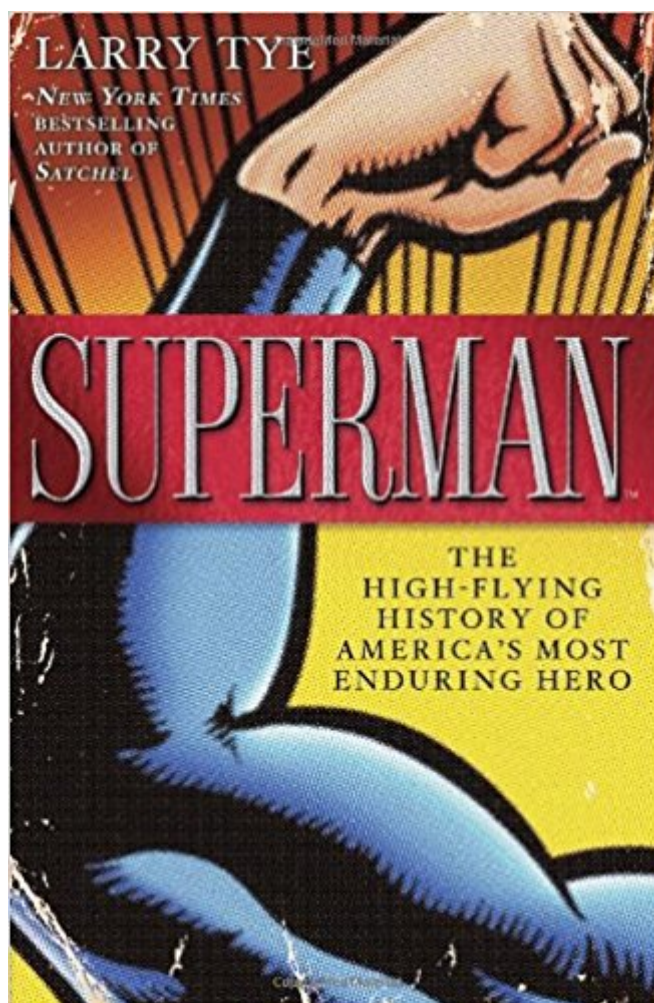


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# Superman: The High-Flying History Of America's Most Enduring Hero



## Synopsis

Seventy-five years after he came to life, Superman remains one of America's most adored and enduring heroes. Now Larry Tye, the prize-winning journalist and New York Times bestselling author of *Satchel*, has written the first full-fledged history not just of the Man of Steel but of the creators, designers, owners, and performers who made him the icon he is today. Legions of fans from Boston to Buenos Aires can recite the story of the child born Kal-El, scion of the doomed planet Krypton, who was rocketed to Earth as an infant, raised by humble Kansas farmers, and rechristened Clark Kent. Known to law-abiders and evildoers alike as Superman, he was destined to become the invincible champion of all that is good and just—and a star in every medium from comic books and comic strips to radio, TV, and film. But behind the high-flying legend lies a true-to-life saga every bit as compelling, one that begins not in the far reaches of outer space but in the middle of America's heartland. During the depths of the Great Depression, Jerry Siegel was a shy, awkward teenager in Cleveland. Raised on adventure tales and robbed of his father at a young age, Jerry dreamed of a hero for a boy and a world that desperately needed one. Together with neighborhood chum and kindred spirit Joe Shuster, young Siegel conjured a human-sized god who was everything his creators yearned to be: handsome, stalwart, and brave, able to protect the innocent, punish the wicked, save the day, and win the girl. It was on Superman's muscle-bound back that the comic book and the very idea of the superhero took flight. Tye chronicles the adventures of the men and women who kept Siegel and Shuster's "Man of Tomorrow" aloft and vitally alive through seven decades and counting. Here are the savvy publishers and visionary writers and artists of comics' Golden Age who ushered the red-and-blue-clad titan through changing eras and evolving incarnations; and the actors—including George Reeves and Christopher Reeve—who brought the Man of Steel to life on screen, only to succumb themselves to all-too-human tragedy in the mortal world. Here too is the poignant and compelling history of Siegel and Shuster's lifelong struggle for the recognition and rewards rightly due to the architects of a genuine cultural phenomenon. From two-fisted crimebuster to fiber-patriot, social crusader to spiritual savior, Superman—perhaps like no other mythical character before or since—has evolved in a way that offers a Rorschach test of his times and our aspirations. In this deftly realized appreciation, Larry Tye reveals a portrait of America over seventy years through the lens of that otherworldly hero who continues to embody our best selves. Praise for Superman

“Engaging, fun, inspiring—like the Man of Steel.”—The Huffington Post

“Powerful . . . wonderfully readable.”—The Plain Dealer

“A

story as American as Superman himself . . . The best origin story pulsing through Superman is not the one about the Krypton-to-Kansas alien baby, but rather the one about the superhero's mortal and sometimes star-crossed creators.

- The Washington Post
- "Fun, enlightening pop-cultural history."
- Kirkus Reviews
- "A rich history full of lively heroes and villains; much like a comic book. Essential for Superman fans."
- Library Journal (starred review)
- "[A] comprehensive, definitive history."
- Publishers Weekly

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A Letter from Author Larry Tye Larry Tye's previous books include Home Lands, Rising from the Rails, The Father of Spin, and the bestselling Satchel: The Life and Times of an American Legend. What does America's choice of heroes say about them and about us? What better way to understand modern-day heroes, I thought, than to look at Superman, who tapped into the American psyche more effectively than anyone and has lasted longer than all of them. I had grown up reading Superman comics and Superman remains comfort food for my spirit, but there was clearly a serious story here. To understand why the Man of Tomorrow is as popular today as in my boyhood I did what any journalist would: I interviewed hundreds of historians, clerics, and psychologists. I read the unpublished memoirs of Jerry Siegel and Jack Liebowitz, Superman's creator and patron. I reviewed yellowing coroner's reports on George Reeves, the TV Man of Steel. I began by worrying if I would have anything new to say. I ended by

worrying how to fit into a manuscript all I have to say on this hero who is as much a part of our communal DNA as Huckleberry Finn. What surprised me? For starters, there was the wrenching story of his nurturing at the hands of a parade of young creators yearning for their own absent fathers. The first was Jerry Siegel, a child of Lithuanian immigrants who was devastated when his dad died during a robbery. While there was no bringing back his father, Jerry Siegel did bring to life a hero able not just to run fast and jump high but to fend off a robber. Who would publish this fanciful tale? How about Jack Liebowitz, a hard-headed comic-book entrepreneur whose own dad died just after he was born and who needed a champion? Not just Superman but his rivals, too, were more than they seemed. Superman stood up to Hitler, Stalin, and the Ku Klux Klan long before America did. And even his most fervent fans may not know this about the Man of Steel: He is Jewish. Superman's enduring power starts with the simplicity of his story. Little Orphan Annie and Oliver Twist remind us how compelling a foundling's tale can be, and Superman, the sole survivor of a doomed planet, is a super-foundling. The love triangle connecting Clark Kent, Lois Lane, and Superman has a side for everyone, whether you are the boy who can't get the girl, the girl pursued by the wrong boy, or the conflicted hero. And he was not just any hero, but one with the very powers we would have: the strength to lift planets, the speed to outrun a locomotive, the gift of flight. Superpowers, however, are just half the equation. More essential is knowing what to do with them, and nobody has a more instinctual sense than Superman of right and wrong. He sweeps in to solve our problems, no thank-you needed. He descended from the heavens to help us discover our humanity. Superman has always embodied our best selves and our collective aspirations. The more jaded the era, the more we have been lured back to his elemental familiarity.

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“A story as American as Superman himself . . . The best origin story pulsing through Superman is not the one about the Krypton-to-Kansas alien baby, but rather the one about the superhero's mortal and sometimes star-crossed creators.”—The Washington Post  
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“Action and adventure . . . comedy . . . tragedy . . . mythology . . . Larry Tye captures it all! As complete a history of the Man of Steel as ever

published, this book is a deeply documented yet anecdotally told tale that transports us from the bedroom of a daydreaming teenager in 1930's Cleveland, Ohio, to the collapsing towers of the planet Krypton, from the wheatfields of middle America to the hearts of every American, with a story that is entertaining, revealing, and shocking, yet crammed with historical information. If you liked reading *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, wait till you read Larry Tye's true story behind it all!

•Michael Uslan, author of *The Boy Who Loved Batman* and executive producer of seven Batman movies

"I only wish I had the good fortune of reading Larry Tye's book before I made *Superman*, the problem being that if I had, then the motion picture part of *Superman's* history would not have been in Mr. Tye's book. Having said that, the reason I found Tye's book incredibly informative is his sense of my bible in making the film—that is, verisimilitude. Reality overcame everything."

•Richard Donner, director of *Superman*

Superman have been my favorite character in magazines and movies in the big screen and shows in TV. He remember me my childhood and how much I enjoy his magazines. I belong to the 1950 TV was in black and white the George Reeve and Christopher Reeves were the actors. I take my daughters to see superman the movie and now my grand children are the new fans. In regard to this book that represent so much information regarding the jerry and joe creators of superman and the litigation sue against dc and WB regarding the rights of the family writers. I recommend this book to science fiction fans special superman, batman and others characters like the flash and spider man. Also for everybody who likes to read, see movies regarding hero's and fantasy and the people who wants to know about superman. As a old school superman fan I waiting for JL and the man of steel #2. Buy this book and enjoy you will not regret.

This painstaking and dispassionate history of how Superman came to be, in all the media and product incarnations, tells a riveting, exhaustive American story. While Superman's origins were in the Jewish immigrant and son-of-immigrant slice of America, his story is universal: being an Other, a stranger in a strange land with invisible powers that are always used for good. If you are not interested in Superman or grew up without Superman, Batman, Spiderman, or any other superheroes in your consciousness, don't bother reading this book; but if you sneaked comic books passed adults, tied a towel around your neck to run around playing, and you want some insight into a large chunk of American and kid DNA, read it and enjoy. Well written, well researched.

I have to say this book really surprised me. I bought by accident and had no intent to read it myself but gave it a shot. In a few pages I was hooked. It is Chuck full of very interesting elements. I do remember superman on TV but never read comics so why would this draw me in, the story is really interesting how different superman personas were strategized over the years.

As a 7 year old growing up in rural Colombia I obsessed about Superman. He was all I wished to be: strong, noble and beloved by all. Instead of enslaving all of humanity as many would have done in his place, Supes dedicated himself to serving others and even seemed to enjoy playing the role of nerdish weakling Clark Kent (I, as all children, assumed that Kent was the me that was and Superman was the me that could be, just waiting under my shirt). The TV cartoons were the highlight of my week (in black and white, natch and sometimes almost undecipherable due to poor signal). The comic books were hard to come by- they could only be had when someone traveled to larger towns over unpaved roads. They were the wonderful Editorial Novaro Mexican editions, which in my humble view were lovelier than the US editions. One never gets over a first love, and mine was Superman, although I empathized more with Superboy who after all also lived in a small town with his (step-) parents and had a crush on lovely redhead Lana Lang. Don't even get me started on the Legion of Superheroes. I still recall the large size Legion v. Mordru special where Superboy gets to kiss the beautiful (although blue-tinged) Phantom Girl and then both of them and some of their colleagues bury Mordru under a huge diamond. Don't tell me that wouldn't be great. Anyway, I love books about Superman. It becomes harder for these books to say things we (faithful, true-blue) Superman fanboys don't know or expect, so there's no way there won't be overlap with other books, such as Jake Rossen's "Superman v. Hollywood", or Gerard Jones's "Men of Tomorrow" or David Hadju's "The Ten Cent Plague". There's no way the author won't make mistakes or omissions that we will notice gleefully, like assuming that all super-creatures (including Titano and Streaky) originate from Krypton, or that there's no crystal Kryptonite. But we still enjoy these books, particularly when, as in this case, there is so much love and respect for Superman and the people who created him and brought him to us. Superman stands aside from the sordidness of business dealings and the grabbiness of executives and of his creators and their relatives, from the tacky merchandising and the failed movies and weak storylines, from the current prostration of the comic book business. From the talk about synergies and multiple platforms. He stands inside many of us, untouched and pristine, as we were in our childhood.

This book provided a dizzying array of detail regarding the inspiration, creation, development, and

evolution of the world's first and greatest superhero. Each chapter deals with a particular time period in the development of the cultural icon known as Superman, from the inspiration of his creators, to the real world economic, political, and moral affect of the character on, not only the American, but world psyche and zeitgeist. Author, Larry Tye does an incredible job of distilling the depth of the information necessary to convey the most central aspects of the character that have allowed him to endure for 75 years, while also providing new insight for hardcore fans who have a near encyclopedic knowledge of the Man of Steel. The book is easy and engaging and definitely worth a read for pop culture history buffs, comic book enthusiasts, Superman fanatics, or the casual reader.

I grew up on "Adventures of Superman" with George Reeves and read comics in the late 50's and early 60's. I own the TV series and two movie serials and have always been a fan. Have watched the Reeve movies and most recent reboots. I had not kept up with all of the updates and variations that have occurred in the world of Superman. This book is a very good history of the character giving how all of the formats tied in with each other or in some cases didn't until a later time when there was more reinvention of his history and powers or the villains or his "costars". The only reason I didn't rate this with five stars is that it wasn't as fast a read as I thought it would be but I was still very pleased with it. Not a kids' book in the way it is handled.

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