

SUPERMAN



**64
PAGES
OF
ACTION!**

**ALL
IN
FULL
COLOR**

THE DRINK TANK 399

SUPERMAN



THE DRINK TANK 399

Editors - Vanessa, James, Chris

The Second-to-Last issue of This Fine Fanzine

Superman was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shushter and first appeared in the fanzine Science Fiction issue 3, then first in regular comics in Action Comics #1. He's been the backbone of DC Comics since 1938. For years and years, whenever a new comic was introduced, either Superman or Batman was used in the first issue of the new comic to help get them over. He has died once, killed by Doomsday, and has been re-invented more than a few times.



SUPERMAN VS. CAPTAIN MARVEL

From Kingdom Come by Alex Ross

When Vanessa asked to me marry her, she gave me a Superman ring. She said that I was her Superman. They say that men want to be Batman, but I was never, ever happier to be Superman!

This issue is dedicated to Superman, of course. I grew up loving Plastic Man and The Flash, and Captain Marvel (who I always called Shazam, only to be corrected, but who is now called Shazam!), but Superman was, well, Superman. He could be a boring fuddyduddy, while Batman was always cool and anti-establishment, SUPERman always played by the rules.

Still, there is something magical about Superman that has allowed him to be re-imagined so often. The best of the Superman Elseworld's were almost as good as those dedicated to Batman, and things like Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow were equally awesome.

This is Superman, in all his glory!



CHAPTER

GETTING TO KNOW THE MAN OF STEEL: FIVE BIOGRAPHIES OF SUPERMAN

by Chuck Serface

*“I offered them
Utopia, but they
fought for the right
to live in Hell.”*

*Mark Millar
Superman: Red Son*

In an article on Panels.net entitled *Secret Identity: The Book That Made Me Get Superman*, Chris Rohling admits to not having cared for Superman until a certain occurrence. “I wasn’t one of those people who decried his every appearance and busted people’s chops for a being a fan of the guy,” he explains “It was more a value neutral thing.” At the age of nineteen, however, he encountered Kurt Busiek and Stuart Immonen’s *Secret Identity*. He enumerates various aspects of the art and writing that captured his attention. While reading his come to Kal-El account, I remembered feeling a similar revelation when exposed to John Byrne’s *Man of Steel*, Mark Waid and Alex Ross’s *Kingdom Come*, and Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely’s *All-Star Superman*. Before, I’d flitted in and out of appreciating Superman, but these three mini-series led me to truly understand what hardcore fans understand about Superman – it’s not only about the superpowers. It’s about the superpowers and the incorruptible essence of he who wields them.

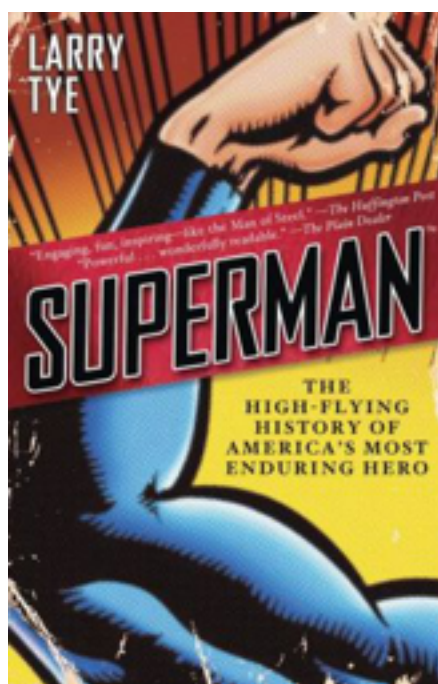
When asked to imagine Superman, my father reports picturing Max Fleisher’s version from the animated shorts he watched a lifetime ago. My older brother sees Kurt Shaffenberger, George Reeves, and Christopher Reeve. For me, a mélange including my three favorites mentioned above flits through my head like a slideshow presentation. After more than 75 years, we have a Superman for everyone, even for Chris Rohling, who reflects:

Critics will say that Superman is a boring character because he lacks emotion/is too powerful/too good of a person. Whatever the flavor of the week is. *Secret Identity* proves all of these wrong. It’s a clever book bursting with heart anchored by beautiful, subtle art that creates a fully realized person and follows them through his entire life.

In 2013, I explored Superman more deeply with help from five books published within two years of one another, biographies of sorts, not shallow blow-by-blow accounts that detail strings of plots or actions. Publishers released each in accordance with Superman’s 75th anniversary. Each confirmed theories, instilled delectation and disillusionment, and presented facts heretofore unknown to me. Although approaching the subject with different emphases, all five biographers agree: Superman will endure. Always an England? Maybe. Always a Superman? No doubt, but they want to know why.

Although my impressions surface throughout, this essay isn’t so much a traditional book review as it is an appreciative inspection. Parenthetical citations refer to page numbers in the book I’m quoting at that moment. Now go forth and read. “Superman Studies” is quite the burgeoning field. A never-ending flow of new releases joins the multitudes already occupying crowded library shelves. For now, however, these five will do for me. I hope they’ll do for you too. I hope you discover or rediscover your Superman.

*“Before it was a
Bomb, the Bomb
was an Idea.
Superman,
however, was a
Faster, Stronger,
Better Idea.”*
Grant Morrison
*Supergods: What
Masked Vigilantes,
Miraculous Mutants,
and a Sun God from
Smallville Can Teach
Us About Being
Human*



Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero by Larry Tye

Readers hoping to find an issue-by-issue analysis of Superman the character should look elsewhere, because while Larry Tye offers a biography that illustrates the evolution of this international phenomenon, he does so through the lens of business. Superman, after all -- whether one imagines him with the face of Kirk Alyn, or speaking heroically like Bud Collyer or Tim Daly -- exists only through creative energies put into play by editors, publishers, writers, artists, filmmakers, all this stemming from the hearts of two young fanboys from Cleveland wanting to break into the industry they loved so passionately. If readers do choose to look elsewhere, they risk missing quite an adventure that for over seven and a half decades has been known as “Superman, Inc.”

In the book's Preface, Tye defines why Superman interests him so deeply: “The most enduring hero of the last century is someone who lived half his life in disguise and the other half as the world's most recognizable man” (ix). Later, he challenges those of us who might feel greatly familiar with Superman: “Ah, you say, the Man of Steel – I know him! But do you really? Do you know the wrenching story of his birth and nurturing at the hands of a parade of young creators yearning for their own absent fathers” (ix-x)? Here Tye refers to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, of course, as well as later creators who would take Superman into every existing medium, making him the most known man who never really existed. How, then, did this brain-child take off? The answer is complex, but Tye takes excellent care in analyzing behind-the-scenes dealings, even if certain participants weren't as heroic as their visions.

In spite of Tye's assertion that buffs might not know the “real” Superman, critics have complained that he reports nothing new. The author does include the gamut of infamous tales, such as how Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* and the Kefauver hearings that followed nearly killed the comic-book industry during the 1950s. Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman were the only superheroes to survive the pogrom. Then there's the story of how the now classic film starring Christopher Reeve sprang from a conversation between Alexander Salkind and his son, Ilya, while dining together at the Café de la Paix in Paris. Alexander later initiated a grotesque Ponzi scheme, selling or trading more than 100 percent of the film, inspiring comparisons to Max Bialystock from Mel Brook's *The Producers*. Lucky for Salkind that *Superman: The Movie*, released in 1978, metastasized into an enormous hit, generating enough funds to pay back investors. My favorite moment happened in 1991 when artists and writers met with Mike Carlin, the editor in charge, in one of many regular meetings to discuss ideas for titles starring Superman. Illustrator Jerry Ordway jokingly suggested, “Everyone dies – the end!” Others took the idea seriously, however, and thus emerged the famous *Death of Superman* arc. The sad fates of George Reeves and Christopher Reeve receive notice as well. Tye devotes quite a few pages to the unwitting deal Siegel and Shuster made with Harry Donenfeld and Jack Liebowitz and the ensuing legal battles, but more on that later when I examine Brad Ricca's biography of Superman's “fathers.”

I agree. Tye offers nothing new – except for his dispassionate reportage, devoid of worship, which lends credence to his voice. He maneuvers through comics books, to comic strips, to radio, to animation, to film and television, employing his journalist's eye to throughout – from, for instance, Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson to Mort Weisinger to John Byrne – outlining both the light and the dark aspects of individuals who have kept Superman not only alive but solidly entrenched in American culture for most of the twentieth century and beyond. A friend noted that on occasion Tye strays from accuracy, for example, when he claims Titano the Super Ape and Streaky the Supercat were from Krypton, which hardcore aficionados know is flatly wrong. If you're looking to pick nits, have at it. I for one laud his meticulous dissection, how he bares the engines propelling the shiny outer machine.

*"I grew up watching
'Superman.' As a
child, when I first
learned to dive into a
swimming pool, I
wasn't diving, I was
flying, like
Superman. I used to
dream of rescuing a
girl I had a crush on
from a playground
bully."
Tom Hiddleston*



Tye concludes that Superman has “belied every prediction of his demise and defied the life expectancy for cultural icons and literary properties” (299), and he will continue to do so because:

Heroes like Doc Savage, Ty Cobb, and even Teddy Roosevelt can become dated, reduced to interesting reflections of their era but not ours. Others, like Sherlock Holmes, Babe Ruth, and Franklin Roosevelt, still resonate, tapping into something primal. Superman defines that archetype. Part of it is the irresistible allure of taking flight. Part of it is the seduction of the love triangle and his secret identity. Part of it is being ten years old again. The more the flesh-and-blood role models let us down, the more we turn to fictional ones who stay true. With them, and especially with Superman, it is about the possibility – or getting the girl, saving the world (or at least Lois and Jimmy), and having it our way. Our longest-lasting hero will endure as long as we need a champion, which should be until the end of time. (300)

May Tye’s prediction come true.

Superman: The Unauthorized Biography by Glen Weldon

Co-host of the *Pop Culture Happy Hour* podcast and comic-book critic for NPR, Glen Weldon acknowledges Larry Tye as a source for his offering. He notes that “Larry Tye’s exhaustive book on Superman came out the week after [he] turned in [his] manuscript, but [he] kept it by [his] side throughout the editing process so that it could serve as [his] ludicrously well-informed and voluble fact checker” (332). Indeed, Weldon covers much of the same ground as Tye, but chooses to emphasize changes in the Superman canon as it changes over time with society rather than on merely describing Superman, Inc. Weldon realizes these shifts occur in part due to marketing techniques and structural rules related to various media, but they also occur due to changes in zeitgeist and reader demand. After all, Superman is a product, but he is a product with many makers. With this in mind, Weldon focuses on a broader conversation between owners, writers, artists, history, and a varying public mood.

The tone of this unauthorized biography is colloquial with frequent bursts of snark. The first line of the introduction reads: “When you think about it, Lex Luthor’s got a point: everything comes easy to Superman. That, in fact, is pretty much his whole shtick: entitled superiority” (1). And two paragraphs later: “Superman is every handsome, athletic trust-fund kid who roars his convertible into the high school parking lot as the sweater around his neck flutters in the breeze. Why has a schmuck like *that* endured for seventy-five years” (1)? . . . Relax, because in spite of his snappishness, Weldon does maintain healthy respect for his subject:

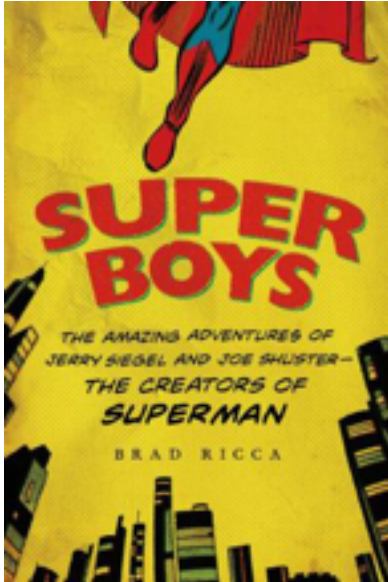
Superman changes as our culture changes. The only thing about him, in fact, that has remained untouched, inviolate, since *Action Comics* #1 hit the stands in April 1938 is his motivation. That motivation is at once the simplest of them all and the hardest to unpack: he is a hero. Specifically:

1. He puts the needs of others over those of himself.
2. He never gives up. (3)

When a story represents Superman in any other light, fans react strongly. Many walked out on Zack Snyder’s *Man of Steel* (2013), because they felt it didn’t represent Superman’s true spirit. If the above two elements, what Weldon defines as “bedrock,” are missing, “our mind rebels; we instinctively reject it. It’s just not *Superman*” (3).

Weldon deftly outlines the character’s evolution. For example, within Superman’s first decade, Siegel and Shuster transform him from a rough-and-tumble, social-justice advocate into a super patriot who pitches war bonds and preaches about Victory Gardens. When Superman first appeared in 1938, the United States recently had weathered the Great Depression, so a hero who punishes corrupt wealth and protects the poor resonated with readers. Scant years later after the war had begun, the comics industry was booming, especially for GIs stationed overseas craving adventures that supported their efforts. 35,000 of all comics shipped to servicemen fea-

*“Superman don’t
need no seatbelt!”
Muhammad Ali*



tured Superman. Clearly this change demanded a change in Superman’s marketing and a continued flexibility in this regard has kept our boy in blue thriving.

It’s revealed how other Metropolitans undergo similar metamorphoses, – Lois Lane (whom I will cover in the section devoted to Tom De Haven’s book), Jimmy Olsen, Perry White, and arguably the greatest *bête noir* of all time, Lex Luthor. In the beginning, Luthor the evil scientist was a “gaunt figure with a shock of bright red hair and a thin-lipped sneer” (38). Later on November 16, 1940, however, he first appeared in the Superman newspaper comic strip as a “scowling, heavy-set bald man in a lab coat” (38). The artist received the blame, having mistaken an earlier image of a henchman for Luthor himself. The baldness stuck, regardless of intent. After years in exile, Jerry Siegel returned to writing Superman stories and retroactively introduced the reason for Luthor’s hairless pate. In *Adventure Comics* #271 (1960), he established that Superman and Luthor had met years earlier in Smallville, when Superman was Superboy, and that an attempt by Luthor to eliminate kryptonite had gone awry, causing him to lose his hair and blame Superboy for the mishap. Thus, he was no longer one lab accident away from becoming a super-villain. At this point, Luthor also receives his first name, Lex. In 1986, John Byrne launched a revamped Superman in his mini-series *Man of Steel* and crafted my favorite iteration, the ruthless tycoon simulating Donald Trump, but with more intelligence and style, and with no comb over. This fell well in line with the “greed is good” mentality of the 1980s, presaging how economic attitudes at that point possessed a villainous touch, at least in Byrne’s outlook. Once again, combined forces – writers, market factors, medium conventions, and even error – prod dynamic movement.

Weldon agrees with Tye that regardless of failures -- of Electric Superman, or Red and Blue Superman – Superman will endure. Never mind Bryan Singer or Zack Snyder, whose films accomplished both failure and success. Superman’s stamina springs from the two unchanging principles that Weldon asserts lie at the core of true representations of Superman, he puts the needs of others over those of himself, and he never gives up:

Like us, he is a creature of immense strengths and surprising weaknesses. He’s not the same guy he started out as, but who among us can say we are? He’s been around for three-quarters of a century already, and, in some form, he’ll be here for centuries to come, because no matter how much he changes on the outside, Superman will always speak to the most essential, the most hopeful, the most invulnerable part of us. (329)

Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster – the Creators of Superman by Brad Ricca

For ten years, Brad Ricca researched documents and private collections, eventually coordinating source materials into the first comprehensive biography of Superman’s creators, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster. He explains his motivation in his Introduction:

I never knew Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. I am not even remotely related to them. But their story – creating the impossible Superman as teenagers during the Great Depression – is one that somehow resounds through all of us with a soundtrack we can almost always just hear. In the comics, Superman is always looking for secrets to his heritage. That is not coincidence. We all want to know where we come from. The same goes for our dreams and fictions. Why have these characters lasted? What can they tell us? Most people say claim to like Batman better, but it is Superman who measures the best of us. We want to know why. (xx)

Ricca studies the source, two young men from Cleveland yearning for professional success in comics. The pair refined Superman and refined him again, moving from a bald villain with psy-

*“My ever-present
mania meant I was
never phased by
staying up twenty
hours a day or by the
different time zones.
I was Superman.”
Andy Behrman*

chic powers more resembling Luthor than the powerhouse they’d eventually develop. Ricca catalogs important influences as well. Philip Wylie’s Hugo Danner and Edgar Rice Burrough’s John Carter and Tarzan feature prominently, but Ricca never mentions Doc Savage. Joe’s fascination with weightlifting magazines and tights-wearing strong men explains Superman’s colorful costume. Models Lois Amstel and Joanne Carter, the sources for Lois Lane, enter the scene. Joanne Carter later became Joanne Carter Siegel, Jerry’s second wife. Finally, the two sold their creation outright to Harry Donenfeld for \$130.00, unknowingly birthing a decades-long battle equal in legend to Joe Simon and Jack Kirby’s.

In their haste to advance in the business, the two accepted a horrible deal that now exemplifies the perils of copyright. In fairness, though, how could they have predicted Superman, Inc? On the other side stood Donenfeld, a pornographer seeking legitimacy, and his partner, Jack Liebowitz. Both were unmovable when it came to recognition and remuneration. Siegel and Shuster weren’t above symbolically infusing this reality into the stories they wrote for *Superman* comics:

In *Superman* #14, Jerry tells a story of a young inventor named Chet Farnsworth who has invented an astounding “fire extinguishing powder” that promises to save countless lives. Clark [Kent] wants to write a story about the young inventor but finds that he has sold the rights to a man named Jim Baldwin, a slick “famous promoter.” Predictably, Farnsworth is treated similarly – very similarly – to how Harry and Jack treated Jerry and Joe. (208)

Ricca expanded my knowledge base substantially. I’d known that with Bernard Bailly Siegel created one of my favorite superheroes, the Spectre, and that both Siegel and Shuster were responsible for Slam Bradley, Dr. Occult, and Henri Duval. Siegel, of course, also devised Superboy and many elements important to Superman’s lore during the 1950s and 1960s -- as if siring Superman himself weren’t enough? Additionally, I now admire the breadth of input Siegel contributed to the Legion of Super-Heroes, a team of teenaged crime fighters operating in the thirtieth century:

The list of characters that Jerry introduced to the Legion included Bouncing Boy, Brainiac 5, Computo, Cosmic King, Duplicate Damsel, Glorith, Invisible Kid, Matter-Eater Lad, Lightning Lord, Phantom Girl, Chameleon Boy, Saturn Queen, Spider Girl, Sun Boy, and Ultra Boy, among many others. (247)

Especially amusing is his self-referential take on Bouncing Boy. I’ll indulge myself with an unnecessarily long quote about Bouncing Boy, whom I adore:

One of the most enduring of Jerry’s creations was Chuck Taine, who first appeared in *Adventure* #329. Chuck, an errand boy, mistakenly drinks a bottle of “liquid super-plastic” because he thought it was “soda-pop” (Jerry’s use of pop” belies his Ohio roots), and he transforms into the round, super-elastic Bouncing Boy. Like human Flubber, he is perhaps partly named after Chuck Taylor, whose famous rubber shoes were meant to give schoolyard athletes some bounce in their jump. Bouncing boy, who was overweight and a jokester, was the first slacker superhero and very much mirrored Jerry’s new attitude toward comics (and his own middle-aged girth). (247-8)

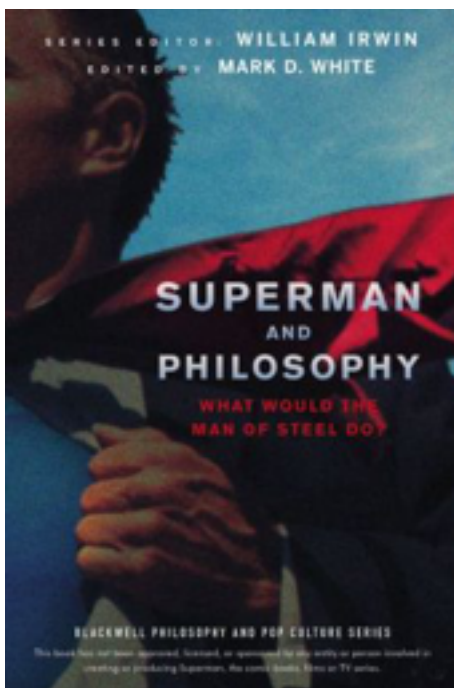
Earning standard scale for this work, as well as for work on *Superman*, Siegel received no author bylines per the agreement he’d reached with Jack Liebowitz in 1957 when the publisher allowed Siegel back into National Periodicals after an absence of several years, a humbling move for Siegel given the contentious nature of their relationship.

Ricca illustrates Siegel and Shuster’s predicament aptly. Imagine suffering financial setback after financial setback while watching your creation evolve into the center of a multimedia empire, into an exemplary cash cow. In 1975, however, artist Neal Adams began helping to negotiate a deal that led to the following result:

Things finished up by Christmas Eve. Jerry’s quote in the papers was priceless for anyone who still believed in Santa Claus: “After more than 30 years we are overjoyed at being reunited with Superman.” Glasses clinked and hands clapped. On the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* on Tuesday, December 23, 1975, reporter Sam Chu Lin reported that Jerry and Joe would henceforth receive \$30,000 a year. This number had been negotiated

*“I think he is
Number #1 He was
capable of flying
with inhuman speed,
repelling bullets etc,
etc.”*

*Pop Art legend Mel
Ramos on Superman*



up by Adams from \$10,000 and also included fine print for continuing payments to their families when they both died. It also – at Adam’s insistence – restored the “Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster” byline to every Superman publication. When *Superman: The Movie* finally debuted in 1978, comics fans and professionals cheered openly as Jerry’s and Joe’s names pushed at them from the screen, in crystal blue type from beyond the stars. (283)

Ricca concludes by discussing Siegel and Shuster’s final years. Upon his death, Joe Shuster’s family discovered that he’d incurred sizable debts, so happily-ever-afters remain hypothetical to some extent. Ricca also adds sections about heirs and issues surrounding copyright and creative rights.

Ultimately, *Super Boys* is depressing and a stellar argument against entering the comic-book industry. Also, Ricca focuses more on Siegel than on Shuster. In fact, Shuster nearly disappears completely in portions. Nonetheless, Superman fans must read this book. Ricca’s ten-year research odyssey has paid off. Finally, we have a thorough account of Siegel and Shuster, as well as an account of their importance to the world of comics.

Superman and Philosophy: What Would the Man of Steel Do? Edited by Mark D. White

I love the *Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*. The editors of each volume select subjects from popular culture – films, books, television shows, even video games -- and gather philosophers to discuss these in connection to concepts within their specialties. In conjunction with the release of Zack Snyder’s *Man of Steel*, Mark D. White chose Superman, inviting his colleagues to analyze him in relation to . . . I think you’ve guessed it already . . . ethics.

Two reasons for matching popular culture with philosophy appeal to me especially. First, it’s inevitable given that most criticism involves philosophizing on some level. The two are wedded through methodology. Second, experiencing difficult ideas by way of enjoyable pursuits lightens matters significantly. I’ve read Immanuel Kant in translation, which nearly ruined my sobriety. I can’t imagine confronting him in German. No twelve-step program in any reality could rescue me from that relapse. But digesting his theories with guidance from trained philosophers who enjoy the same pop entertainment that I do? Philip Sidney’s dictum about poetry applies here as well: teach and delight.

Many wish to be Superman, to fly, to amaze others with great powers, to reap the love generated from completing mighty deeds. In the song *Real World*, Matchbox 20 encapsulates this desire:

I wonder what it's like to be a superhero!
I wonder where I'd go if I could fly around downtown!
From some other planet, I get this funky high on the yellow sun!
Boy, I bet my friends will all be stunned. They're stunned!

Superpowers would amaze friends, impress the masses, and he or she possessing these gifts could seemingly do anything. Many dream this grand fantasy, but not me. What astounds me about Superman involves his ability to resist temptation, to unwaveringly utilize his talents for the greater good. He surely struggles, because a human heart beats in that alien breast. When Brainiac descends upon Metropolis, people look up, grateful but unsurprised. They wonder at how he arrives like the proverbial bird, plane, or speeding bullet. They’ll cheer as he dismantles Brainiac’s space ship, or his giant robot, with his bare hands. Then off he goes, never stopping to wink at the ladies, or to grin heroically into cameras while celebrating his success before the nation at large. Instead, he simply finishes the job, secures everyone’s safety, and leaves until needed again. His powers astonish the citizens, provoking jealousy in more than a few. That

“Growing up in
Eastern Germany, I
knew of Superman,
but he didn't
resonate emotionally
with me”
Antje Traue

resistance to temptation, however, to not become “Super Tyrant,” to not easily bank in on those abilities, to avoid falling into arrogant entitlement, to keep surging forward with his version of might for right . . . I’m not sure I could do it, and so even with superpowers I wouldn’t be Superman. Therefore, on I abide, happily mired in my mundane existence.

The ethicists contributing to *Superman and Ethics* cover a wide range of topics. Leonard Finkelman, for instance, clarifies Thomas Hobbes’s pessimistic philosophy and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s optimism by ascribing pessimism to Lex Luthor and optimism to Superman. Hobbes’s theories are pessimistic, because he defines human nature as naturally driven toward violence and best checked. Rousseau, on the other hand, earns the label optimist in that he affirms humans only learn the behaviors Hobbes attributes to nature through interactions with society. My stance on attaining superpowers in the previous paragraph slightly mirrors how Finkelman interprets Luthor’s feelings, the only difference being that my pessimism isn’t absolute. I hold that a virtuous Superman, one that resists power-induced corruption, could exist, but those who have the fortitude to pull it off are rare. Luthor, the ultimate Hobbesian pessimist, would argue that such people don’t exist. We’d all go to the dark side once empowered and set loose:

The only reason that Superman doesn’t completely dominate humanity is that he uses his powers for the good of humankind rather than to dominate it. Many writers regard this as one of the primary reasons that Luthor cannot help but view Superman as an alien: as Hobbes argued, humans are essentially limited in their willingness to help others. We’ve asked the question: what would *you* do if you had Superman’s powers? According to Luthor – and any other human nature pessimist – if your answer doesn’t include some variation on the term “global domination,” then you simply can’t be human . . . Superman’s unfailing helpfulness excludes him from being included amongst humankind. It’s just too alien a characteristic! (175-6)

Another contributor, Arno Bogaerts, introduces the inevitable comparison: Superman to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. Bogaerts argues that Nietzsche’s original figure has been misconstrued and misused over time, especially by the Nazis during World War II, and that the Superman we know and love can rectify this confusion, since “the *Übermensch*, who is able to look into the abyss of meaninglessness without flinching, is positioned as an independent creator of new myths and entirely new values” (87-8). General Zod and Luthor don’t meet Nietzsche’s definitive criteria, but Superman does, because:

Unlike some religious figures, Superman isn’t weighed down by his humanity nor is it presented as some sort of curse. Instead, he embraces it and thereby gains his greatest strength. Although he can show great compassion, and will always be around to “catch us if we fall,” he does allow “mankind to climb to their own destiny” because of his unwavering belief in humanity’s potential for the future. In these respects, Superman can certainly be seen as giving “meaning to the earth.” [Mark] Waid probably said it best in his introduction to the collected *All-Star Superman* series: “Gods achieve their power by encouraging us to believe in them. Superman achieves his power by believing in us.” I think even Friedrich Nietzsche would agree to that. (96-7)

Superman the iconoclast, who helps humankind break free of tired traditions and moribund spirituality, models vibrant ideals without threatening our independence. According to Bogaerts, he best represents Nietzsche’s primary formulations, free from the misapplications and misunderstandings of later generations.

Readers will gain clearer understandings of deontology, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, the philosophers I’ve mentioned, and ethics in general. White hasn’t written a biography per se, but he has orchestrated an interesting discussion about Superman and what about him so fascinates his fans: his ethical nature. I’m willing, then, to accept it as a biography.

*“I heard one time
that the Superman
glyph is the second
or third most
recognizable symbol
on Earth after the
Christian cross.”
Zack Snyder*



Our Hero: Superman on Earth by Tom De Haven

At 224 pages, *Our Hero* represents the briefest among the five biographies I’ve included in this article, but that in no way dims the overall quality of his output. One can consume the entire volume in a sunny afternoon out on the veranda, and De Haven’s comprehensive index, very comprehensive for a book this size, makes information easy to locate. Keep this one on hand to solve bets or to quickly review Superman-related facts that may have slipped your mind.

In 2005, Chronicle Books published De Haven’s novel, *It’s Superman*, a non-canonical origin story set in the 1930s. During promotional interviews for his literary effort and for Bryan Singer’s *Superman Returns*, with which he had no involvement, interviewers kept asking him the same three questions: “Why has Superman lasted for almost seventy years? Can you explain his appeal? Does he still matter in the twenty-first century” (3)? *Our Hero* incorporates his answers to these queries.

Especially memorable is De Haven’s chatty rendition of the Weisinger years. The tyrannical Mort Weisinger – “picky, petty, intimidating, overbearing, and monstrously cruel” -- edited all titles in the Superman line starting in the mid-1950s until he resigned in 1970 (110). These were the years after Wertham, when the Comics Code Authority rigidly dictated that no violence, no sex, no morally objectionable whatsoever would appear in comics if they wanted that stamp of approval on their covers, which meant sales. Perhaps in reaction to these standards Weisinger “had decided to put Superman in more ‘situation’ stories rather than in stories involving crime and super-villains” (127). Krypton grew from a mere concept into a fleshed-out world to which Superman could time travel. The famous silly imaginary stories cropped up. Certainly he did no favors for Lois Lane:

Maybe hoping to pick up some new female readers, the ones who bought Archies and romance comics, [Weisinger] replaced the fearless and often foolhardy big-city reporter with an irritating newsroom pea brain whose only concerns were uncovering Superman’s secret identity and then (sigh) marrying him. (113)

His alterations definitely affected the Lois seen on *The Adventures of Superman*, portrayed first by Phyllis Coates and next by Noel Neill. De Haven notes that “the original Lois Lane as created by Jerry Siegel and then carried on by Siegel’s comic book successors became the Mort Weisinger Lois, a Cold War-era female nuisance and wife wannabe” (113).

De Haven continues illustrating Weisinger’s ogish ways and reactions to them. Curt Swan, for my generation the definitive Superman, developed migraines due to the verbal abuse Weisinger doled out so liberally. Swan actually quit to work for an ad agency, but returned to DC, because the money was better. And did scripter Don Cameron try to push Weisinger out of his office window? It seems no one would have blamed him had he succeeded.

Lovers of Broadway will enjoy De Haven’s defense of *It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane, It’s Superman!*, which premiered in 1966. De Haven reminds us that “most reviews were positive” and “Patricia Marand won a Tony Award for her portrayal of Lois Lane” (150). For this daring move, I’ll give De Haven the last word, not just for this section, but for the entire article:

As with athletes and artists, there has always been a selfish, even a self-serving quality to Superman, to Superman’s ego. He doesn’t require love from the multitudes; Lois will do. Basically, what he needs, and all he needs, is the freedom to act in ways that are satisfying to him.

That’s why he’ll “never stop doing good.”

It makes *him* feel good, dammit.

Our hero. (206)



CHAPTER



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MAN OF TOMORROW?

By Michael A. Burstein

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I've been a fan of Superman since before I was born.

Okay, I'm probably exaggerating a little. But it is true that when he was a kid my father owned a copy of the original Superman #1 and that when I was born the house I grew up in was already filled with comics from the previous decade. Truth to tell, I can't remember a time when I wasn't a big Superman fan. I've been buying Superman comic books since I was four years old, and the original Christopher Reeve movie came out during my childhood.

Consequently, I have some pretty strong beliefs regarding the character of Superman, including what he's supposed to be like and how he should be represented. It may be cliché, but to me Superman is, or should be, the embodiment of all that is good within humanity. The only way the human race could accept Superman being around, given how powerful he is, would be if we knew we never had anything to fear from him.

Some have referred to Superman as the ultimate Boy Scout, and it's a pretty good analogy. I was never a Boy Scout, but my understanding is that the Scouts have rules about being trustworthy and helpful and doing good deeds every day. As Clark Kent growing up in the heartland of Kansas, Superman absorbed these lessons from his adoptive parents and the whole town of Smallville. Superman is not just the ultimate Boy Scout; he should be the ideal Boy Scout.

Which leads me to consider the new Superman movie that came out last month, Man of Steel.

A lot of ink (or electrons, perhaps) has already been spilled about this film and about whether or not it lives up to our vision of who Superman is. Being the Superman fan that I am, I was excited to see this new film and made a point of getting to a movie theatre as soon as I could. As delighted as I was to be watching a new Superman movie, and one with Christopher Nolan's hand in it, even before the film ended I felt a vague sense of disappointment. And I tried to understand why.

(If you haven't seen the film yet, be warned that spoilers are coming.)

I've been a fan of Superman since before I was born.

Years ago, I took a course on comic book writing from Denny O'Neil. Denny spent years writing and editing many different characters, including Batman. I recall a lot of his teaching and advice, but one piece stands out. I paraphrase below.

When writing serials about a well-known and beloved character, you need to determine what the core of that character is, protect that core ruthlessly, and for purposes of dynamic storytelling only change everything around that core. If I recall correctly, Denny had decided that part of the core of Batman was his refusal to use a gun of any sort, as his parents had been killed by a gun. He also felt that Batman's core included his working in the darkness of the night to scare the criminals that plagued Gotham City.

I never asked Denny about Superman, another character he also worked on, but I wouldn't be surprised if, like me, he felt that the core of Superman could be found in the Boy Scout analogy. In the movie, Superman tells Lois Lane that the S-symbol on his costume is a Kryptonian symbol for "Hope." Superman represents all those ideals that we as humanity aspire to.

And that's why the film Man of Steel disappointed me. As much as I hate to sound like an old man telling the new generation that they have it wrong, this interpretation of Superman violates the core of the character that has been built up for generations. Because when the great big battle happens, Superman doesn't do what we expect him to do. He doesn't put every single human life he can ahead of his goal of stopping the bad guy. He allows people's lives to be sacrificed without a moment's thought, until those lives are placed right in front of him. And then, to save them, he commits murder.

The film Man of Steel works better if viewed not as a Superman story but as a science fiction/horror story about an alien invasion. Think about it. If we leave our idea of Superman out of the story, then what is the film about? What's the thirty-second Hollywood pitch?

It's about how Earth and humanity gets caught in the middle of a civil war between two factions of a powerful alien race from a dying planet. One of those aliens, however, is sent to Earth as a baby, and as an adult chooses the side of humanity against the hopes of his own people.

*“If Superman is
going to so casually
tell us that his
symbol stands for
hope, he’d better live
up to it.”*

If this were the story of a film about a new character, someone other than Superman, I think I could have enjoyed it a lot more. But, of course, the film wouldn’t have been made if it wasn’t a Superman film. Instead of having a new story whose merits we could discuss and debate, we get a story the meaning of which is bogged down in what we feel Superman should be about.

So given that this is the new interpretation of Superman for what we might call the DC Cinematic universe, it prompts the question: can this vision of Superman hold up?

Well, it can, provided the filmmakers are willing to make a few points in the first sequel to the film. In my opinion, to salvage the ideal of Superman for these films, they need to make it clear that Superman did not come through the events of Man of Steel unaffected. Superman’s battle with General Zod led to billions of dollars in property damage and probably millions of lives lost. A second Superman film should explore that intently and show us how Superman comes to his Boy Scout ideal through never again wanting to be the cause, even indirectly, of the deaths of so many.

If Superman is going to so casually tell us that his symbol stands for hope, he’d better live up to it.



SUPERMAN: DEAD

By Chris Garcia

1992 - Santa Clara, CA & The World

Superman died, and in a way, so did comics. Comics, apparently, learned nothing from wrestling. The Idea of the retirement meaning nothing, never sticking, always the door being open, making the emotions experienced at the retirement moment seem meaningless, the creators heartless. I was one of those who wanted Superman back, but when I got it, I realised that I didn't want it. I wanted it to matter that he died. I wanted the Reign of the Supermen to continue, because even though they were pale imitations, they were told the right story: a world waffling without its savior, without its Superman. That was what it meant, all of it. We saw how much comics sucked without Superman, and like wrestling when any gimmick gets over, the attempted replacement never satisfies, and while the return of the real thing brings out the mark in all of us, it never nurtures like it used it.

*Superman isn't real,
or course, but the
hope he represents,
that is real."*
Mike Sugar

Never Superman

"Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it."
-- William Pitt the Elder

The nagging flu that vitiates my flesh
Has worsened overnight, and then a gang
Of little pricks chose to sate their wish
For joyrides with my car. My job still hangs
In Layoff Limbo too . . . *but soon the land
Would know relief if I were Superman!*

*No sweating tyrant would escape my coup,
And thieves would enter college, find a job
Since crime's no longer safe! Above all groups,
I'd oversee each social trend and stop
Injustice at its birth! Then Earth would stand
For Paradise, all thanks to Superman!*

*I'd tend the masses, keeping watchful should
They hope to stray beyond my boundless sight!
I'd note their grateful bows . . . but always would
I hear their prayer to other gods, feel spite
Like Pharaoh scribing laws in shifting sands,
"Oh, Lord. Deliver us from Superman."*

My well-intended wish is best left checked
Forever by diminished skin and bone,
A state insuring nations won't reflect
On crimes best played out in my mind alone.
If truth and justice ever have a chance
To thrive, then pray I'm never Superman.

-- Chuck Serface



SUPERMAN Byline *Taral Wayne*

Old Toronto Star Bldg.
Model for Daily Planet

Welcome, dear reader, to my new column for The Mayberry News, North Carolina's 46th largest paper.

By now you have noticed I'm no longer writing a column for the Daily Planet. The fact is, my services there are no longer required. You might say it was my own fault for running afoul of the editor-in-chief, Mr. White, but how was I to know about the "invisible ceiling" at the Planet? Perhaps I should start with my first day on the job.

Mr. White hired me on the strength of a humour column I wrote for a small tabloid, *The Vegas Foto Weekly*. Working in Metropolis for a major paper was several steps up, all the more so since the Daily Planet was known for its ambiguous connection to the Man of Steel. I wondered how soon I might catch a glimpse of him, and what Superman really looked like up close. But on my first day I'm afraid the only person I met was a Mr. Clark Kent.

Kent, there was a real gent, but I must admit I never did form much of an understanding about just what he did around the Planet. He seemed around all the time, but mysteriously absent whenever needed. He was always working on a story, but never seemed to get the scoop. Miss Lane and Jimmy Olsen beat him to the story so consistently that I often wondered how Kent kept his job. He was mild mannered all right, but he was the sort of man who exuded self-assurance and mastery of every situation, somehow. You felt secure in his presence. I guessed perhaps he was being groomed for the job of editor when White retired. At least he was left in charge of Mr. White's desk from time to time even if he didn't seem to be that ace a reporter.

Kent was there in his conservative double-breasted suit when I arrived, his hand out to offer a warm shake. I had expected to see Perry White. After all, White was my new boss, but Kent said the Chief was tied up. (I later learned that this sort of thing was most likely literally true.) Everyone called Mr. White the Chief, but Kent warned me not to say it to his face. Then he showed me my "office". It was just a room on a lower floor I was to share with another staff writer whose name I never quite got clear. I think he wrote theatre reviews. Like other offices in the Planet Building, it was just a plain box with a door, a couple of desks with typewriters, and a coat hanger. The one peculiar feature was a wall of corrugated green plastic. I never saw an office without one, not even Mr. White's. At least his made shade for a large picture window with a breathtaking view of the Metropolis skyline. Not a pretty sight, mind you, (what with tarry rooftops, water towers, radio masts, ventilators, and elevator sheds), but breathtaking all the same.

Did I mention that everyone who worked for the paper seemed to have a well-blocked Fedora or a pork-pie hat? Everybody but me. I felt rather out of place with nothing on the hook, so decided to bring shabby Irish tweed I had. I hung it up on the second day and never took it down, not even when I left work. That first day, though, I felt naked sitting at the unfamiliar Smith-Corona, trying to imagine what I was going to fill up sev-

eral sheets of paper with. An idea germinated, and it no longer mattered where I was. I was writing.

That is, until lunch. There wasn't a clock in our "office", but you could hear doors closing outside, and people walking briskly by. The theatre-guy checked his wristwatch, and next thing I knew he was off. I finished up a thought, and took my leave as well. The lunchroom was as austere as most of the Planet Building. About two-dozen people ate there, in suits of varying shades of gray or blue, and dresses hardly more colourful. I looked around for Kent, but he didn't seem to be eating lunch that day. I sat down with a young man, introducing myself as the new columnist. He said he was a photographer himself. His name was Olsen, but I could call him Jimmy.

Jimmy could hardly talk about anything but the Man of Steel. Superman did this. Superman did that. Did you know he once broke up a hurtling meteor that could have destroyed Metropolis? How about the time he stopped a robot cold by melting its interior mechanism with his X-Ray vision? Once Superman even replaced a damaged rail on a track and let the Express ride right over him! And did I know what? Jimmy Olsen was Superman's pal! Right about then this cool dame with red hair walks up and my soup went cold. "Jimmy, weren't you going to drive me to the old Maxwell place after lunch?"

"Oh, that's right Miss Lane. I'm ready if you are. Like you to meet Mr. ... Uh..."

But he had already been dragged off.

That was how I met Lois Lane, top reporter for the Daily Planet. I might as well not have been at the introduction. It wasn't the last time I saw Olsen led around by Miss Lane. In fact I think I saw him more often behind the wheel of that convertible Rambler of his than behind the lens of a camera.

I didn't see Superman that day, nor the next. It wasn't until the week following that I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye, a blur of blue and red, but at an elevation no person had any business to be. It was gone before I could look up, so at first I was inclined to think it had been a bird. An escaped parrot perhaps? A minute later I saw it again, this time clearly. It was Superman all right, flying out of a 12th Floor window and streaking off in the direction of the abandoned warehouse district.

It also wasn't until the second week on the job I was called up to Mr. White's office on the 12th Floor. It was actually elegant for the Planet Bldg. A spacious office with a carpet, a large wooden desk, a couple of comfortable chairs, and the ubiquitous green paneling between which slices of the commercial heart of Metropolis could be seen. The interview was a formality. In reality the editor-in-chief had little to say to a lowly columnist just started, he only needed to set eyes on me at least the once. My efforts so far had evidently met his expectations, and they would begin appearing in the coming week. Just about when it was obvious I'd be dismissed, in walked Lois Lane. "Have you met," White asked politely?

"I don't think so," answered Miss Lane. "Chief, I think we have a problem..."

"That'll be all," the Chief indicated to me. Gee, I thought. She gets to call him Chief to his face.

On the way out I almost bumped into Clark Kent, who seemed in a hurry. To my surprise he was headed neither to Mr. White's office nor to the elevator, but to a storeroom! I was sure it was a storeroom – it plainly said so on the door. But my elevator had come and in a moment I was on my way down to the lower floors where my kind toiled.

Could it have been just
too small for an office?

I only had a couple of other opportunities to visit the 12th Floor, in company of Jimmy Olsen. He was a good lad, who ate with the common herd in the lunchroom. More often than not, I found him nose buried in a mystery magazine, and sat down beside him. I don't think he had his own office, but he did have run of the upper floors. One time he brought me up to look at some photos he took, I asked him where Mr. Kent's office was and learned it was around the corner in another direction from the storeroom I had noted. I was able to duck out and peer into it, but it was just what it was supposed to be – a storage space. It was rather large for that sort of thing and didn't seem to be used to store anything much. More unusual was that it had a large curtained window, overlooking the street twelve floors below. I noticed it was wide open, the breeze fanning the curtain inward. Could it have been just too small to be an office for the senior staff?

By then my column was appearing daily. On my walk to and from work I noticed the open window of the storeroom twelve floors above. I don't think I ever saw it closed, then or later, but didn't have long to consider it odd. One afternoon I decided to try a diner down the block instead of eat in the lunchroom, and saw Superman again. Clearly he flew into the window of the 12th story storeroom. Why on Earth, I wondered, didn't he just fly into Perry White's office if he was on one of his mysterious assignments for the paper? Didn't he want to be seen? I resolved to ask Jimmy.

Superman, he said, came and went unpredictably. A ransom note might appear in the mail or a challenge be issued over the radio. Somehow the Man of Steel always knew and arrived when he was needed. Did Jimmy know about the store-room? Apparently not, but he supposed Superman had to get in and out of the building somehow. He didn't think Mr. White would like him crashing through the outside walls

all the time. Did Jimmy ever participate in Superman adventures? "Oh sure, all the time." Like? Jimmy talked, and I spent a very interesting lunch hour listening to the close calls and high points of being pals with a superhuman being from Krypton. What was the chance I might ever met Superman myself, I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. Nobody seemed to be able to contact Superman. He came and went, only he knew when or why.

Except Mr. Kent, said Jimmy. Mr. Kent had some means to contact Superman that he had never explained to Lois, or the Chief, or even to Jimmy. It was kind of funny, now that Jimmy thought of it. I resolved to ask Clark Kent.

He lifted the entire back
end by its rear bumper!

Before I could, however, matters took a turn I hadn't expected. I'd been working late and took an hour off for some beans and meatloaf. Returning to the Planet I was brought to a halt at the entrance by the sight of the Chief, Miss Lane, and Jimmy being forced into a dark car by a number of gangsters with ill-concealed guns. I hung back and watched the door shut on Jimmy's back. The car started up. Then, before I had much chance to think of what I was going to do about all of this, I heard a sound like generator whine changing pitch, and suddenly Superman dropped like a colossus on the Sidewalk, only ten steps in front of me. He strode quickly to the gray Chrysler and lifted the entire back end by its rear bumper! Only two words could possibly describe my excitement.

Holy. Cow.

The gunsels bumbled out of the car like so many circus clowns, falling over themselves to form a line of fire. They emptied their revolvers in a hail of bullets that bounced harmlessly off Superman's chest. One, I noticed, creased the car roof, leaving a trail of bright metal. Another spent round spat itself on the sidewalk near my shoes.

Suddenly it didn't seem altogether safe to be around the Man of Steel. It was all over, though. Superman bounced a pair of heads together, slammed another gunman against the side of the car, and chopped the last on the back of the neck. All the while Superman wore the most peculiar smile.

It was as though he knew it was all a harmless game, even if we didn't, and he bore no one ill will. Then he helped Miss Lane, Jimmy, and Mr. White out of the back seat of the abduction vehicle.



He brushed by me, and leaped into the air. I actually felt the fabric of his cape with one hand as he went by, and my heart slammed in my chest. For a moment I felt like a little girl in the presence of a teen idol. Did the presence of the Superman always have this effect, I wondered? I had to meet this man, to speak to him, and have him crook that beatific smile at me!

Mr.White was brushing himself off, as though soiled, and missing the one piece of lint there actually was. Miss Lane was staring into the air, as though she was as mesmerized as I by the departing speck of blue and red.

Jimmy came over to say, "Did you see that! Did you see that! Gosh, what a swell guy!"

It was as though he knew

it was all a harmless game, even if we didn't, and he bore no one ill will.

Yes, Jimmy, I saw it all. Was it always like this, I asked? No, sometimes Superman stayed long enough to ask if everyone were all right or to suggest we call the police right away. You never speak more than that? "Oh sure we do," Jimmy went on. "He comes to the Planet sometimes to plan things, or ask us favours. Other times he seems in more of a hurry, though he never says why."

Just then Clark Kent steps out of the door of the Planet, adjusting his already impeccable tie.

"Lois! Jimmy! Mr.White! Is everyone all right? What did I miss?"

"Oh, Clark," said the suddenly frigid Lane, rounding on him. "You only missed Superman. Again. You're never around when there's trouble."

Kent looked aside and spotted me a few feet away. "Nice to meet you again," he said, "though I wish it were under better circumstances. Were you a witness of the incident?"

"Yeah," I said, "I was right here when Superman swooped down right out of the blue. Do you think I might see Superman up close like that again, someday?"

"You never know," he said.

Then he gave me a warm smile I thought I'd seen before.

Of course. It was when he met me on my first day of work. So much had happened in the past few moments that it was hard to think back over such an immense period of time as the three weeks that had passed since I started at The Planet. Kent was husbanding the others through the entrance when I heard police sirens up the street. The thugs at my feet would soon be in lock-up. I called after Kent to ask if we could have a few words.

He looked a little perplexed at this.

"Yes... I suppose. But right now I'm rather busy, you understand."

Then he was gone inside. Having nowhere else to go myself, I followed him in a moment later. But I was headed to

my "office" and only saw the indicator over the bronze elevator door already crawling upward to twelve.

I didn't have that talk with Kent anytime soon. He was always busy, poking at his typewriter upstairs according to Jimmy, or away somewhere on unknown errands. I saw him go by my "office" door many times, not exactly rushing but covering ground with a determined pace that spoke of purpose. If I hadn't had a chance to speak with Kent again, though, I did see Superman on other occasions.

It was almost difficult to avoid him. Superman smothered a bomb in the lobby the Friday after the kidnapping attempt. Thursday next he was at The Planet to present an award for Good Citizenship in Mr.White's office, and most of the staff was invited to applaud from the hall outside. Four or five days later, Superman confronted a robot duplicate of himself that tried to rob the payroll. My favourite appearance of the Man of Steel was during my second month at The Planet, when (for charity) Superman actually played against the Metropolis football team in the parking lot. Kicking off to himself, catching his own forward passes, he won by a hundred-and-forty points to zero. Fortunately the game was only for one quarter.

After the parking lot game, Superman happened to pass my way. He tossed the ball to Jimmy, who was standing next to me. But then he did the most surprising thing. Superman winked at me and said "We meet again." Then it was up, up, and away, and I was left with Jimmy, who was predictably enthusing over the game ball. He looked at me, and suddenly pressed the pigskin into my hands. "Jeepers, you know what, I have enough trophies of Superman, why don't you keep this one? Maybe he was really throwing it to you, anyway."

As if. But I didn't turn down the ball.

I wish I had that ball now, but my doctor persuaded me that if I was ever to get over my obsessions it was best that I got rid of it. The last I saw of the football that had actually been thrown by Superman, it was in the hands of the very lucky young boy I gave it to. It might pay his college tuition someday.

When I finally had that talk with Kent, it was almost as though he were looking for me.

"Jimmy speaks well of you he began."

Kent looked a little awkward for a moment. He shrugged up his jacket and reached both hands into his pants pockets, then rocked on his heels. Then in a man-to-man voice he said,

"Sorry I couldn't find a minute for you earlier, but how can I help you?"

Was there a reason why he chose Metropolis to protect?

I wanted to ask about Superman, of course. Why did he seem so close to The Daily Planet, but no other paper? Was there a reason why he chose Metropolis to protect and not some other, equally worthy city? Did Kent have a special tie to

Superman, as some believed, that gave him alone the power to reach the Man of Steel in case of need?

Kent went awkward again.

"Why, I really don't know," he said. "I guess he can't be everywhere. I know he's saved the country, and even the entire world numerous times."

"Yes, I suppose that's so," I replied. "But according to Jimmy, whenever Superman is needed, you somehow get word to him. I don't suppose it's anything as mundane as a phone number, but maybe a ham radio whose frequency Superman's ear is attuned to? A secret signaling device you have in your watch, or in the glove compartment of your car? Or perhaps even a telepathic link?"

"Well, now," he said, "even if I did have some means to communicate with Superman, do you think it's something I could discuss with people? It isn't really like that anyway," he continued. "I just know that if I mention things in certain places... um... Superman seems to hear about it."

Kent sounded oh-so reasonable up to that point, but now I knew that behind that warm, manly smile he was concealing something.

Kent knew how to contact Superman all right. Not just be overheard when it was convenient. He had a point about not revealing such an important power, but I unreasonably felt he could trust me.

"Sorry," I said to Kent, "I really shouldn't be asking. I guess everyone would like to know how to contact Superman when they wanted, especially people who meant him harm."

"And people who want to hurt Superman's friends too, don't you think?" I agreed.

"Well, no harm done then," he said. "You know that whatever he does, Superman has your best interest in mind."

Superman had my best interest in mind. It was a sobering yet exhilarating thought. Kent and I shook hands and he was off. "I have to meet a Professor Pepperwinkle about a shrink ray," he called from the door. He flashed me his smile.

The next few weeks were very much of an anticlimax, I'm afraid. I wrote my daily columns and they appeared in print, day after day. Superman came and went too, but by chance I was never in the right place or at the right time to catch even a glimpse. It was becoming Fall in Metropolis.

When I moved here, I had pictured seasons more like back East, but the weather scarcely changed. I thought about how generic a big city that Metropolis was. It wasn't really like New York, with its rains and gray inheritances of another century standing all in rows like tombstones. Nor was it like Los Angeles quite, with that city's dazzling face, all angles and flat surfaces, slumbering under red tile sombreros in eternal noon. Metropolis was both and neither, as you liked. It's gashouses and factory sheds could be any city, but was curiously unable to be a home. Although my job went well enough, I was restless, unsatisfied.

I suppose that was why the idea came to me.

It took some doing, and for a time I thought I had put myself in serious jeopardy. Some of the people I had to make deals with don't like to be kidded.

But it all had to seem real, and it did because up to a point it was real.

No purpose in dwelling on how I made my preparations, just how I dealt with Mikey G. (otherwise known as The Liar), or what sort of offer I made him. Perhaps he really believed I could knock off Superman. Strange how gullible those who are adept at falsehood can themselves be.

My scheme swung into operation on a Monday, a day I never had use for in any case. When the others came in for work that morning, they found a reception waiting – armed gangsters. They waved each newcomer up against the lobby wall and told them to clam up. Before 9 a.m., almost the entire staff of The Planet was trembling with hands raised over their heads. I was among them of course. That was part of the plan.

Some of the people I had to make deals with don't like to be kidded.

Kent was absent, but I counted on that. He had a knack for avoiding this sort of pickle, and somebody had to fetch Superman.

I wasn't disappointed. It wasn't five-after when I heard the familiar swooping sound and Superman filled the doorway. When he saw the Planet employees all held at gunpoint, some in a state of funk close to total collapse, his smile left him. It was the first time I had seen Superman actually angry, and a shiver ran up and down my spine. This man wasn't just a helpful boy scout – he could be dangerous!

"Back off, Superman," ordered the gang leader. As I had suggested during the planning sessions, they didn't waste their ammunition trying to put the slug on the Man of Steel. The bullets had better use threatening the hostages, and that alone could keep Superman at bay.

"You can't stand there all day, holding your guns on those people, you know," said Superman.

He took a step forward and the chief hood waved his gun at Lois. "Mmm! Mmm!"

Superman dropped back. "All right then, what's your next step?"

We had it all worked out.

"You! You! You, and you!" the hood barked at Lois, Jimmy, Mr. White and myself. "Yer coming with us! Don't try to follow us Superman, or they get it! Got it!"

The smile came back on the Man of Steel's face, but it wasn't a friendly one.

He could be dangerous!

We were hustled through a door in the back of the lobby, through a service passage, and out another door that led into an alley. One of The Planet's delivery vans was gassed up and waiting, a thug at the wheel. In a moment, I and my fellow

hostages and my hired gangsters were racing down Central Blvd. at high speed. The top-heavy van nearly tipped as we took the corner onto Observatory Rd. at sixty, and twenty minutes later, as we hit the washboard surface of the old Rte. 6 to Smallville, a sudden rumble of wheels told me we were close to our destination. Of course, Superman was flying high above, following our every move with his telescopic vision. I had anticipated that.

The chairs we had been tied to were not particularly comfortable, but we were nearly at the end of this charade – so that didn't matter. Exactly as I'd hoped, Superman made a terrific entrance. He crashed through the brick wall of the old abandoned power station where we were held as though it were sponge toffee! I felt the electricity of his presence and was so mesmerized that I almost forgot that I was supposed to be in danger.

A voice from a dark corner of the room spoke. "Just a moment Superman, if you please." Mikey G. stepped out of the shadows, his large bulk elegantly clothed in a well tailored, pin-stripe suit.

"Last time I saw you, you were in Metropolis Penitentiary," said our rescuer. "Time off for good behavior I suppose?"

"No, good lawyers," said the criminal kingpin, his walrus mustache bristling with barely controlled annoyance. "I swore I'd get you for sending me up, Superman. You're walked right into our trap."

With a theatrical flourish, Mikey G. whipped a tarp from a floor-mounted object that bore a strong resemblance to one of those gizmos you drop a nickel into for a closer view of Niagara Falls. Actually, that's what it was ... but Mikey G. didn't know that.

"Behold! My kryptonite powered death ray canon! One blast from this will reduce the Man of Steel to a quaking blob of Jello!"

For a moment Superman's brows knitted together in concern. He looked intently at the mechanism of the "ray gun" for a moment, and a relieved grin broke out on his face. "Do your worst Mikey."

Of course, the cheap prop I had cobbled together didn't work. It was hard not to laugh at the succession of comical expressions that played over The Liar's face when he realized he'd been lied to.

Superman waltzed over and almost gently thumped him on the head with a fist that could bend horseshoes. Mikey the Liar collapsed to his knees and fell face forward, cushioned from serious harm by his multiple chins. The Man of Steel turned to the other gangsters, and demolished them just as easily. Then it was only a matter of snapping ropes to free us, and he asked, "Are you all right Lois, Mr. White, Jimmy..." and then Superman called me by my name! He smiled on me, bathing me in his benevolence just as he did his older friends!

Behold! My kryptonite powered death ray canon!

I had taken care to demand that the van be driven away as soon as our abductors pushed us out the back. With no other way to get us home, Superman flew us in pairs the entire forty miles back to Metropolis.

Mikey G. and his gang sang like canaries to the cops later, of course. But I had been careful to keep them in the dark. Dealing only with a crooked lawyer, they had no idea who was back of the plan to kidnap the Planet reporters and kill Superman.

It had been the perfect crime. I was radiant.

My state of mind didn't last long, that's the truth. The next day at work I was brought to a stop in the hall by the sound of sharp footsteps just behind me. It was Kent, and he had me pinned like a bug to a card. "I want a word with you," he said.

"Did you think Superman was so stupid he didn't see through that little charade yesterday? What point was there to holding up the entire staff of The Planet when all those criminals wanted in the first place was a few hostages? And why did they keep looking at you as though they needed to reassure themselves you were in the right place and wouldn't be harmed? You knew something from the start, didn't you?"

I tried to explain, but Kent couldn't be stopped.

"Then, at the power station, you were the only one who didn't seem surprised when Superman broke through the wall. That was suspicious enough, but who does Superman find is supposed to be behind the whole scheme? A second-rate mastermind whose usual capers involve stolen art and smuggling, not kidnapping or newly invented death rays. A death ray that didn't work, I might add. What was that 'kryptonite' fuel rod powering it? Was it an ordinary steel bearing roller from a printing press? You set Mikey G. up. Why?"

A second rate mastermind

Superman had seen through the whole set up and told Kent. What could I do but deny everything? As long as no one could prove I hired the Mikey the Liar, or faked the kryptonite ray, I was safe. The kryptonite... That reminded me of

something. How did Kent know the silvery rod of kryptonite was just a steel roller from one of The Planet's presses? Did Kent use x-ray vision to analyze the metal?

As it happened, Kent had taken his glasses off and was polishing them with a cloth handkerchief from his pocket. I looked at him hard. He suddenly noticed my scrutiny and put his glasses on again in a hurry. You look just like Superman, I said. It was noticeable even wearing the glasses, but since nobody seemed to question it, I gave it no thought. But just now, angry and with his glasses off, the resemblance was unmistakable.

"You are a fool," Kent said to me. "If I were Superman, why would I waste hours of every day in an office in The Daily Planet when I could be saving lives or stopping wars?"

I didn't know how to answer that.

Kent walked away from me with unmistakable finality, and we never spoke after that day.

At lunch I found Jimmy as usual with his nose in a magazine, absent-mindedly consuming a baloney sandwich. I asked him if he'd ever noticed that Superman and Kent looked alike. He thought about it a moment, and said he never had. Clark wore glasses. But Lois had sometimes suspected they were the same man. One would disappear when the other was around, and vice versa. Lois always came to her senses, though. Mr. Kent was such a timid man – reliable and intelligent to be sure, but far too timid to be the Man of Steel. Besides... why would Superman need to work? He could make diamonds by crushing coal in his bare hands.

I saw Superman from time to time, still.

He flew in and out of that 12th story room regularly, but his business was only with White, Miss Lane, or Jimmy. He passed me once on the street, carrying a floor safe that must have weighed half a ton, but he looked at me like dirt under his fingernails.

It occurred to me that if by chance Kent was Superman, it might not be the smartest thing to go around telling people.

The foul mood I sank into persisted right into Winter. If Fall in Metropolis was like no season in particular, Winter was worse in that it was cool, cloudy, and wet but not in the least like the transformation a Northern city like Cincinnati or Boston goes through when it snows. I began to find my work tedious, repetitive. I wasn't interested any more in poking fun at stuffed shirts, politicians, celebrity causes, hen-pecked husbands, popular fads, or TV quiz shows. I wanted to break new ground. Satirize something no one had thought of before. A superhero for instance...

Not the smartest thing to
go around telling people.

The words struck the page like a line of machine gun fire. Then another line, and another. The piece was writing itself. Long before three o'clock when the copy boy came around for our columns, I had finished what seemed at the time to be the most brilliant performance of my career. I handed it over to the boy with no qualms, expecting to see it set in Times Roman in the morning.

It wasn't. But I was on Perry White's carpet in the morning. What was I doing, biting the hand that feeds this paper I worked for, he shouted. Didn't I know how much good Superman did for Metropolis? What did Superman ever do to you to provoke a crude, scurrilous attack on his dignity by a third rate, venomous, muckraker with a broken down typewriter?

I wanted to explain, but in a moment of brutal candor I realized that first I'd have to explain it to myself. Last night that piece had seemed a masterpiece of satire, and next day I couldn't understand what had possessed me to write such a thing.

Well, I was fired of course. I didn't blame Mr. White one bit, though I would have appreciated a less robust vocabulary. I thought he was going to have a fit. Yet he was hale enough to practically fling me through his office door when he was done reaming me out. I left the 12th floor for the last time. Then, having cleaned the things out of my desk, I removed my tweed cap from its hook and walked the last mile.

On my way to the elevator I met Jimmy.

"Jeepers," he said, "I just heard. Perry wouldn't let anyone read the copy – what did you say to get fired?"

I said it was just something poking a little fun at Superman. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea.

"Golly no," he said. "People sometimes say I have screwy ideas, but that just doesn't sound funny at all."

My epitaph at The Planet. "A Humorist. R.I.P. Doesn't sound funny at all."

I saw Kent at the door on the way out. He just shook his head, and for a second I thought I saw pity in his eyes for someone gone so horribly wrong. I don't know if he was Superman or not. Probably not. He had the same strength of character. I'd thrown away any possibility of friendship with Kent as well as well as Superman, and too late I realized that one might have been as valuable to me as the other. The best I could hope now is that perhaps they didn't actively despise me.

I found work eventually. It wasn't easy to find another job as a journalist after it got around that I'd been fired from a prestigious paper like The Planet. I set my sights on smaller and smaller papers, until finally I found one that wasn't particular enough and took me on without asking for recommendations. The News, as you know dear reader, is the leading daily of Mayberry. It is also the only newspaper in Mayberry, if you don't count the one the coloured folk read.

The climate is hot and sultry, as befits a sleepy little town in the foothills of rural North Carolina. Everyone speaks in a Southern drawl but me, and wears a panama or straw hat instead of a fedora. But it's my new home, and will remain my home as long as Perry White has anything to say about it.

Pity in his eyes for someone gone so horribly wrong

I think I may learn to like it here, though. With Spring the Magnolias blossoms fill the air with perfume. Everyone is friendly here. The clerks know my needs in the stores, so I never have to ask. I've begun driving up to Mt. Pilot to see one of those Freudian analysts to resolve certain issues that I reluctantly came to believe cost me my last job. I'm determined not to let that happen again. But anything I see in the air in Mayberry is likely to be only a bird or a plane, and there are times I regret it.

(Dedicated to the only Superman I ever believed in,
George Reeves.)