licensed products.

**TRIVIA:** Jeff East, who played the teenage Clark Kent, had his voice overdubbed by Christopher Reeve.

Despite his exorbitant salary, Marlon Brando did not memorise any of his lines. Instead, he had them pasted

around the set and read them.

Donner, furious that Tom Mankiewicz had not received accreditation for the script following arbitration by the Writers Guild of America, gave Mankiewicz a special 'creative consultant' credit placed *above* those of the credited writers, infuriating the Guild but delighting Mankiewicz.

**APOCRYPHA:** One of the best-known stories surrounding Superman is the so-called 'Curse of Superman', which began with the suicide of 1950s Superman George Reeves. Following the deaths of several *Superman* crew members after the film wrapped (including production designer John Barry), the curse was blamed for the paralysis of Christopher Reeve following a 1995 horse-riding accident, and a mental breakdown suffered by Margot Kidder the following year. Kidder has since made a full recovery, whilst Reeve, despite his paralysis, has continued to produce, direct and appear in films and television shows, written two bestsellers, *Still Me* and *Nothing Is Impossible*, and done more charity work than Superman himself.

**SEQUELS & SPIN-OFFS:** The closing credits of *Superman*, released in December 1978, contained the legend 'Coming Next Summer: *Superman II*', apparently giving the producers only six months to make the film. In fact, the Salkinds' original plan had been to film *Superman* and *Superman II* back to back - indeed, at one point the intention was to leave the first film on a serial-style cliffhanger. <sup>14</sup>'Superman was going to leave Hackman and Beatty in the prison, fly up past the camera just as he does, and then I was going to pan back into the sky and pick up the [nuclear] rocket that he had left tumbling,' Donner explained to *Cinefantastique*. 'You see it shut off, and you see the Zone of Silence with the three villains in it; then, all of a sudden, the rocket goes past them and there's an

atomic explosion, and it blows up the Zone of Silence, freeing Terence Stamp, Jack O'Halloran and Sarah Douglas. But then,' he added, I finally decided, "Hey, if *Superman* is a success, they're going to do a sequel. If it ain't a success, a cliffhanger ending ain't going to bring them to see *Superman II*.'" Nevertheless, Donner claimed to have completed around eighty per cent of the sequel before being fired and replaced - by Guy Hamilton, whose departure had given Donner the *Superman* job in the first place. 'The Salkinds and [co-producer Pierre] Spengler have now seen fit to replace me with the original director,' Donner commented bitterly in 1980, 'whose material I had to radically change to make the picture you have seen.'

As it transpired, however, Hamilton was replaced again, by Richard Lester (*The Three Musketeers*), by which time the summers of 1979 and 1980 had both passed, and cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth and production designer John Barry had passed away. *Superman II* was finally released in the US on 19 June 1981, incorporating footage shot by Donner and Lester, and although Marlon Brando refused to allow his *Superman* footage to be included, Jor-El's absence was more than made up for by the other returning cast members, including Christopher Reeve, Gene Hackman, Ned Beatty, Margot Kidder, Mark McClure, Valerie Perrine, Terence Stamp, Sarah Douglas, Jack O'Halloran, Jackie Cooper and even Susannah York. The film's box office performance - \$108 million in the US alone - paved the way for two further sequels: Richard Lester's *Superman III* (1983), which grossed \$60 million; and Sidney J Furie's ill-starred *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987), which sounded the death knell for the series by grossing just \$15 million.

In the meantime, Superman's adventures continued in animated form, with the Hanna-Barbera series *SuperFriends: The Legendary Super Powers Show*, which debuted in September 1984, two months before the