



the movies Louise Snider

Superman's image isn't all that's bad in 'Superman III'

Superman ain't what he used to be. The Man of Steel definitely is tarnished. In "Superman III" (PG), the square-jawed hero (Christopher Reeve) appears with a 5 o'clock shadow, demonstrates a mean streak, takes to drink and even shows signs of lust.

Alas, it's not just his image which is taking a beating. It's the whole Superman gestalt. If you'll pardon such a weighty word for so light a piece of popcorn culture. The first two Superman movies had tension, energy and excitement. These qualities are in short supply in "Superman III."

The tension, especially that created in the Lois Lane-Clark Kent/Superman relationship, is entirely absent. Margot Kidder (Lois Lane) has no more than a cameo role in this film. Her absence also marks the absence of the bright dialogue, double entendres and slight note of eroticism that were present in the previous films.

Lois is replaced in Clark's affections by Lana Lang (Annette O'Toole), his high school sweetheart whom he meets at a class reunion. O'Toole creates a likeable, daffy sort of character, but Clark and Lana do not send sparks flying.

THE EXCITEMENT LEVEL of "Superman III" is down because Robert Vaughn as Ross Webster, a maniacal industrialist, doesn't pose the powerful, fiendish threat necessary to offer Superman real opposition. His most villainous plot involves cornering the markets in coffee and oil.

But worst of all, this film has the energy of a tranquilized ground sloth. It's slow, tedious and overly long. Richard Lester, the director, begins with a series of running sight-gags as the opening titles are rolled. Things look promising — for the first five minutes.

Then, Lester tries to evoke laughs by resorting to quotes from other films. There's a repeat of the James Cagney/Mae Marsh grapefruit-in-the-face routine and a spoof on "Patton" with Richard Pryor dressed as the general.

Pryor, as computer wizard Gus Gorman, is the best thing that happened to this movie. What little zip and spunkiness "Superman III" possesses comes from Pryor, who always invests his characters with much more than scripts dictate.

At the beginning of the film he is among the rag-tag unemployed. He has just run out of benefits. He impulsively signs up for a computer-programming course and discovers his true genius. His inspired manipulations with the payroll gets him an expense check for more than \$80,000 and brings him to the attention of the corporation's scheming president, Ross Webster. Webster then enlists Gorman as an accomplice in his plans to control world markets.

ASIDE FROM PRYOR, the most noteworthy aspect of the film is not the contest between Superman and Webster but the struggle within Superman as he confronts the dark side of his character. It's an interesting twist as he and Clark Kent slug it out in an auto junkyard.

This confrontation proves much more novel and exciting than the (anti) climactic battle between Superman and a megacomputer of flashing lights and clanking hardware. All of this suggests something strangely awry in the conception and direction of "Superman III."

what's at the movies

BREATHLESS (R). Richard Gere and Valerie Kaprisky are passionate lovers running from the police after Gere kills a policeman in this remake of the Jean-Luc Goddard classic, 1959 film, "A Bout de Souffle."

FLASHDANCE (R). A determined young woman works as a welder by day and a dancer by night. Movie doesn't make too much sense but the dancing makes a terrific impact.

OCTOPUSSY (PG). Roger Moore is again the dapper Agent 007 as he goes to India to crack an international jewel-smuggling operation in this 13th James Bond adventure. Also with Maud Adams.

PORKY'S — THE NEXT DAY (R). Raunchy gang members from Angel Beach High School tangle with school administrators, corrupt officials and their own active libidos.

PSYCHO II (R). After 22 years in a mental hospital, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) returns to reopen the Bates Motel. Vera Miles, of the original cast, also returns in this sequel to Hitchcock's chiller.

RETURN OF THE JEDI (PG). Third chapter in the middle section of George Lucas' "Star Wars" trilogy. With Luke Skywalker, Hans Solo, Princess Leia and other characters from the previous films as the Rebel Alliance battles Darth Vader and the forces of the Empire.

SUPERMAN III (PG). Action, comedy and romance are on tap as Superman (Christopher Reeve) and Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) battle an evil entrepreneur and a computer genius. Cast also includes Richard Pryor, Robert Vaughn and Annette O'Toole.

TRADING PLACES (R). What happens when Dan Aykroyd, a wealthy and toney executive, meets up with Eddie Murphy, a poor kid from the ghetto?

LA TRAVIATA (G). Franco Zeffirelli wrote, designed and directed this sumptuous version of Verdi's opera with opera stars Teresa Stratas, Plácido Domingo and Cornell MacNeil.

TWILIGHT ZONE (PG). Four uncanny and bizarre stories inspired by Rod Serling's vintage television series. The episodes are directed by four different directors, one of whom is Steven Spielberg.

WAR GAMES (PG). A teen-age computer whiz kid (Matthew Broderick) accidentally taps into the command system of a military defense network and triggers a world crisis.

YELLOWBEARD (PG). A wild pirate spoof with a crazy-quilt cast including the Monty Python group, Peter Boyle, Marty Feldman (in his last performance), Cheech and Chong, and James Mason.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.

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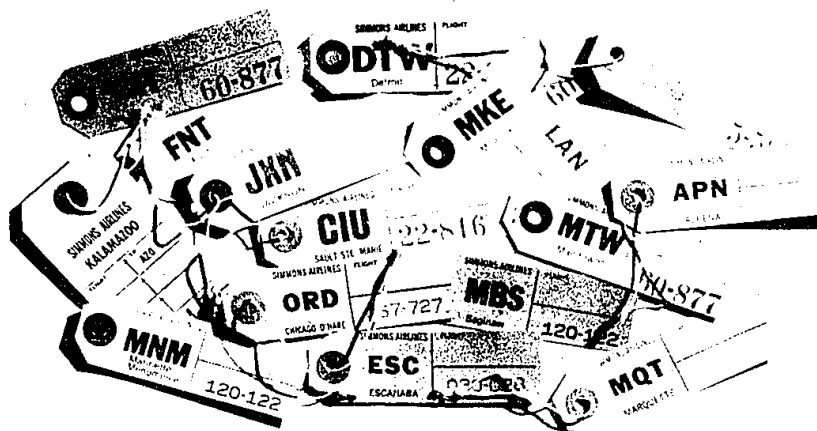
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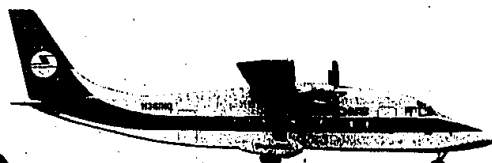
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