

ABC retells Superman myth with 'Lois & Clark'

By MICHAEL SCOGIN

One of America's most familiar superheroes is making a return to both the small screen and the comic book pages where he was born. Superman flies back to the pages of DC Comics later this year and is back on television on Sunday in ABC's "Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman."

ABC puts a new twist on the Superman saga, however, adding romance and a '90s sensibility to the more traditional action elements often associated with the Man of Steel to give the program a wider viewer appeal.

"In the comic books and the features, the main thrust is that Superman arrives in Metropolis to fight for truth, justice and the American Way and takes on a disguise as a mild-mannered reporter," says Deborah Joy Levine,

the program's creator and co-executive producer. "In our version of the show, what we really have is a young man by the name of Clark Kent who really wants to live a normal life, even though he did come from another planet, who does find a disguise for himself so that when he needs to, he can help people."

Part of Clark Kent's (Dean Cain) normal life includes his attraction to Lois Lane (Feri Hatcher), the headstrong Daily Planet reporter who sees more in his alter ego, Superman, and his nemesis, Lex Luthor, than in the mild-mannered Kent.

Both actors struggled with being stuck in the Superman stereotype (like Christopher Reeve in the film versions) before deciding to accept the roles.

"At first, before I had read it, I

thought, this is just not something I could do because of the stereotype attached to it," says Hatcher. "But you read so few scripts for women where the character is so broad and full, and can be smart, funny, vulnerable, sexy and goofy and have all of that happen in one character, rather than just sexy or just smart. So it's extremely challenging for me because I get to go everywhere."

"This is a whole different role than the Men of Steel in the past and the Christopher Reeve nerdy character," says Cain, who once played football with the Buffalo Bills. "There's none of that. I think it's a very broad-ranged character, so I'm not really too concerned with that."

Producers have tried to update the Superman story while keeping true to the traditional elements established in DC Comics over the years.

"We were very concerned that they (DC Comics) would perhaps be our harshest critics, but they really love the show," says Levine.

Although "Lois & Clark" will rely more on the love triangle among Lois, Clark and Superman to attract viewers, there should be enough action, including the almost prerequisite flying sequences, to keep younger watchers interested as well.

Flying, as it turns out, is not an easy thing to accomplish. Expensive for producers and often excruciating for the actors, it is a necessary evil of almost any retelling of the Superman myth.

"It can be very painful," says Cain. "It's difficult because you have wires coming out just at the hips, and you have to straighten out, and your whole body has to tense."

Hatcher, while not a fan of flying at first, grew to enjoy it more than Cain, if only because she, as Lois, does it less.

"You put on these miserable harnesses and wear them for six hours and get bruises all over your body," Hatcher says. After flying into the pressroom of the Daily Planet in Superman's arms for the first time, however, Hatcher turned to Levine and said, "That is the most romantic thing a woman could ever, ever do."

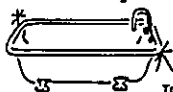
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