



The Superhero Book



THE ULTIMATE ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF COMIC-BOOK ICONS AND
HOLLYWOOD HEROES

Second Edition

GINA MISIROGLU



About the Author



Gina Misiroglu—also known by her code name, the Taskmistress—has authored or edited more than three dozen books in the popular culture, biography, American history, folklore, and women's studies genres. She is the editor of the three-volume reference work *American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History* (2009—winner of the 2010 RUSA Award for Outstanding Reference Source) and the *Encyclopedia of Women and American Popular Culture* (2012), which explores women's contributions to film, television, comics, music, fashion, and graphic art. Misiroglu was the co-editor of the first edition of *The Superhero Book* and its companion title *The Supervillain Book*, both of which received numerous accolades from the comics and film communities, including a Top Picks selection from SCOOP. She is a frequent speaker at the San Diego Comic Con, where she moderates panels for the Comics Arts Conference, a gathering of scholars who publish in the American studies and popular culture genres.

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Second Edition

GINA MISIROGLU



Detroit

The Superhero Book

The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Comic-Book Icons and Hollywood Heroes SECOND EDITION

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Andy Mangels (AM) is a best-selling author and co-author of more than a dozen books, including *Star Trek* and *Roswell* novels, and the books *Animation on DVD: The Ultimate Guide* (2003) and *Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Characters* (1995). He is an award-winning comic-book anthology editor and has written comics for almost two decades. He has also written thousands of articles for entertainment and lifestyle magazines and newspapers in the United States, England, and Italy, mostly about film and television.

Michael A. Martin (MAM)'s obsession with comics began more than three decades ago at a spinner rack in Santa Claus Lane, California. Years after this origin tale, Martin schlepped the funnies to the direct-sales market, first for Marvel Comics and later for Dark Horse Comics. In 1996, he began collaborating with Andy Mangels on scripts for Marvel's *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* comics. That same year Martin's solo original short fiction began appearing in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. He has co-authored (also with Mangels) several *Star Trek* novels and shorter pieces of *Star Trek* fiction for Pocket Books, as well as a trio of novels based on the late, lamented *Roswell* television series. He has written for *Star Trek Monthly*, Atlas Editions, *Dreamwatch*, Grolier Books, WildStorm, Platinum Studios, *Gobshite Quarterly*, and Gareth Stevens, Inc., for whom he has penned six *World Almanac Library of the States* nonfiction books.

Writing about action heroes wasn't **Adam McGovern (AMC)**'s choice; being named after one himself (Detective Adam Flint from the classic police drama *Naked City*) was his destiny. Since then he

fulfilled it by writing about comic books, cartoons, and other popular culture for such outlets as the *Village Voice*, *Yahoo! Internet Life* magazine, TotalTV Online, *Comic Book Artist*, and *The Jack Kirby Collector*, among many others. Corporate copywriting and nonprofit arts consulting help support his comic-book habit and prolong what was already a somewhat enduring adolescence.

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David Roach (DAR) is a comic-book illustrator and writer based in Wales, United Kingdom. In addition to his post as associate editor of the U.S.-based magazine *Comic Book Artist*, dedicated to the historic representation of comic-book characters, Roach has illustrated for several UK companies including 2000 AD, Panini, and Marvel. In the United States, he has drawn and inked heroes for DC Comics, Dark Horse Comics, Topps, and the gaming company Wizards of the Coast. Roach is co-editor of *The Warren Companion: The Definitive Compendium to the Great Comics of Warren Publishing* (2001) and the revised edition of the *Slings and Arrows Comic Guide* (2003).

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Introduction

Leaping over skyscrapers, running faster than an express train, springing great distances and heights, lifting and smashing tremendous weights, possessing an impenetrable skin—these are the amazing attributes which Superman, savior of the helpless and oppressed, avails himself of as he battles the forces of evil and injustice.

—Superman, *Action Comics*, 1938

Superhuman strength. Virtual invulnerability. Motivated to defend the world from evildoers. A secret identity. And a penchant for looking good in spandex and colorful tights. These are the traits that define the quintessential superhero: those characters whose impossible feats graced the pages of comic books during comics' Golden and Silver Ages. They are Batman, Captain America, Captain Marvel, Spider-Man, Superman, Wonder Woman, and dozens of others—with names such as Ant-Man, Daredevil, Hawkman, the Human Torch, the Spectre, Mr. Terrific, the Human Bomb, Phantom Lady, and Sub-Mariner—whose death-defying acts and altruistic motives have come to characterize heroism for generations of Americans.

Though these characters repeatedly saved planet Earth from the well-laid plans of supervillains, larger-than-life aliens, and Nazi infiltrators, by the mid-twentieth century heroes had evolved from the All-American boy fantasy to multidimensional characters who clearly reflected the dreams and fears of modern society. By the end of the twentieth century—with a war on terrorism underway and failings of federal institutions making daily headlines—the real world had become a darker place, necessitating a new kind of hero. Popular heroes of yesteryear were reinvented to meet the demands of a new age. Comic book readers witnessed the rise of the anti-hero, a fresh breed of brazen, gritty adventurer that includes the likes of Elektra, the Punisher, and Wolverine. Heroes who aren't typically defined as *superheroes*—Buffy, Hellboy, Sandman, and Spawn—became associated with the word because they possessed superhuman qualities and identified with their audiences in unique ways.

At this time, too, the superhero's presence in mass media became stronger than ever, with the Batman and Superman live-action film franchises of the 1980s preparing audiences for the entrée of superhero films like the *Spider-Man 1* saga and X-Men adventures, which consistently made worldwide top-grossing films lists. Mega-merchandising machines such as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Powerpuff Girls enjoyed previously unheard-of success, helping round out a burgeoning market filled with independents like the spunky neo-feminist Action Girl. Characters continued to show up on consumer products as varied as hair barrettes, lunchboxes, and cookie cutters, and they began to make new inroads into the video game, trading-card, and book markets. Such superheroes as Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, Wolverine, and the Avengers have appeared in the famous "Got Milk?" advertising campaigns, and Miller Lite beer commercials have mimicked the oft-stated Spider-Man credo with the slogan, "With great beer comes great responsibility."

But who exactly are these mask-wearing, cape-donning men and women? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Secret identities? Who are their arch-enemies? When and where did the characters first appear and how have they changed through the years? *The Superhero Book*—the ultimate A-Z compendium of everyone's favorite superheroes and their mythology, sidekicks, villains, love interests, superpowers, vulnerabilities, and modus operandi—answers these questions and more as it explores many of pop culture's favorite icons. This second edition promises a leaner and meaner overview of

character history and updates existing entries to include the latest happenings of America's myth overachievers. Within these pages lie hundreds of entries on superheroes both mainstream and counterculture, famous and forgotten, best and worst, including classics like Green Lantern and Plastic Man, cult favorites like The Rocketeer and Madman, and timeless entities like the X-Men. It includes modern favorites such as Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl and would-be superstars such as Kick-Ass. You'll be reminded why you love them (who wouldn't want to fly like Superman for just one day?); why they were chosen to save the world ("We shall call you Captain America, son! Because like you—America shall gain the strength and will to safeguard our shores"); what they do for their day jobs (world traveler Oliver Queen ... Hollywood star and America's sweetheart Linda Turner ... billionaire playboy Bruce Wayne ... college student and freelance photographer Peter Parker), and their very human *faux pas* (the Flash, he could outrun the wind, but as alter ego Barry Allen he was hard-pressed to show up for date on time!).

Because this encyclopedia is as much a reference on modern mythology as it is a chronicling of the superhero genre in America, the book discusses the cultural phenomenon of each character and its various incarnations in the popular culture. Themed topics for discussion include alternative superheroes, camp and comedy heroes, multiculturalism, robot heroes, superheroines, supernatural heroes, and superpatriots. Each significant era of the superhero is explored—the Golden Age (1938–1954); the Silver Age (1956–1969); the Bronze Age (1970–1980); the Late Bronze Age (1980–1984) and the Modern Age (1985–present)—in a new chapter following this introduction, providing the reader with a perspective of the hero over the course of the twentieth century and beyond. And creators, comic book companies, and merchandising efforts all take their rightful place in the history of hero-making.

Why do all this? The bottom line is that we need our heroes. Psychologist Carl Jung (*Man and His Symbols*, 1964) and myth-maker Joseph Campbell (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949) both explored society's need for heroes, though many prefer the edited version. Upon gazing at Batman and Robin approaching Gotham City in their Batcopter in *Batman: The Movie* (1966), Ordinary Joe said it best when he declared, "It gives a fella a good feeling to know they're up there doing their job." In a world not quite right, heroes provide a solution. Though scholars have long noted that superheroes fulfill our longing to honor the heroes of legend and myth, it really goes beyond that. They satisfy our "inner hero." Superheroes embody "the ancient longing of mankind for a mighty protector, a helper, guide or guardian angel who offers miraculous deliverance to mortals," observed Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs in their *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium* (1972). Frank Miller, artist extraordinaire of Daredevil, put it a bit differently when he said, "It's very comforting to know that there's a god-like figure going around making things right. That's a lot of what superheroes are about."

That's not all the outspoken Miller has had to say. Regarding the prospects for the superhero genre's health into the new millennium, Miller told the *Village Voice* in 2002, "The president talks incessantly about evil. I don't think melodrama is dead." Indeed, in the era of action-movie heroes winning governorships and military missions against opponents with designations like "Dr. Germ," comics have struck a chord again—even if nowadays they deal with gray skepticism about government motives as often as they deal in black-and-white portrayals of heroic firepower. Comics have emerged from an industry-wide sales slump since the first years of the new millennium, as current sales and hundreds of thousands of comic-con fans can attest to. Even though they were generating notice in prestigious quarters before then—with a Pulitzer Prize for Michael Chabon's novel about the comic-book medium's pioneers, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000), for example—the current cultural currency of blockbuster superhero films and widely covered events like Miller's *The Dark Knight Strikes*

Again series (2001–2002) show that the costumed variety of comic book still has a lot to tell America about the state of its soul.

Noted cartoonist Jules Feiffer once said that if superheroes joined the more numerous supervillains they would fill the skies like locusts. This truism prompts a note about selecting superheroes, particularly those created in the first half of the twentieth century: out of the tens of thousands of comic books that make up the Golden and Silver Ages, hundreds of them contain costumed heroes. Even following the strictest criteria of a superhero or superheroine—he or she wears a costume/mask and has special powers and/or a secret identity—a complete listing of every hero would be prohibitive. Therefore, the table of contents reflects the most diverse listing of American superheroes possible—those who are among the best loved, historically significant, or most representative of a type of hero.

As this revised edition makes clear, the superhero genre truly began with the debut of Superman in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938. But what exactly is a superhero? What made Superman such a revolutionary new creation that inspired an entire new genre of adventure fiction?

Contrary to popular belief, superpowers are not the essential element: Batman, for example, does not possess traditional superpowers such as flight or X-ray vision but rather relies on his highly developed intellectual skills to empower him; Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars* and the Doctor in *Doctor Who* have superhuman abilities, but they are science-fiction heroes, not superheroes. Some people use the word “superhero” to describe any kind of hero that seems larger than life, no matter what genre the character is in. To do so is to render the term “superhero” virtually meaningless. James Bond is not a superhero, nor is Robin Hood, the Lone Ranger, Sherlock Holmes, Lara Croft, or Indiana Jones—no matter how extraordinary their abilities may be.

In his book *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006), Peter Coogan, Ph.D., performed the invaluable service of defining just what a superhero is: “A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers—extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, powers, or origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is generally distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres (fantasy, science fiction, detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret.”

There can be variations on these criteria: the Hulk, for example, has a distinctive and iconic visual appearance rather than a superheroic costume. But Dr. Coogan’s three criteria—mission, powers, and identity—are the main factors in identifying superheroes and the ones I used in the heroes’ profiles within this book. Moreover, as he states, a superhero operates in the superhero genre, which includes such genre conventions as supervillains. The Lone Ranger may have a mask and a mission and be an extraordinary gunfighter, but he operates in the Western genre.

Following these criteria, *The Superhero Book* naturally eliminates entries for one-off or obscure characters, as well as those that would more precisely be defined as cowboys, magicians, detectives, spacemen, or jungle adventurers. However, this book does cover some major transitional figures, like Doc Savage and the Shadow, who preceded Superman and Batman and were highly influential on the genre and the superhero genre.

The ground gets muddier for the later heroes, those of the Bronze and Modern Ages, since they break away from the “strict criteria” that can easily be applied to the earlier heroes. Here, some artists

license has been applied to their selection. Many of these later protagonists possess qualities customarily considered non-heroic, or “anti-heroic,” their motivations for superheroic acts being not always selfless or clear. To further broaden the definition, they may not always wear a costume or have a dual identity, yet the popular culture considers them heroes primarily because there is a strong heroic identity associated with the character. Rather than argue whether certain borderline characters—such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer or the title characters in the TV show *Heroes*—fit the mold, the book chooses to include them and lets the reader draw his or her own conclusions.

These qualifiers aside, the goal of *The Superhero Book* is straightforward: to pay homage to the heroes who have, in whatever minor or major way, influenced our lives.

—Gina Misirog



An advent of the twentieth century and a clear marker of American popular culture, costume superheroes have achieved historic milestones within the last seventy-five years of American history. Much like in radio, film, and television, several key “ages” have defined comicbook history in general and the superhero genre specifically. Characterized as periods of artistic advancement and commercial success, the superhero ages are generally classified as the Golden Age (1938–1954), the Silver Age (1956–1969), the Bronze Age (1970–1980), the Late Bronze Age (1980–1984), and the Modern Age (1985–present).

Golden Age (1938–1954)

In the view of many readers, the superhero and the comic book are interchangeable, but historically the comic book came first.

THE FIRST COMIC BOOKS

Collections of newspaper comic strips and cartoons had been published as early as the late nineteenth century, printed on low-grade pulp paper in a variety of sizes and generally distributed as promotional items. The characters featured in these publications—*The Yellow Kid* and *The Katzenjammer Kids* were among the more popular early features—were almost entirely comical, earning the nicknames “the funnies” or “funny papers.” Dell Publishing introduced *The Funnies*, which resembled a Sunday newspaper comics section, in 1929. An anthology of Sunday newspaper strips, *Famous Funnies #1* debuted as a monthly periodical in May 1934, and this is acknowledged as the precursor to the conventional comic book (although this series was preceded a year earlier by two similarly formatted one-shots, *Funnies on Parade* and *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics*).

Pulp magazines catered to readers craving adventure and thrills. The “pulp,” collections of prose short stories published on pulp paper with an illustrated (usually painted) cover image, emerged in the early twentieth century and grew to tremendous popularity, particularly in the 1920s through the 1940s. From anthologies like *Weird Tales* to solo titles featuring mysterious heroes like *The Shadow* (whose pulp series lasted an astounding 326 issues from 1931 to 1949), the pulps offered breathtaking action and a chilling suspense.

It was only a matter of time before these two modes of popular culture converged. Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a retired soldier and author of pulp stories in the late 1920s and early 1930s, started his own publishing house in 1935—National Allied Publications—and in February of that year released *New Fun* #1, the first comic-book series exclusively consisting of new material; in this case, comic strips. Adventure-oriented comics with new material followed, most notably *Detective Comics* #1, released in March 1937 by Wheeler-Nicholson and his new partners, Harry Donenfeld and Jack Liebowitz, who both then took over the company, renaming it National Comics—even though it was (and still is) commonly called DC.

THE COMING OF THE SUPERHERO

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, there were notable and popular fictional characters that foreshadowed and inspired the superheroes to come: Zorro in prose and on film, Doc Savage in pulp magazines, the Shadow in the pulps and on radio, the Green Hornet on radio, and the Phantom in a newspaper comic strip. The first masked crime fighter in comic books was the Clock, whom Centaur Publications introduced in 1936. But it was two young men from Cleveland who created the character who truly launched the superhero genre.

DC Comics introduced the first costumed superhero, Superman, in *Action Comics* #1 (June 1938). Superman's creators, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, had unsuccessfully tried to sell the series to newspaper syndicates as a daily strip. DC took an enormous risk in 1938 by publishing the untried character, given the depressed economic climate of the day. Siegel and Shuster's unwavering faith in the superpowered champion never faltered, and readers of the day reciprocated the creators' enthusiasm. *Action* #1 sold phenomenally well; with subsequent issues its circulation figures were boosted to meet reader demand. Superman, the first superhero, was a hit.

At the time, however, Superman was not labeled or marketed as a "superhero," even though he perfectly personified the term as it is defined by many comic-book scholars today: a heroic character with an altruistic mission, who possesses superpowers, wears a defining costume, and functions in the "real world" in his or her alter ego. According to author Mike Benton, in his book *Superhero Comics of the Golden Age: The Illustrated History* (1992): "Although the term 'superhero' was used as early as 1917 to describe a public figure of great talents or accomplishments, the early comic book heroes of the 1940s were usually referred to by their creators as 'costumed characters' or as 'long-underwear' or 'union-suit heroes.'" They were also called "mystery men." Nonetheless, the superhero had been established and was about to multiply in number through American popular culture.

IN SUPERMAN'S FOOTSTEPS

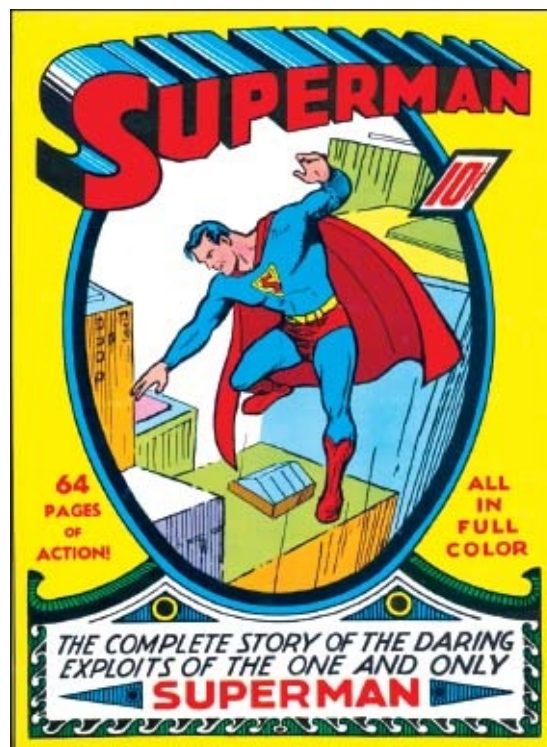
Encouraged by Superman's success, DC introduced the Crimson Avenger in *Detective* #20 (October 1938), the Sandman in *New York World's Fair Comics* #1 (April 1939), and Batman in *Detective* #21 (May 1939). It published *Superman* #1, spinning off the "Man of Steel" into his own solo series, in the summer of 1939.

Victor Fox was an accountant for DC Comics who knew a good thing when he saw it. After witnessing the profits generated by Superman in *Action*, Fox quit his day job and started his own publishing company, Fox Features Syndicate. The overly ambitious Fox was sued by his former employer.

upon the May 1939 release of *Wonder Comics* #1, which featured “the daring, superhuman exploits” of Wonder Man, a superpowered character who was created by Will Eisner and was too close to Superman for DC’s comfort. Wonder Man did not return for a second appearance, but Fox continued to publish comics, introducing the Flame, the Green Mask, and the Blue Beetle.

Entrepreneurs other than Fox also took notice of the success of Superman, and comic-book publishers—from talented visionaries to fly-by-night shysters—sprouted up instantly, with a flood of new “long-underwear heroes” spilling forth, including Lev Gleason Publications’ Silver Streak; Quality Comics Group’s Doll Man; Brookwood Publications’ Shock Gibson; Centaur Publications’ Amazing Man, the Arrow, the Iron Skull, and the Fantom of the Fair; and MLJ Publications’ the Wizard.

A publisher that would later become DC’s chief competitor entered the field in November 1939: Timely Comics. Its first superheroes—the first Human Torch, the Sub-Mariner, and the original Angel—premiered that month in an anthology that bore the eventual name of the company: *Marvel Comics* #1.



Superman #1 © 1939 DC Comics. (Cover art by Joe Shuster.)

Comic books were the perfect entertainment form for Great Depression audiences: their heroic, larger-than-life characters stirred the demoralized masses, and the very format of the magazines themselves—usually sixty-four pages of original material for a mere dime—was a bargain during those times of economic hardship.

THE SUPERHERO EXPLOSION

The years 1940 and 1941 heralded an eruption of new comic-book superheroes. Included among their legion: DC’s the Flash, Hawkman, the Spectre, Hourman, Dr. Fate, Green Lantern, the Atom, Starman, Green Arrow, and Aquaman; Fawcett Publications’ Spy Smasher, Bulletman, Ibis the Invincible, and the “World’s Mightiest Mortal,” Captain Marvel; plus Cat-Man, Blue Bolt, the Black Terror, Hydroman, the Ray, Plastic Man, Midnight, the Human Bomb, Magno (the Magnetic Man), Daredevil, the Black Hood, the Comet, and Will Eisner’s the Spirit (who starred in a comic supplement appearing in newspapers).

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