

Rock's Little Richard: from sin to salvation

How old is man?

Ask Richard Leakey

**Sybil's shrink
diagnoses a rapist
with 10 personalities**

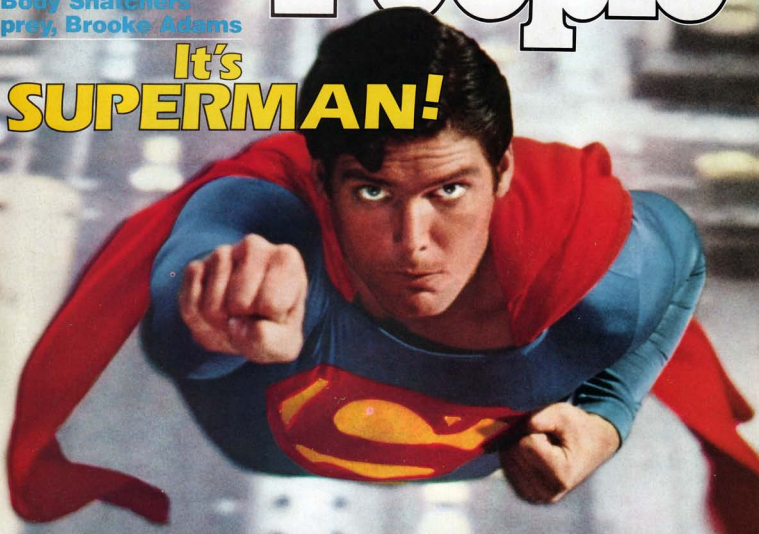
**Body Snatchers
prey, Brooke Adams**

JANUARY 8, 1979 • 75¢

People

weekly

**It's
SUPERMAN!**



**And it's Chris Reeve
in the cape because
McQueen was too fat,
Stallone too Italian,
Redford too expensive
and Eastwood too busy**



CAPEDWONDER
SUPERMAN TALKERY

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Reeve was already licensed to fly before his courageous and convincing stunt work in *Superman*. "The flying is all me," he crows. "It's not a bunch of midgits."

As a soap star, Reeve two-timed actress Birgitta Tolksdorf as *Love of Life*'s resident bigamist Ben Harper. Now he's double-timing Lois Lane as "Supie" and Clark Kent.



Katharine Hepburn in 1976's *A Matter of Gravity* was "a wonderful lady, but I was too nervous to do well," says Reeve.

SCREEN

IT'S STARDOM, NOT FLYING, THAT CHRISTOPHER REEVE FEARS: THE LAST SUPERMAN SHOT HIMSELF

In those earlier '70s epics *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*, the sum of the movie was greater than the acting parts. But the latest, *Superman*, was destined to fly—or go splat—on the strength of its title player. "If I blew it," worried Christopher Reeve, 26, "then I'm the one who should go down with the ship." Almost as disturbing was the prospect of *not* blowing it. Reeve, an introspective Ivy Leaguer, was mindful that the last Hollywood Superman, TV's George Reeves, put a bullet in his head in 1959. "I'm making an effort not to turn into a product," says the new Superman. But it would be easier to leap tall buildings than to escape becoming hyped and typed—and perhaps something of a national joke.

The danger was underscored by the long quest to cast the role. Robert Redford wanted too much money. James Caan said no way would he get into that "silly suit," and Clint Eastwood said he was too busy. Meanwhile producer Ilya Salkind was himself vetoing Steve McQueen (too fat), Charles Bronson (too earthy), Bruce Jenner (too amateurish) and Sly Stallone (too Italian). By then things had become so desperate that Salkind's actress wife, Skye Aubrey, coaxed him to send her Beverly Hills dentist to London for what turned out to be a hopeless screen test.

Enter—after a two-year search—Christopher Reeve, then an unknown except for one Broadway credit and a couple of years on the soap *Love of Life*. When Salkind approached him, the kid was coming from an audition for a Woolite commercial. "My first reaction," Reeve confides, "was, 'Poor Hollywood. How sad. Why can't they come up with something new and exciting? Who wants these multimillion-dollar epics?'" The answer, so far, is all America. In its very first week, *Superman* grossed \$12 million.

Indeed, Reeve had changed his own tune once he read the script, a tortured

if finally delightful effort by a relay of big-name writers from Mario Puzo to the team that created *Bonnie and Clyde*. Christopher got so caught up in the property that he rejected the option to have costume men build his physique with Styrofoam falsies. When signed, Reeve was 6'4", 188 pounds and looked, he admits, "like Jimmy Stewart standing sideways. I had to get to a state where I could believe I was Superman." To that end, the producer hired body builder David Prowse (who played Darth Vader in *Star Wars*). After the first workout, Reeve confesses, "I went into the locker room and heaved." But in 10 weeks of weight lifting and a four-meal-a-day high-protein diet, he gained 33 pounds and added two inches to his chest. As for strength, he raised his initial bench-pressing record of a pathetic 40 pounds to 320. "By the time my body took shape I was able to loosen up," he says. The gawky flip side of the role was never a problem. "I'm much more like Clark Kent," says Reeve. "Joe College. I have one thing in common with Superman, which is that I'm clean. I'm not a drug addict."

On the set he refers to his red-caped character fondly as "Supie." Christopher has flown before, though not commercially. He owns a glider and is a licensed pilot but frankly did not enjoy dangling 240 feet over Manhattan's East River from a crane "with my little red boots limp like spinach. I wouldn't do that again," he shudders. But with the movie's success riding on believable flight, much of Reeve's time was spent in the air. The usual rig suspended Reeve 30 feet above the studio floor. During the shooting of his airborne courtship with Lois Lane (Margot Kidder), the apparatus began to crack. "Margot said, 'Oh God, get us out of here,' and I was stupid enough to reach out my hand to catch her," laughs Reeve. "When I get in the costume something takes over."

CONTINUED

Will Reeve bed Margot Kidder in *Superman II*? "Like *The Godfather*, 'Part II' is even better than 'Part I,'" he promises.

Photographs by Ken Regan/Camera 5



(He went through 40 suits, changing as soon as one got snagged or sweaty, on the principle that "there's something not quite so significant about Superman in wrinkles.") Reeve did all of his own stunt work despite advice from the man the crew kiddingly called Marvin Rando: "It's not worth risking your life for—it's only a movie." Marlon Brando, who plays the minor role of Jor-El, Superman's father, was paid \$3.7 million—or, by one calculation, \$27,000 an hour.

Reeve, who earned a mere \$250,000 plus overtime for two years' work, has collected few residuals as yet other than annoying gags. "The cape and the boots didn't follow me home," he says matter-of-factly—unlike the jokes "anytime something has to be lifted. Or lines like did I fly between New York and London in a plane? They were funny the first 200 times."

To deal with the problems of portraying a prototype, Reeve consulted Sean Connery, who has suffered his share of James Bond cracks. Connery's good-natured advice: "(1) Be in Outer Mongolia when they're trying to find you for the sequels. (2) If that doesn't work, I'll give you my lawyer and he'll stick it to them. (3) And you better be damn good in the first one or you won't have that problem." Most of *Superman II* (in which Superman gets it on with Lois Lane), however, was shot concurrently with Part I. And Reeve's contract, besides stipulating that he can't behave in a way that would discredit Superman, commits him to at least the first sequel.

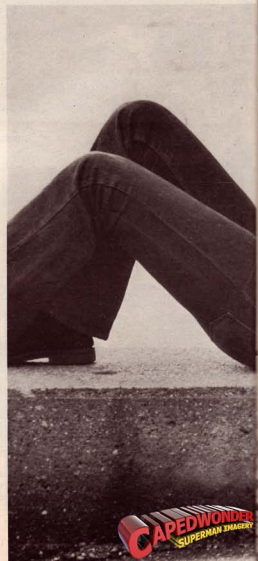
"I can't believe that people who become phenomena like Cassidy, Travolta and Winkler find that is the reward they were looking for," observes Reeve. "That's why they're running away, buying Malibu houses and Learjets to disappear from it all. I knew Travolta in New York. Now he's too protected even to see. I can't believe that could happen to me." The lady he met and moved in with a year ago in London, models' agent Gae Exton, 27, said after the premiere: "I can't see that all this will change him, but those could be famous last words."

"I did not want to be famous," says Reeve, "I wanted to be at the top. I thought they were separate." That the Manhattan-born Reeve had aspirations is not surprising. His father, F. D. Reeve, is a creative writing professor at Yale, a Russian translator and an author; his mother, Barbara (remarried to a stockbroker since her divorce when Christopher was 3), writes for a Princeton weekly. Less predictable was that the boy chose acting. He was not encouraged to watch TV or

Christopher and his writer-photographer brother, Benjamin, 25, are very close and equally preppy.



His brother's Lower West Side loft is a getaway for Reeve and holds the Steinway Chris got when he was 16.



CAPEWONDER
SUPERMAN EMERGES

read comics. "I think the last movie my father saw was *Casablanca*," Reeve laughs, and adds that when he told Pop of his breakthrough movie role, the professor elatedly ordered champagne, thinking Christopher meant George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*. At Princeton Day School, Reeve joined a local theater company and found, like many actors before him, that "being somebody else took me away from a lot of things I was not prepared to deal with." So while earning a degree in English at Cornell, he hustled parts in New York and briefly took a European sabbatical to check out the Old Vic and the Comédie Française.

He studied acting at Juilliard, where Robin (*Mork*) Williams was a classmate and John (*Paper Chase*) Houseman the master teacher. The two years on the soap enabled Christopher to reimburse his stepfather for his education, and Reeve was featured with Katharine Hepburn in *A Matter of Gravity*—to no critical acclaim. Then he dropped out. "I sat on the beach at Santa Monica

—not even Malibu—for five months. I absolutely wrote myself off," he says. "I was sponging off friends, sleeping on couches, turning into a vegetable, and then one day I said this isn't right." Back in New York he landed two plays, but after two days of rehearsal in *Dracula* Reeve traded in his black cape for a red one, dyed his sandy hair black and started flexing his pecs.

Despite Superstardom, Reeve still drives a battered 1970 Pinto, lives in his old "hole in the wall" Manhattan walkup studio apartment, and doesn't own a suit. An accomplished pianist who prefers Ravel and Debussy, he managed to practice 90 minutes a day throughout the shooting. Other passions besides flying include sailing, junk food (Oreos, Mars Bars, coffee milk shakes) and his lady. He doesn't like to discuss Gae ("If I'm going to have to turn into a public person, I'm not keen on her becoming a household name, because then we would lose what we had"), but they shuttle between continents to be together. Any reports of either dalliance or squabbling be-

tween Reeve and co-star Kidder are fantasy, he says. "He's like my brother," says Margot (novelist Thomas McGuane's ex-wife, who is currently dating *Star Wars*' Harrison Ford). "He will be a major, major star someday."

That may be so, but Reeve refuses to move to—or go—Hollywood. Post-*Superman*, he has turned down a flattering bid from Britain's National Theatre and has been offered parts with Goldie Hawn and Ali MacGraw and a CBS special playing Thomas Wolfe. "Over the past two years I've decided I'm not a bad actor after all," he proclaims, half-convinced. "I'm reasonably happy, reasonably sane, reasonably positive. Enough people seem to like me, I like enough people—so I'll settle for that." And need he worry about work, about typecasting? "Hell no, there's the Green Hornet. Batman. The sky's the limit," he laughs, committing a Supie joke.

KRISTIN MC MURRAN

They've been together since a studio lunch a year ago, but Reeve frets that his fame "may not be fun" for Gae Exton.

