

SUPERMAN, with Christopher Reeve, Gene Hackman, Marlon Brando, Margot Kidder; written by Mario Puzo, Leslie Newman, David Newman & Robert Benton; directed by Richard Donner.

Four years and \$45 million since producers Alexander and Ilya Salkind announced they would make an epic movie about Superman, the film has flown into theatres across America. The ads say "you'll believe a man can fly," which curiously is beside the point in this sweet, almost ingenuous film about the world's favorite super-hero. If you go expecting another dazzling special effects movie on the order of 2001, *Star Wars* or *Close Encounter of the Third Kind*, you'll be dreadfully disappointed. However, if you go expecting throw-away sophisticated acting, a lovely romance and a little high adventure, *Superman* can do no wrong.

The film's major saving grace is 25-year-old Reeve. Good looking, athletic, he also possesses a charm and sweetness that can't be faked. He plays Superman very straight-ahead and with enough subtle grace to make him believable. Unlike the comic books on which this movie is based, what makes our screen Superman work is his ability to relate to the world—and the people around him, most notably Lois Lane, played by Margot Kidder.

Reeve and Kidder have an on-screen rapport that's quite remarkable and their scenes together, although in this part-one of the two-part movie saga quite chaste, are oddly romantic.

Where *Superman* gets grounded is in building to a viable dramatic climax. It's as if the filmmakers were so intent on making two separate films (the next to be released in '79), they had no idea how to finish this initial venture. And the sequences from the planet Krypton to earth never quite mesh in style. When we're on Krypton the attitude is pure fantasy; when we come down to earth, Donner and company try for realism, a mish-mash of styles that's quite distracting. The best way to watch *Superman* is simply to give yourself over to the flight of fancy and come in for an easy landing.

And oh yes, Brando is in this film as Superman's daddy, although he's hardly worth the marquee value of the \$4.5 million he received for 12 days work. He is, however, his usual accomplished Super-self.

Jacoba Atlas

MOVIE, MOVIE, starring George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere; written by Larry Gelbart and Sheldon Keller; produced & directed by Stanley Donen.

A woman in one of James Thurber's short stories scalded her hand on purpose, just to see if the salve she'd bought at the county fair was any good. It was only so-so.

Movie, Movie, a two-segment burlesque of Thirties films, aims to be funny by being awful on purpose. It's only a little bit funny.

Part one, "Dynamite Hands," takes a delivery boy into the fight racket in order to pay for his sister's needed eye operation. He's sidetracked by a blonde floozie and duped by a crooked manager, but he wins in the end, thanks to a trueheart girlfriend, a loyal family and his gruff but lovable first manager. Part two, "Baxter's Beauties of 1933," traces the birth of a Broadway hit, the last one for dying producer Spats Baxter, whose daughter, away at school so long neither she nor her father know each other, takes over the lead role after the bitch who was to star breaks a leg on opening night. Spats fades right after closing curtain on their triumphant opening night, of course, saying, "One minute you're in the wings, the next minute you're wearing them."

Perhaps the affectionate stance of its

humor is what limits *Movie, Movie* to being a cute failure, because every joke is harmless and yawns outpace laughs by three to one. As a project, it seems to have been lots more fun for its creators than it is for its audience. Writers Larry Gelbart (*Oh, God*) and Sheldon Keller (*Buona Sera, Mrs. Campbell*) enjoy most of the giggles themselves. Accomplished wiseguys, clever to a fault, they turn their take-off into a jerk-off, mixing and over-extending metaphors as if they believe groans are better than laughs. But their supply of comic effects goes no farther than warm-hearted exaggeration. When writers want to draw laughs from the obvious—and *Movie, Movie* is an exercise in inevitability—they should bring more than just the obvious into play. Marshall McLuhan aside, the message is something bigger than the medium.

Director Donen has musical and light romance credits going back to *Singing in the Rain* and *Charade*. His camera movement in *Movie, Movie*'s best source of momentum. And nearly all the actors, young and old, are praiseworthy in their hammy-beyond-belief roles. It's the concept that stinks.

Byron Laursen

MOMENT BY MOMENT, with John Travolta & Lily Tomlin. Written & directed by Jane Wagner.

It's dangerous calling any film "the worst movie ever made" because someone can always come up with an alternative disaster, but *Moment by Moment* is surely one of the worst films ever made, filled with lofty pretensions and feeble-minded literalness. It's a perfect example of the lack of creative leadership in Hollywood. The movie looked good on paper, teaming John Travolta, America's hottest sex symbol, with Lily Tomlin, America's hottest comedienne, in a trendy older woman-younger man romance set in the glittery world of Beverly Hills. But somewhere between signing the contracts and shooting the movie, everything went wrong.

Writer-director Wagner (Tomlin's good friend and a co-creator of the Tomlin style) has not bothered to write believable characters in a realistic setting. Lily is supposed to play a rich, bored matron who has a fling with a slightly dangerous street kid, Travolta. It's an okay notion, especially since the creators wanted to deal with the very interesting issue of role reversal, where it's the man who's needy, romantic and anxious for love, while the woman is cautious, realistic and anxious for sex. But Wagner, a screen novice, simply isn't up to the task. Lily's character is so superficial she'd be thrown out of Gucci's and John's about as dangerous as Perrier water, although to be fair, the sheer power of Travolta's screen presence at least makes us care about him.

Lily is all wrong; she is simply too hostile, too cold to make us believe her character; she is a performer without passion, so her desperate sexual need for Travolta becomes a laughing matter. I watched the love scenes embarrassed for the actors, and it's ultimately this lack of sensuality that kills *Moment by Moment*. The movie needs to be the screen equivalent of Anais Nin's *Delta of Venus*—a women's point of view of erotica, a movie about how women perceive raw passion, unencumbered by sex and romantic love. But Wagner and Tomlin don't seem to know very much about that aspect of life; at least they don't know how to put it on screen. There's a great deal of Travolta flexing his muscle and offering his body, and a great deal of Tomlin reaching out to take what's offered, but very little desire. I hope Travolta fares better in his next movie, *American Gigolo*, and I also wish Tomlin and Wagner better luck with their next film, appropriately titled, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*.

Jacoba Atlas

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