

BEYOND THE CAPE OF SUPERHEROES

SUPERMAN

THE BIRTH OF SUPERMAN



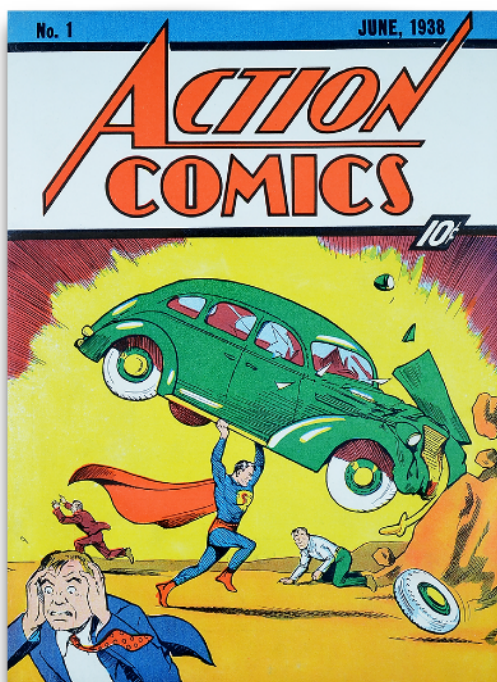
**"UP IN THE SKY, LOOK! IT'S A BIRD. IT'S A PLANE.
IT'S SUPERMAN!"**



The Man of Steel. The Last Son of Krypton. The Metropolis Marvel. In June of 1938, the world got its first and arguably greatest superhero when Superman smashed his way onto the scene in Action Comics #1. Written by Clevelanders Jerry Siegel and Joel Shuster, friends since high school, their idea for a new kind of hero, modeled after Doc Savage, sold to DC Comics for \$130 after years of being rejected by other companies. Faster than a speeding bullet, enthusiasm over Superman launched the Golden Age of Comic Books. More powerful than a locomotive, Superman has found himself in radio shows, animated features, television series, films and video games for over seventy-five years. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, he remains, despite now sharing the stage with an expansive gallery of superheroes, one of America's most recognizable and beloved pop culture icons.

Who is the man of steel?

Superman looks human. But that's about where his similarities with us end. How powerful is he? He's capable of surviving a direct thermonuclear explosion, as we learn in Frank Miller's masterpiece *The Dark Knight Returns*. If we take 1978's *Superman: The Movie* as canon, Superman can fly so fast he can go backward in time—a feat that would mean he can travel faster than the speed of light. Even if he can't fly quite that fast, he can certainly zip around the Earth in no time at all. He's also strong. As in, he can move planets. Planets. Perhaps needless to say, he also packs a serious wallop. Superman, in other words, really does put the 's' in 'super.'



In just over a dozen panels in *Look Magazine* in 1940, Siegel and Shuster have Superman capture Hitler and Stalin and hand-deliver them to the League of Nations, thereby ending WWII long before it would actually end. No doubt it was a cathartic piece for the sons of Jewish immigrants to write, but it does invite the question: why didn't Superman actually do that? Why does the world that Superman occupies still have genocidal atrocities?

The creators

Siegel and Shuster were both born in 1914, Shuster in July and Siegel in October. Both were shy young men – Shuster being the image of the bespectacled non-sporting youth – and they didn't have a wide circle of friends. Like Clark Kent, Siegel worked for a newspaper. The pair had little luck in selling their original stories to the pulps they loved, so self-publishing seemed like the way to go. Siegel had already published one of the earliest science fiction fanzines called *Cosmic Stories* by the time he met Shuster, so the pair happily collaborated on another fanzine called *Science Fiction*, subtitled 'The Advance Guard of Future Civilization'.

Wallop = un coup (familier) une beigne
Cathartic = cathartique, purgatif, purificateur

BEYOND THE CAPE OF SUPERHEROES

- 10 Only five issues of Science Fiction were ever produced, using the duplicator machine at Glenville High School. In the second issue Siegel published his own review of Philip Wylie's two-year-old novel *Gladiator*. It was in the pages of issue #3, published in January 1933, that the earliest version of Superman made his unsung appearance. In a story entitled 'The Reign of the Superman', Siegel and Shuster invented a bald, telepathic villain named 'the Superman'. This nascent version of their later superhero was not a physically powerful hero interested in doing the right thing. Instead, he was more like the eventual form of Superman's antagonist Lex Luthor. Siegel picked the name Superman from Friedrich Nietzsche's 1883 philosophical work *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in which the philosopher had introduced the concept of the *Übermensch* – translated as the 'overman' or 'superhuman'. The phrase had recurred in the title of the 1903 George Bernard Shaw play *Man and Superman*. Siegel wrote the story and Shuster provided the strong, simple illustrations, beginning a creative partnership that would bring them great fame, but little fortune.
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THE BIRTH OF SUPERMAN

INTRODUCTION

1. Who created Superman?
2. In what types of medias was he adapted?

WHO IS THE MAN OF STEEL?

3. Name some of his powers
4. Why would he fight nazis and communists?

THE CREATORS

5. What kind of people were the creators of Superman?
6. What was their first collaboration?
7. Explain the first appearance of « the Superman »

A SAD STORY FOR A SUPERHERO

8. What happened to Jerry Siegel in his childhood that may have influenced him in creating Superman?

A sad story For a superhero

Jerry Siegel may have had an altogether more personal reason for wishing to create a 'superman' who would fight on the side of right, one rooted in family tragedy. Siegel's father Mitchell (his original name was Michel, but he'd adopted the American name Michael – as on his death certificate – and was known as Mitchell to his family) was a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania who ran a secondhand clothes store in Cleveland. On the night of 2 June 1932 there was a robbery at the store and Siegel's father died. Although the police report suggested gunshots were fired, sixty-year-old Mitchell Siegel actually died of a heart attack. Some in the Siegel family believed Mitchell's death was murder, despite the coroner's report indicating there were 'no wounds'. Jerry Siegel's first thoughts about Superman came in the weeks immediately following his father's death: it is little wonder that the then-seventeen-year-old youth dreamt up a fantasy hero figure who could repel bullets, and who would fight for truth and justice against the criminal underworld. While the figure of the 'strongman' in myth and legend was a factor, it is perhaps all the more poignant that this mythically resonant superhero should have his origins on the night a lonely boy lost his father.