



AGE OF TV HEROES

JASON HOFIUS
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A Comic Book-to-TV Hero

Timeline



When the comic book superhero first appeared in the late 1930s, a completely new genre in entertainment was born. Superman came first, then Batman, Captain Marvel, Captain America, Wonder Woman and scores of other early costumed crimefighters. The colorful characters and straightforward ways they dealt with evildoers made them immediately popular with young readers.

Similar heroic characters like The Lone Ranger, Zorro and Dick Tracy were already popular in radio, pulp novels and newspapers respectively, but it wasn't long before leading comic heroes made their way into the bigger spotlight. The exploits of Superman and Batman were adapted into all manner of media for public consumption, including radio shows and newspaper strips and even a series of striking animated theatrical shorts from Fleischer Studios for Superman.

Comic heroes made their first live-action appearances starting in 1941, with *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, a theatrical chapter play series (now referred to as "serials") from Republic Pictures. *Batman* (1943 and 1949), *Captain America* (1944) and *Superman* (1948 and 1950) soon followed with popular theatrical chapter series of their own.

But after those efforts, it was time for the new phenomenon of television to pick up and build upon the superhero trend. From the time television was first generally available to families, superheroes, in one form or another, populated the airwaves to bring a little more excitement to young viewers' days. Whether flying, jumping, crawling, raging or just moving really, really fast, they've been on hand for over fifty years to help clean up the evil intentions of all from common street thugs to maniacs trying to take over the planet.

For this timeline, and indeed for the rest of the book, we are centering our coverage on heroes that had their roots in comic books. While we remain huge fans of characters like Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon and many others up to the current hit *Heroes*, we wanted to keep the scope of our coverage limited mainly to those super individuals who inspired our imaginations the most—the ones who came from comic books.

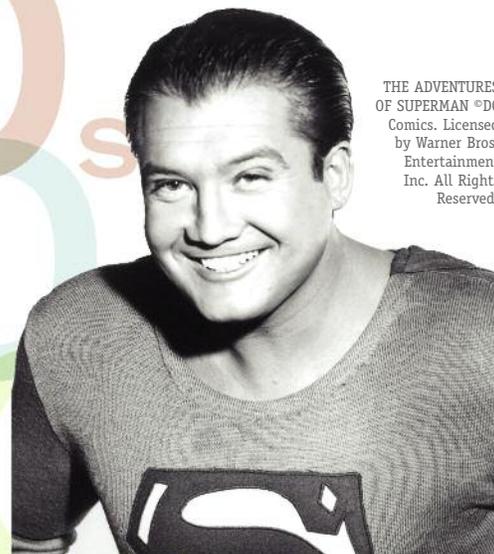
In this timeline we are presenting a very brief description of known titles that have been created for North American TV. Many of the shows in this section also have their own detailed entries later in the book. We have made note as to whether or not each title has been made available on home video, be that VHS, DVD or LaserDisc.

The 1950s

This decade saw many American families purchase their very first television sets. It was only fitting then, that the original comic book hero should also have the first comic-based weekly TV program. *Adventures of Superman* proved to be a long-lasting series that is still fondly remembered.

Adventures of Superman - 1952

The premiere comic book adaptation, ABC's *Adventures of Superman* starred George Reeves as Superman, while Phyllis Coates, and then Noel Neill, starred as Lois Lane. Lasting six seasons and becoming one of the first programs to be filmed in both black-and-white and then color, *Superman* was a tremendous hit and set a path for countless future comic book adaptations. The famous character created by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel would go on to star in three more major weekly television series. All six seasons of *Adventures of Superman* have been released on DVD. *Superman* is more fully covered in its own chapter, starting on page 24.



THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN © DC Comics. Licensed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The legendary George Reeves as TV's first Man of Steel.

Sheena, Queen of the Jungle - 1955

The character of Sheena is lauded as the first major female comic book heroine. Her comic series debuted in early 1942, slightly before the first appearance of Wonder Woman. This early Sheena television series by Nassour Studios was only the second live-action comic TV adaptation, following *Adventures of Superman*. But it did not prove as popular as the Man of Steel and lasted only a single season from 1955 to 1956. Chosen to play Sheena was magazine cover model and actress Irish McCalla. Another attempt to bring Sheena to life on television was undertaken in the year 2000. Episodes of this '50s version of *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* have been released on various budget DVD labels.



Stunning Varga Girl model and actress, Irish McCalla made the perfect Sheena.

PILOTS

The Adventures of Superpup - 1958

A spin-off of Superman intended for the youngest crowd, this full-color episode incorporated live-action actors in giant, semi-animated dog head masks. The premise did not make it past the pilot stage. This very different production has been released as part of a fourteen-disc *Superman* DVD set.



Bark Bent (Billy Curtis) and Pamela Poodle (Ruth Delfino). Bark Bent (Billy Curtis) at his desk at *The Daily Planet*.

The 1960s

This decade was nearly void of any televised comic book heroes, except for the iconic *Batman* series. Given the heavy shift in culture and attitudes over the course of the sixties, not to mention the changeover from black-and-white programming to full-color, it's surprising viewers weren't treated to many more comic book heroes and heroines.



The Caped Crusaders (Adam West and Burt Ward) in the thick of it again!



Yvonne Craig as the mysterious Batgirl, seen here in her pilot film.

Batman - 1966

The wildly popular *Batman* series was the first comic adaptation to be done completely in color. It lasted three seasons and due to airing several times a week, racked up a count of an amazing 120 episodes. *Batman* has not been commercially released on home video. *Batman* has its own expanded chapter, beginning on page 42.

PILOTS

The Adventures of Superboy - 1961

The first look at bringing Superboy to television came shortly after the end of *Adventures of Superman*. The pilot was directed by George Blair and written by Vernon Clark and Whitney Ellsworth. A solid and entertaining pilot, it was never picked up nor screened for the public. This was unfortunate as it had a lot going for it, including a solid cast and the participation of a number of people involved with the previous Superman series, including Blair and Ellsworth. More details can be found in the Superman chapter, starting on page 24.

Batgirl - 1967

With the popularity of *Batman*, producer William Dozier decided to try bringing another of the Bat-family to TV. A short pilot/presentation film was done with Yvonne Craig in the lead role of Barbara Gordon/Batgirl, supported by *Batman* stars Adam West (Batman), Burt Ward (Robin) and Neil Hamilton (Barbara's Father, Commissioner Gordon). After introducing the audience to the character and her origins, the pilot included an action set piece to demonstrate Craig's abilities on film. While this short has never been aired for the public, and *Batgirl* was never developed as its own series, the character was successfully incorporated into the third and final season of *Batman*. See more in the *Batman* chapter, starting on page 42.

Wonder Woman - 1967

Also developed in 1967 by *Batman*'s William Dozier was this quick pilot/presentation film for *Wonder Woman*. This was the first time the character was ever seen on film, although in a very different form than that of her comic counterpart. Lasting about six minutes, the pilot focused on Diana Prince's suburban angst and her Mother's wishes for her to settle down with a man. Ellie Wood Walker starred as Diana Prince/Wonder Woman, while Linda Harrison appeared as the way Prince saw herself in the mirror. The pilot was not picked up and it has not been screened for the public. More information about this pilot can be found in the *Wonder Woman* chapter, starting on page 70.

The 1970s

The 1970s was simply *the* time to be a comic and television fan. More projects were brought to the small screen here than at any other time. Beginning with the first ever live-action TV appearance of *Wonder Woman* in March, 1974 and ending with *Captain America* in November, 1979, the vast number of comic adaptations in the 1970s is incredible. For whatever reasons, superheroes were on everyone's minds at this time, and fans got to enjoy the results.

Wonder Woman - 1974

Wonder Woman appeared as a telefilm on March 12, 1974 starring Cathy Lee Crosby in the title role. Many people associated with the original *Star Trek* series worked on this production, including writers John D.F. Black and Margaret Armen as well as director Vincent McEveety. Although this version of *Wonder Woman* did not continue, another attempt at bringing the character to life was completed late in the following year. This pilot is shown on television once in a while, but it has not been made available on home video. Please see the *Wonder Woman* chapter, starting on page 70 for more details on this original telefilm.

The Electric Company - 1974

The first Marvel character to appear in a live-action series was Spider-Man in a series of short presentations on the PBS production, *The Electric Company*. Dancer/performer Danny Seagren portrayed the wall-crawler, even though he never spoke. Spider-Man's lines were presented as on-screen dialogue, in order to help children with reading comprehension. The Spider-Man segments appeared on *The Electric Company* from mid-1974 through 1977 when the program ended. Approximately 30 segments were produced. A handful of the Spider-Man skits have been released on *Electric Company* compilation DVD sets. For more information on this version of Spider-Man, see the hero's full chapter, starting on page 88.

Shazam! - 1975

For Saturday morning viewers, *Shazam!* was created in 1975 and it ran for two seasons with years of reruns. It, along with *Isis*, an original character created for television, was the only live-action superhero program done outside of primetime in the decade. Only the pilot episode has been released on DVD as part of Warner Bros. 50th Anniversary celebration. It was made available as an on-pack promotion in 2005 for purchasing the third season of *Wonder Woman*. Page 60 provides more background on the *Shazam!* production.



Spider-Man (Danny Seagren) snags Luis Avalos, and scores of kids, on *The Electric Company*.



Jackson Bostwick leaps into action as Captain Marvel!
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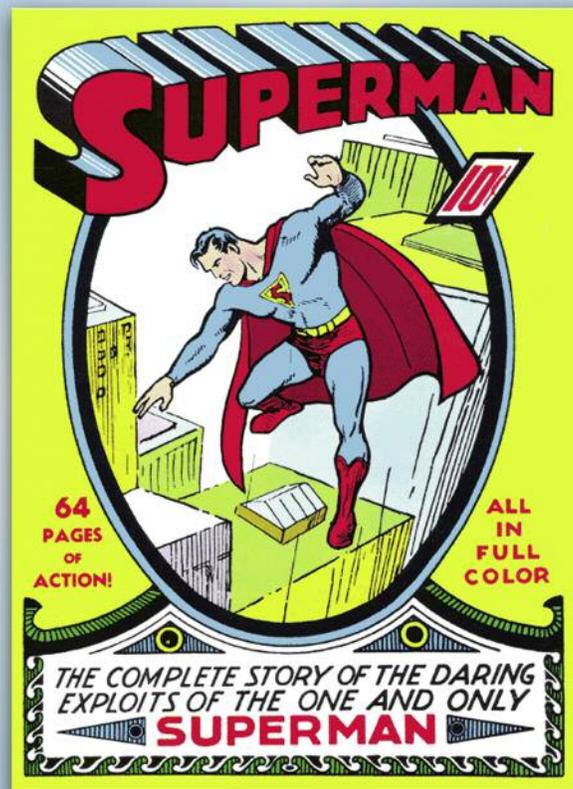
THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

Superman was originally conceived in the summer of 1933 by writer Jerome Siegel and artist Joseph Shuster, two lifelong friends from Cleveland, Ohio. After years of fine tuning and pitches to various other publishers, the pair finally sold their hero to Detective Comics Inc. (DC Comics) in 1938. Once the character made his debut in *Action Comics* #1, the pop culture world would never forget the word “superhero”—a genre basically named after him. The Man of Steel’s success came immediately and millions of his comics have since been sold. He’s one of the great merchandising properties of the twentieth century, becoming the first comic book character to successfully cross into every major medium: newspapers, television, radio, cartoons, motion pictures and beyond. Although the character has slightly evolved over his seventy years of existence in the public consciousness, Superman remains not only one of the most

identifiable characters throughout the world, but one of the **25** most beloved and endearing icons in all fiction.

Superman’s story is undoubtedly one of the greatest contributions to modern day mythology from the world of comic books. At its finest, his is a tale full of responsibility, integrity, and wonderment—one that shows us that we all possess the inner strength to be true to ourselves and those around us. In *Superman* #1 (1939), Jerry Siegel defined the character as “Superman—Champion of the oppressed, the physical marvel who has sworn to devote his existence to helping those in need!”

Within the comics, Superman was born as Kal-El on the planet Krypton to his mother Lara and his scientist father Jor-El. Upon discovering the imminent destruction of their world, Jor-El places his only son into a small spacecraft that will take him to Earth, and thus give his infant a chance to live a full life. When the child lands, he is



Superman #1. ©1939 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

A young reader engaged by *Superman* #19 (Nov./Dec. 1942).



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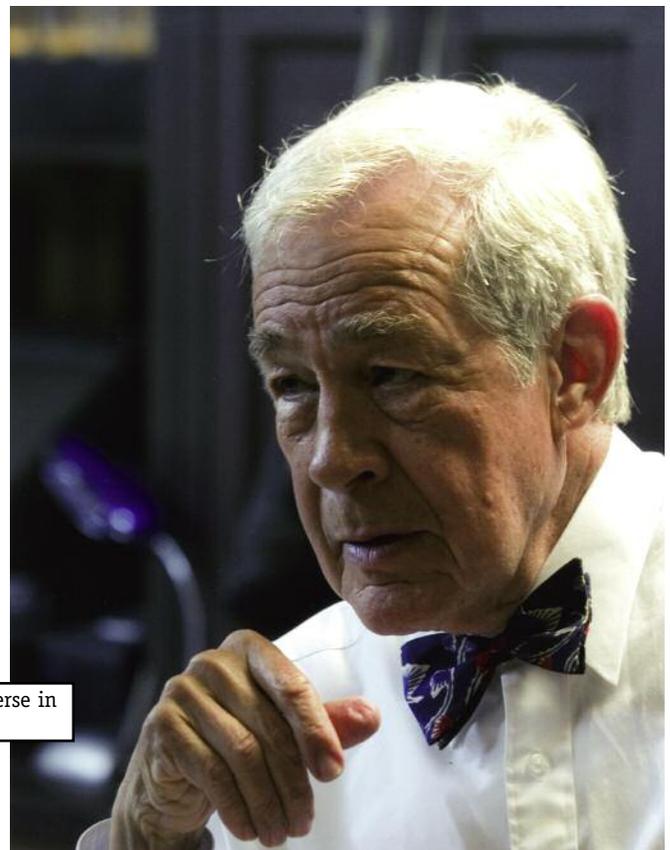
found by Jonathan and Martha Kent, a childless couple that adopt the alien and raise him with their pure-hearted values on their farm. Naming him Clark Kent, the Kents not only dote on him with affection but instill virtue, wholesome goodness, and work ethic into the center of his being. As he grows into a young man, his superpowers also mature: dazzling strength and invulnerability, astonishing flight, amazing speed, uncanny x-ray vision and heat vision and more wondrous gifts come to him. It becomes evident to Clark that his gifts are a responsibility that he has to use for the betterment of mankind, wherever trouble might arise. With a red cape and blue costume that bears an "S" symbol on his barreled chest, he is reborn as a hero named Superman.

To serve the greatest good, Clark moves to the booming hustle of Metropolis, where he takes a job working at the *Daily Planet* newspaper as an unassuming reporter, a role that keeps Superman close to any ongoing wrongdoings or catastrophic events. In the newsroom, he discovers a second family in the guise of editor Perry White, cub reporter/photographer Jimmy Olsen and his senior colleague Lois Lane, the object of his affection. Along with a faster paced life style in the big city, Superman encounters new terrors and constant despair caused by an array of villains, including his worst nemesis, Lex Luthor, whose envy for Superman consumes his genius. No matter how impossible the odds, Superman fights the good fight for all of us—he'll forever stand for "Truth, Justice and the American Way."

Jack Larson remained a part of the Superman universe in 2006 with a cameo in *Superman Returns*.

By 1940, a long lasting *Adventures of Superman* radio show—featuring Bud Collyer in the titular role, with Joan Alexander as Lois Lane—took listeners by storm as the Man of Tomorrow crossed into the medium. The very next year, Superman arrived to the big screen in the first of seventeen action-packed, big budgeted, animated Technicolor short films initiated by Max & Dave Fleischer (with Collyer and Alexander voicing their characters), which still remains one of the best cartoons to hit any screen format, even earning a 1942 Academy Award nomination. Finally, 1948 saw the first live-action interpretation of the Son of Krypton, played by the spirited Kirk Alyn [in a later serial series, he portrayed DC hero Blackhawk]; his Lois Lane was the lovely actress Noel Neill. Alyn appeared in two theatrical serial series, respectively titled, *Superman* and *Atom Man vs. Superman*.

With 1951's low-budgeted theatrical *Superman and the Mole Men*, actor George Reeves found himself in the role of a lifetime—one that would take him from a mere hardworking actor and turn him into an icon, one of the first true stars of the small screen. Apart from the debut of Reeves' mighty Superman and the elegant Phyllis Coates' straight-laced Lois Lane, the black-and-white production was your typical fifties B-movie sci-fi picture: an oil drill uncovers a race of mole men that innocently start paranoia in a small town. Under his screenwriting pseudonym of "Richard Fiedling," former Supes radio drama producer Robert Maxwell wrote the story, cast the two principals and co-produced the nearly hour-long feature at



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Clark Kent (Kirk Alyn) and Lois Lane (Noel Neill) in a still from the first Superman chapter play, 1948.

the behest of DC head and company co-founder Jack Liebowitz, as part of an initiative to bring Superman to the new medium of television. With the film's modest success, and Kellogg's Cereals as the show's sponsor, Superman was on his way to a TV series.

For the shiny new series, both George Reeves and Phyllis Coates returned to their roles. Remembering her first sight of the actor in full costume, the alluring Ms. Coates remembered, "I laughed. He was wonderful. He had a martini in his hand and he said 'Come into my dressing room and have a martini with me and let's talk about this thing.'"

She also mentioned, "George gave me equal billing. It was his idea, I hadn't really thought about billing at that time and that's the kind of guy he was. He was wonderful to work with. He was off-camera if you had to read lines, you know. He was there with his martini and his fedora for you. That's very important."

Jimmy Olsen, a character originally introduced in 1940 for the radio series (and subsequently in the comics) was

brought to life on the television screen the by a young actor from Los Angeles named Jack Larson. Despite his boyish looks, he was already a seasoned performer who had been a contract player at Warner Brothers and an experienced artist in front of the bright lights of live theatre. Although he had initially seen the work as means to other career opportunities, the actor was a fan of the *Superman* comics growing up. "When I did them (the shows)," says Larson, "my dad was a truck driver of wholesale milk, and he said, 'They're not giving you anything; you're just giving back the dimes I gave you to buy the *Superman* comic book.' Because I was a big, initially, Superman fan as a kid, when the comic book came out."

Larson continued, "I didn't really want to do it, and then they said, well, at that time the casting man, who was a wonderful guy, and my agent said that, 'Look, this will never go on the air. No one will ever see it.' All these months' work and you'll make enough money to go to New York, which is where I wanted to go, and they said, 'Take the money and run.' So I did



John Shea added a cunningness to his take on Lex Luthor while he and Superman (Dean Cain) both vied for the affections of Lois Lane (Teri Hatcher).

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LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

No matter what happens in life, you can rest assured that Superman will be a hero who will always come back. So on September 12, 1993, Superman returned to television in the hour-long prime-time series called *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* on ABC Television. Unlike previous incarnations of Superman's cast of characters, this program went out of its way to modernize them with a bit more sex appeal. Actor Dean Cain played a Clark Kent that was bit more self-assured and fashionable; the actor's Superman was more street savvy, less of a goody two shoes. Where this series really shined was in giving Lois Lane a bit more spotlight by allowing actress Teri Hatcher to use not only her beauty, but a little humor and spunk to show some progression that Ms. Lane was keeping up with the times in the 1990s. The shake-up to the Superman story formula initially proved to be very successful with audiences and raved about by critics.

On September 13, 1993, actor Dean Cain hit the ABC airwaves as the Superman of the nineties.



The origins of *Lois & Clark* actually started within the offices of DC Comics in New York City. In remembering the development of the show, DC executive editor Mike Carlin (then-editor of Superman's comics line) said, "Jenette Kahn (DC Comics President at the time) and I put together a bible for something called *Lois's Planet*, and it was literally based on the kinds of soap operas which we had started putting in the *Superman* comic books at the time. Kind of after John Byrne relaunched it, it became a little more realistic Clark and Lois stuff, and then guys like (writer/artist) Jerry Ordway and (writer) Roger Stern and the team here kept adding to that, and Jenette really was enjoying the interpersonal stuff that we were doing and that that was a good angle for a weekly television show. And she pushed for it at Warner Brothers, and they finally went for it. And the bible that we put together was literally panels clipped out of our comics that

In their reimagining, the ABC network produced a steamier campaign that emphasized this wasn't your parents' Superman.

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chapter

3

BATMAN

43

You know his name, and you know his story. As a youngster, his parents were gunned down as victims of a cold-blooded crime. Ever since the tragedy, he's sworn and committed himself to fighting lawlessness and defending the helpless in his city. A master of combat, forensics and technology, the brilliant detective is feared by all evildoers that lurk in the night's mist. By day, he is the sophisticated billionaire playboy all of Gotham reads about in the headlines, who seems to be all about the fast cars, faster women and the finer things that money can buy. By night, he's a relentless and obsessive creature who remains undeterred in his tireless campaign that never ends. He's the Dark Knight of Gotham City. He is Batman.

Batman has been an enduring hero since his debut in the pages of *Detective Comics* #27 in 1939, when he was launched by his creators, twenty-two-year-old artist Bob Kane and twenty-five-year-old writer Bill Finger. The public's fascination with the characters would only increase in time with Batman, his boy sidekick Robin, their infamous endless line-up of interesting villains and the film noir environment that they've inhabited since. In 1943, the Caped Crusader was rushed to the big screen courtesy of a film serial from Columbia Pictures which pitted Batman (played by Lewis Wilson) and Robin (played by Douglas Croft) against the evil Dr. Tito Daka. A later lower budgeted serial series arrived on the big screen in 1949 entitled *Batman and Robin*, with Robert Lowery and Johnny Duncan in the respective lead roles of this kid-fare favorite.

By the 1950s, the invasion of television sets in the average American household would signal the end of the movie serial

format as families now sought to spend less time in movie palaces and more time in front of their TV sets at home. Thus television apparently put a stop to Batman's presence on the big screen, for the time being. Although there was an effort in the early sixties to do a children's television show featuring future Tarzan Mike Henry as the hero, nothing ever came to fruition. Ironically, it would be at a viewing of the old serials at Chicago's Playboy Club in the early sixties where ABC executive Yale Udoff got the notion of having his network develop a show on Batman.

By the mid-sixties, Douglas Cramer, ABC's Vice President in Charge of New Program Development, spoke with veteran television producer William (Bill) Dozier about developing Batman as a television show. In an effort to bring something that would rejuvenate their television line-up, ABC had initially acquired the rights to the crimefighting character in the hopes of competing with lively popular family shows like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Munsters* and *Lost in Space* that drew away younger viewers from their network. With no knowledge of Batman or anything pertaining to comic books, a slightly nervous Dozier prepped himself by reading a handful of *Batman* comics. He did this in anticipation of a big meeting with the ABC network brass in New York City where he was to discuss his vision of the character's television show. Regardless that the producer initially found the comics to be rather silly and not necessarily something that would make engaging television, he soon realized that maybe simply "overdoing" the straight-laced image of this boy scout was a direction that could be humorous



to adults while younger viewers would be lured in by the action. Although the network brass wasn't overly enthusiastic at the big meeting with his angle for the show, the ABC executives were so determined to get *Batman* on the air that they gave the seemingly self-assured Dozier and his Greenway Productions their commitment to a series. 20th Century Fox would financially back and produce.

With a deal in place, Dozier immediately sent a telegram to Spain where his friend, screenwriter Lorenzo Semple Jr., was residing at the time. In later years, Semple would establish himself as one of the premier screenwriters in Hollywood by writing well remembered classics like *Papillon*, *Pretty Poison*, and *The Parallax View*. In Semple, Dozier knew that he had the person who, due to his sharp wit and intelligent sense of humor, could create the template and vision for the show. The producer and writer were owed a project by ABC after their previous effort (a pilot called *Number One Son*) was shelved despite the network's high opinion of it. In return ABC offered *Batman* to the team. "We met at the Ritz

in Madrid," Semple recalled, "and [Dozier] pulled out the comic book *Batman*, which he was sort of dismayed by, because he didn't have any idea what to do. And I said, 'No problem, I'll write it,' and that was the extent of it."

A lot of people forget that the *Batman* comics of the time were filled with childish stories and concepts. The character had moved away from his film noir roots for stories about robots, aliens, space travel, time travel and various alternate realities and dimensions. The Caped Crusader's comic also included gimmicky, goofy characters like Bat-Hound, Batwoman and Bat-Mite, amongst others. The producer strayed

away the fantastical elements of the comics to embrace more the crime-fighting aspects and the colorful cast of villains.

Ahead of its time, in an era when shows were meant to be played either overly serious or purely for laughs, *Batman* did a little bit of both very cleverly without seeming too hokey. It was also the first TV comedy shown without a laugh track. Even the novelty of having the sound effects literally spelled out on the television screen during a melee was a masterstroke that only the writer could conceive. From Spain, Semple served as "Executive Story Consultant" for the show; he would continue to write new scripts and oversee those written by other screenwriters. Semple commented, "We had

trouble finding other writers at first, because people didn't quite get the show; they went too far out, or whatnot. This was a very special type of deadpan humor. Which I happen to be very sympathetic to, and it was easy for me. But some people had some trouble with it; ABC had no trouble with it at all. I went over once to New York and met with ABC, with a script, and they said, 'Great.' I mean, they shot it



In the classic series, Batman (Adam West) and Robin (Burt Ward) were ready for whatever devilry may arise from their rogues' gallery.

without any problem. They just shot it from the script, without any notes or anything. They said, 'Let's do it.'"

The biggest success of the show came from its ability to successfully entertain on two levels without insulting the intelligence of its viewers: kids and adults could enjoy it for different reasons. The idea that Dozier might have had initially was taken to another level with Semple's sharp scripts. "It's one-dimensional, but a different one dimension," [laughs] Semple said in defining the tone within his vision for the show. "It really was for adults. I mean, in other words, my sense of humor, we weren't consciously thinking of kids. But obviously kids



On the Minstrel's (actor Van Johnson) menu this fine evening: Slow-Roasted Caped Crusaders à la carte. From the second season episodes "The Minstrel's Shakedown / Barbecued Batman?"

Afterwards, Batman quipped, "What a way to go-go."

Once West had the character of Batman defined to his liking, along with a positive reaction to the very first show from the viewers, he was allowed to open up and have a great deal more creative input. Producer Bill Dozier and his team were always receptive to West's ideas for the show and his character. West commented, "Yes. I rewrote many of the lines in the scripts, and I added nuances to the character that the writers didn't think of. For example: Batman's rhythm of speech, his pattern of speech. There was always an urgency in Batman's diction, 'To the Batcave, Robin! To the Bat-pole!' There was always an urgency. When I stood in Commissioner Gordon's office talking to Chief O'Hara, I crossed my arms a certain way, the same way a bat crosses his arms. I had to be aware of the cape. If you look at many of the episodes, you will see at times the cape is draped behind my shoulders, and many times it is over my shoulder. I used the cape to make the scene more dramatic. Also, in wearing the cowl my vision was

restricted, so I walked a certain way, which became the "Batman walk."

The show benefited from colorful supporting performances from by the straight-laced Neil Hamilton (Commissioner Gordon), hearty Stafford Repp (Chief O'Hara), doting Madge Blake (Aunt Harriet) and British actor Alan Napier as Bruce Wayne's imperturbable butler. The show featured an endless array of actors and actresses as guest stars. "Many favorite co-stars," West said, "Burgess Meredith (The Penguin), who when I was a child growing up was a major star. Cesar Romero (The Joker), another major star when I was growing up. George Sanders, one of my favorite characters on *Batman*, the original and the first, Mr. Freeze. My favorite line from that episode is that Mr. Freeze asks Batman, 'Baked Alaska, Batman?' That was funny in writing. Who can forget my three Catwomen? The sexy Julie Newmar, Lee Meriwether for our *Batman* movie, and Eartha Kitt in our third season. And Frank Gorshin (The Riddler), who did our pilot, which was our first and second episode, and many other episodes during the first season and was in the third season. Out of all the actors that were on the show, Frank and I became the closest. We would see each other off the set at parties and Hollywood gatherings."

Batman marked the first time that West headlined a show. But the pressure of constantly shooting episodes and promoting the program was hard work that never really allowed the actor the time to bask in his sudden fame. Bat-related products and public interest exploded in 1966, with an avalanche of goods and great demand for anything remotely related to Batman. West said, "It was gratifying to play the lead character, to have the challenge of carrying the title role and to be enjoyed by so many. There were many enjoyable moments. I never really thought much about stardom, just getting work done and getting paid. You have to remember, this was the sixties, where it was not unusual to do 30, 33, 35, sometimes 36 shows in a season! Compared to the shows of today, where you do 20. So there was a lot of pressure on me to know all the scripts. It was not unusual that you're working on three or four scripts at the exact same time because we had to film these so fast."

Via pressure from Twentieth Century Fox, there was an urgency to rush an original theatrical film to cash in on the popularity of the show. The film was shot while the show was on hiatus, and by the time the film was ultimately released on August 3rd of 1966, the Batman craze was starting to subside. Semple, who penned the screenplay of the theatrical release, said, "[Twentieth Century] didn't have any idea what they had. They just had no idea this was the beginning of the gold mine it could have been. Yeah, I wrote the movie in about two weeks. At that time, 1966, whenever it came out, they rushed it out to cash in, they thought. And some other movies were out that were made from a series. They paged together some episodes. I remember *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* put together four episodes and called it a movie.



Batman (Adam West) and Batgirl (Yvonne Craig) debate her role in Gotham, from the pilot/screen test for Batgirl.



Girl Power! A much needed female touch arrived in season three as Batgirl (Yvonne Craig) kicked her way into the hearts of boys and girls.

chapter

4

SHAZAM!

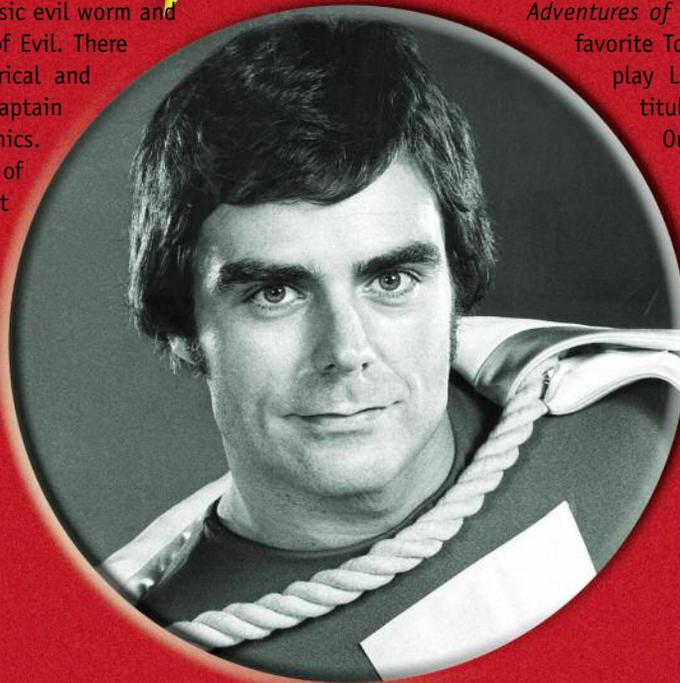
When twelve-year-old Billy Batson says the magic name of the wizard, Shazam, he transforms into the caped superhero named Captain Marvel, the world's mightiest mortal—his fans, affectionately, and his enemies, unaffectionately, have nicknamed him The Big Cheese. Becoming Marvel through a strike of lightning, he is bestowed with all the powers of six great mythological deities and transformed from the body of a boy to a man—the word “Shazam” is an acronym for Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles and Mercury. The comic-book stories of curious boy reporter Billy Batson were simple tales without any heavy realism. Magic and imagination were all over the page and in the art. Supported by a colorful cast of characters—like his intelligent tiger friend, Tawky Tawny and his beloved sister Mary Marvel—Captain Marvel battled criminals like Dr. Thaddeus Bodog Sivana, your basic bald evil scientist, and Mr. Mind, your basic evil worm and leader of the Monster Society of Evil. There was no book as magical, satirical and fantastical as those starring Captain Marvel in the Golden Age of comics.

Debuting in the pages of *Whiz Comics* #2 from Fawcett Publications in 1940, Captain Marvel was created by artist C.C. Beck and writer Bill Parker. He immediately became a sales success that rivaled (and even eclipsed, at times) Superman during the

Golden Age of comic books. It was the perfect book for children daydreaming of being an adult and having the strength they so desperately craved. Kids of the forties and fifties felt more of a connection with Billy Batson than they ever did with the Man of Steel—despite the similarities between the two caped titans—because he triggered a sense of zest and awe. When the paper restriction put in place due to World War Two was removed, Fawcett spun off The Marvel Family (Captain Marvel Jr., Mary Marvel, amongst others) into a series of other books. Under Beck's whimsical, cartoony art style, writer Otto Binder's guidance and the contributions of many memorable artists, these stories were full of adventure, humor, and charm and built upon the ongoing continuity and mythology.

Captain Marvel became the first live-action superhero on the big screen with the 1941 Republic movie serial *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, starring B-movie favorite Tom Tyler (in 1943, he would also play Lee Falk's *The Phantom*) in the titular role of the twelve-part saga.

One could argue that because of the Big Red Cheese's popularity, Fawcett found itself in a court battle with National Periodical Publications/DC Comics. National felt that Captain Marvel was too similar to their Superman and took Fawcett to court for copyright infringement. In 1953,



Shazam! marked the first Saturday morning live-action adaptation of a major comic hero. Jackson Bostwick is pictured here in a CBS network publicity still.

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In all his mighty splendor, Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick) awaits his next Saturday morning TV adventure.

The three leads, Mentor (Les Tremayne), Billy (Michael Gray) and Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick).

Fawcett agreed to retire Captain Marvel and to a payout of \$400,000 as part of a settlement with DC. Captain Marvel historian P.C. Hamerlinck noted, "Fawcett never actually 'lost' the battle; there was never a final judgment from a jury or anything—it was simply long, ongoing, and, according to VP Roscoe Fawcett, they didn't want to put any more money into it, so they agreed to settle the matter out of court, pay National \$400,000 and agree not to publish CM anymore." So for almost twenty years, Fawcett's comic characters remained dormant. In 1973, DC Comics, ironically, revived the Captain for a new series named *Shazam!* C.C. Beck returned to helm the art of his creation for the first ten issues.

In 1974, Filmation successfully brought Captain Marvel to the small screen for CBS' Saturday morning line-up. Filmation was an animation company founded by the producing team of Lou Scheimer and Norm Prescott. Amongst their biggest cartoons shows were the popular *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* and the eighties staple *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. For Scheimer and Prescott's company, *Shazam!* would be their first venture into producing a full live-action program.

"We did a whole bunch of stuff with National Periodicals," recalled Lou Scheimer. "That's how we first got started on network television, and I got the rights to Captain Marvel. I had always loved Captain Marvel as a superhero, as a comic book, when I was a kid... National Periodicals could not use the name 'Captain Marvel' as the name of the show or the

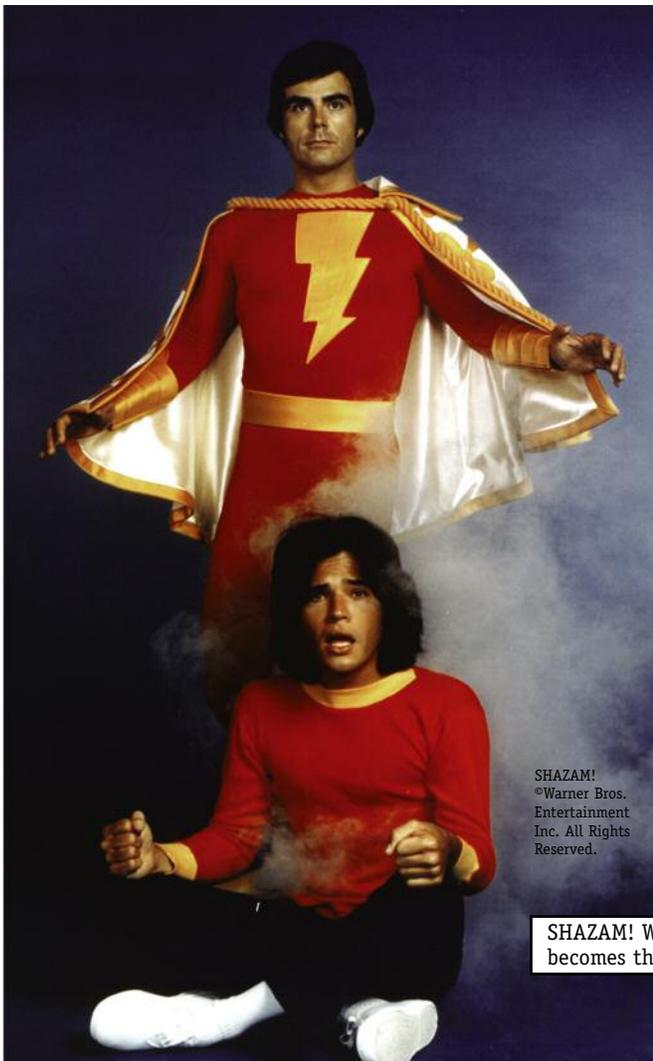


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comic book, so they had to call it 'Shazam.' It's very interesting, because I got the rights, and I went to CBS because we had been very successful at CBS for many years. It was probably in the early seventies when we did that. I went back to New York and I had to deal with a guy named Fred Silverman, who really created the whole concept of Saturday morning with the cartoons on all day. I said to Freddy, 'Hey, I got the rights to a terrific property, and I'd like to talk to you about it before I talk to anyone else about it,' because we had done most of our work for them [CBS]. And I told him what we wanted to do with Captain Marvel, with *Shazam*, and he said, 'Can you do it live?' And I said, 'Oh, yeah! Of course we can do it live!' And I wondered how we could figure that out later on."

In the years since Fawcett's comics downfall, Marvel Comics had created a new hero named Captain Marvel and appropriately registered a trademark for that name. Thus, creatively, the show as well as future projects with the Big Red Cheese usually bear his dynamic magic word as their title, "Shazam!" Once committed, the intuitive producers immediately tried to figure out how they could do a superhero show on relatively small budget. To give the hero flight, they became one of the first television shows to incorporate blue screening, with effective results. With a budget under \$100,000 per episode, the producers put every cent the network gave them into achieving the glossy look needed for the children's show. Also, the producers weren't going to test market the show; rather they trusted their intuition. Added Scheimer, "No, none of that. No, we actually used our own heads. Oh, God, when I think of testing, and going through all that crap, bringing twelve kids in and see if they liked it. In those days, nobody did anything like that. You know what? It doesn't work, anyway."



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SHAZAM! With but one magic word, young Billy Batson (Michael Gray) becomes the hero Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick).

W O N D E R W O M A N

With a rush of animated stars and rollicking musical fanfare, the familiar *Wonder Woman* burst into living rooms across North America in late 1975. The light, adventurous tone of the series pilot, plus the positive attitude and unquestionable beauty of its star, combined to make *Wonder Woman* an instant hit. The show catapulted to the top of ABC's ratings, and audiences couldn't get enough of Diana Prince and her incredible alter ego. Although she may have been someone new to weekly viewers, comic readers had already been enthralled with the character for decades.

Wonder Woman was created by William Moulton Marston as a female answer to the explosion of early major comic heroes like Superman and Batman. She made her debut comic book appearance in late 1941 in an issue of *All Star Comics*, published by All-American Publications. By the middle of the following year, after an additional successful appearance in an issue of *Sensation Comics*, the Amazonian princess was awarded her very own monthly title. The heroine proved to be one of All-American's most popular characters as her early adventures had her taking on the Axis powers to fight for the cause of justice.

Marston saw Wonder Woman as an unconventional, forward-looking character with a definite eye on advancing women's independence and power. The character was used to further the uncommon view at the time that women should be more than mere set dressing or capture bait in stories. His goal was to prove the power of women and their importance to society. Until her initial appearances, there were very few powerful females in comics. Wonder

Woman was an important character for her time and has remained so through to the modern day. **71**

Her origins were simple enough. As an Amazonian Princess living on Paradise Island, neither Diana nor her sisters had had previous contact with the outside world. That all changed during World War II when serviceman Steve Trevor crashed his aircraft on her home. Diana helped keep him alive, but his arrival made the goddess Aphrodite recognize the danger that the Axis powers posed.

Because of this, she decided that one of the Amazons should be sent out to protect the world and stop the Nazis' advancement. The choice of who would be sent out was to be determined through a contest of physical feats. Diana's mother, Queen Hippolyta, forbade her daughter Diana from competing, but she defied her mother, disguised herself and competed anyhow. In no surprise, Diana proved herself to be the strongest warrior. When her identity was revealed, the Queen had no choice but to allow her to become Wonder Woman. Diana returned Trevor to the outside world where she then took the role of his nurse, Diana Prince. While many of her characteristic elements like her invisible plane, tiara and ability to fly would be introduced into her comic continuity much later, she always had her bullet-deflecting bracelets, magic lasso and incredible powers of strength.

Since her solo title debut in 1942, Wonder Woman has gone through many changes, but has always remained an integral part of DC Comics' lineup. Yet the path to bring this famous heroine to live-action was an unusually long one. Unlike her contemporaries Batman, Superman, Captain Marvel and Captain America,



The power of Wonder Woman, the heroine portrayed by Lynda Carter, inspired young women around the world.

For the second season, Wonder Woman's costume was recut to Lynda Carter's instructions and made to appear more modern.

When it came time to fight for the United States, Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) never backed down from a challenge.



THE NEW ORIGINAL WONDER WOMAN ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

Wonder Woman never received a theatrical chapter play series, nor a radio show, nor exposure in any of the other popular outlets that many early heroes had. No, her first steps into live-action would come more than a quarter century after her creation, and they would be on the small screen.

Wonder Woman's most famous adaptation was still nearly eight years away when, in 1967, the staff of Greenway Productions first had the idea to bring her to life. The phenomenal success of their *Batman* series in 1966 inspired company head William Dozier to explore bringing similar comic characters to television. Wonder Woman's status as one of DC Comics' most popular ongoing characters, coupled with the fact that she had never been on television, made her a natural follow-up for development. Of course, the instincts of the producers were to duplicate their successful *Batman* pattern and create their version of Wonder Woman as a comedy.

A script was co-written by Stan Hart, Larry Siegel and frequent *Batman* scribe Stanley Ralph Ross. Our brief glimpse of this version of Wonder Woman takes place during a stormy night. Dubbed *Wonder Woman—Who's Afraid of Diana Prince?* (the title being a play on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the famous film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton from the year before), it stars Ellie Wood Walker as a mousy-looking, clumsy Diana Prince who appears to be in her twenties, but is actually 27 million years old. She lives in the modern-day suburbs with a mother who is well aware of her superheroine status. But her overly dramatic parent feels that flying around saving the world is no way for her daughter to behave, and she constantly picks on her to settle down with a husband. But Diana only has eyes for Steve Trevor.

After deciding she needs to rescue Steve from the downpour, she quickly ducks behind a secret panel in her bedroom and steps out in full Wonder Woman costume. On top of her problematic home life as Diana Prince, her transformation into Wonder Woman also reveals that the character is delusional and narcissistic. As she fawns over herself in the mirror she sees the reflection of a curvy, attractive woman (accompanied to the musical strains of "Oh, You Beautiful Doll", no less), when in reality she is still a scrawny girl who doesn't even fill out her costume. After blowing a kiss to her optimized reflection—played by actress Linda Harrison—she crawls out the window and dashes off on her adventure to help Steve. This last bit of business was a very odd choice. Had the pilot been picked up it would have been interesting to see if the producers would have kept the idea that Diana saw herself as far more attractive to others than she actually was.

Although it was just a short one-act scene, and unable to fully delve into the history of Wonder Woman, the pilot seemed to completely ignore the comic book origins of the character in order to make Diana Prince like any other young American woman stuck in the suburbs. The project was

envisioned as a comedy, and indications were that it would have been done in the same over-the-top manner as the *Batman* series, even including *Batman's* narrator, William Dozier. However, even at its short five-minute length, the presentation fell flat. It featured no action and not much about it was very inspiring. As a positive, the Wonder Woman costume worn by Linda Harrison was well done. Aside from a white belt, it was mostly faithful to the comic version with all the accents and elements in place. With a bit of additional tooling, the premise for this pilot may have been salvageable, but as it failed to generate any interest among television networks or buyers, it never got the chance to develop further. Since it was also never screened for the public, *Wonder Woman—Who's Afraid of Diana Prince?* was destined to quickly fade into the realm of mostly-unseen and unknown productions.

Although the first take on Wonder Woman didn't succeed, the character would prove difficult to keep off television. In late 1973, well after Greenway's options had expired, another attempt was made to introduce a flesh-and-blood Wonder Woman to television audiences, this time with Warner Bros. at the helm. The tone of this new pilot was more serious and completely avoided anything having to do with the previous production from Greenway.

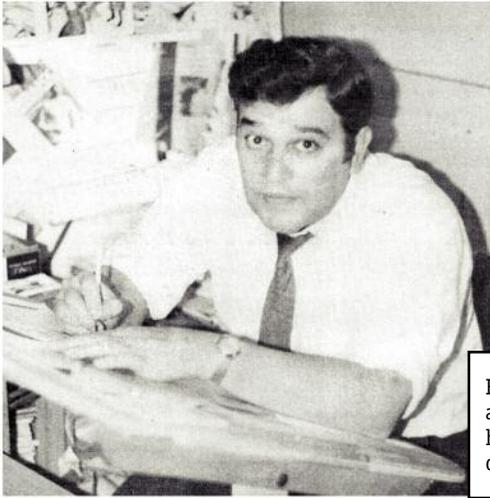
Titled simply *Wonder Woman*, the pilot premiered March 12, 1974 and starred Cathy Lee Crosby as Diana, with Ricardo Montalban as the villain, Abner Smith, and Andrew Prine as his chief henchman, George. It was produced by John G. Stephens, and written, developed and executive produced by John D.F. Black. Direction of the pilot was by Vincent McEveety. All of these gentlemen had strong backgrounds in television, all three having worked on the original *Star Trek* as well as many other top series.

Wonder Woman began by showing Diana being sent into the outside world by her mother. Her mission was simply to be present with her love of justice and right, to show the world the true value of women. Diana, whose identity of Wonder Woman was known to seemingly everyone in the film, took a job as a receptionist and part-time spy for an unnamed government agency headed by Steve Trevor in Washington, DC.

The plot centered on a set of stolen books which held the names and information for thirty-nine US spies. They had been stolen by agents of Abner Smith, who then held them for ransom for the sum of fifteen million dollars. It was Wonder Woman's job to retrieve the books within Smith's imposed deadline of forty-eight hours. Diana was able to thwart every attempt to stop her, even including battling one of her sisters from the island, whom Smith had recruited. In the end, Diana was of course successful in stopping Smith and his henchmen, retrieving the books and the ransom money.

Wonder Woman 1974-style, with Cathy Lee Crosby in the first telefilm's title role.





Famed Spider-Man artist John Romita hard at work at his drawing table.



Co-creator, Stan Lee drew on personal experiences to create the comic version of Spider-Man, a youngster with his share of real life troubles.

Spider-Man, the definitive Marvel character, was created by the company's legendary wordsmith Stan Lee along with the incomparable illustrator Steve Ditko. Both men infused the character with many of their own characteristics. While Peter inherited some of Ditko's quirky neuroticism, Lee instilled bits of his trademark optimism and snappy banter into their wall-crawling alter ego. The Parker character was grounded in real-world worries with his love life, school grades, finances, and the well-being of his doting Aunt May. Even as Spider-Man, he couldn't escape problems as he was hounded by a ruthless rogues' gallery, the authorities and the wrath of J. Jonah Jameson's biting *Daily Bugle* editorials. It's this grounding in reality that made this guilt-ridden superhero so endearing to the public.

Since his debut in 1962's *Amazing Fantasy* #15, the public has warmly embraced the character throughout the world. His instant universality quickly earned him his very own comic series—*The Amazing Spider-Man* in 1963—one that continues to remain a monthly fixture on magazine stands today. By 1966, Steve Ditko left the title, which ushered in the dynamic debut of "Jazzy" John Romita as the principal artist. The draftsman's crisp storytelling and elegant figure work took the book's popularity to uncharted higher ground. Romita's interpretation of the character would become the company's standard, establishing Spider-Man's slick iconic look for decades to come in everything from comics to merchandising to numerous animated shows on major networks.

With his Spidey-sense buzzing, Spider-Man leapt to life on network TV in April of 1977.

Although Spider-Man's first television appearance in 1967 was in animated form, it was soon followed up by an even more striking live-action counterpart. Produced by The Children's Television Workshop, *The Electric Company* was already a much-heralded children's educational series on Public Broadcasting Service affiliates in America when it decided to debut a new segment entitled *Spidey Super Stories* into their hip sketch comedy format in 1974. While children learned fundamental vocabulary skills with live-action Spider-Man, he also entertained them with a jovial attitude, and he quickly became the most popular bit in the show. The Children's Television Workshop was provided the character without a licensing fee, a move that paid off in strides for both them and Marvel. The show would help to acquaint Spider-Man with an even younger national demographic, an audience who would never forget the character.

The producers of the show started looking for an actor who could articulate the character through gestures and body movements—since Spidey would not speak—but rather communicate with viewers through on-screen thought balloons. Upon auditioning Danny Seagren, they immediately knew that that they had found their Spider-Man. "There's a guy named Andy Ferguson, who was a producer," Danny recalled, "I went in there and they gave me the costume that [they] got from Marvel. They said, "You can go on back to the music room there and put it on and Andy will be down in a little bit." I carefully perched myself on top of the desk, and when he came out, I almost



Before Spidey, Danny Seagren worked with Jim Henson and his growing puppet empire. Here he's pictured with a friend.

jumped on top of his head to another desk—scared the sh*t out of him. It did impress him. They looked at some people who were big muscular people who had lots of muscles, but they were pretty stiff and couldn't do the movements. I looked okay in the costume, and I did move."

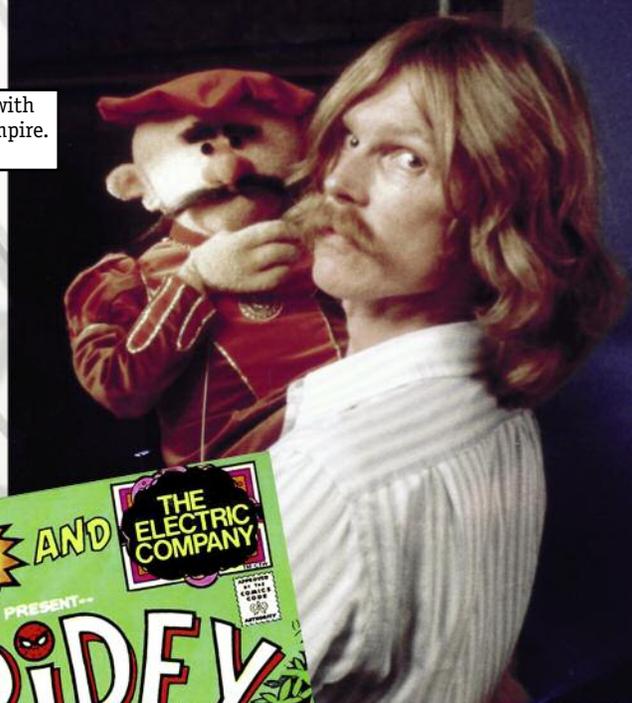
The talented Seagren was a professional dancer and a puppeteer trained by Muppets creator Jim Henson during the sixties and early seventies. Having been familiar with the comics and the animated show, he used a lot of his dance techniques to establish the unusual rhythm of movements that became crucial to his portrayal. Without uttering a single word, the six-foot tall actor gave the hyperactive role the in-your-face attitude and appropriate coolness that would win over even the harshest comics aficionado. Adding another degree of mystery was the fact that Spider-Man's alter-ego of Peter Parker was never seen on-screen throughout the show. As stated in the lyrics of his catchy theme song by Gary William Friedman, "Where are you coming from, Spider-Man? Nobody knows who you are!"

Most of the Spider-Man scenes were filmed at Reeves-Teletape Studios—a pioneer in the then-revolutionary chroma key special effects—in New York City. "First time we shot," Danny recalled, "they had the costume they got from Marvel, which had webbing under the arms, and that was a big problem with the chroma key. It would key out. Part of the picture would fall out and just become transparent—there would be nothing there. The eyes [of the mask] were a white mesh, but if the lights were in your eyes—obviously there's a lot of lights on television—the cameras were less sensitive and even need a little bit more light. So there was a light in my eye. I usually worked on a chroma key backdrop, and usually they're blue but in this case were green because his costume was dominantly blue."

Being the new guy to the show, Danny insisted that there was no animosity shown towards him and Spider-Man by the cast. The segments were relatively easy shoots that were completed over a couple of hours in a day or two. Seagren described, "They weren't that difficult. They had been doing that show for a couple of years before I got there. I don't want to say it was 'pat' but by that time they knew what they were doing. The performers were good and they were really talented people. They knew their lines. The set-ups weren't that complicated and we would work with that crew for a year—the same crew that shot *Sesame Street* over at 81st and Broadway. There wasn't any jealousy in that cast at all."

During the show's run, *The Electric Company* aired one hundred thirty episodes per season; Spidey segments were limited to ten to twelve a season, because of the higher

What gives?! Why can't our friendly neighborhood hero (Danny Seagren) ever catch a break?



Spider-Man was on *The Electric Company* to help teach youngsters to read. A line of tie-in comics added to the fun.



records and more. Spider-Man was the only Marvel property Toei adapted for live-action television.

Spider-Man was a rousing success in Japan, featuring lively stuntwork from Japan's premiere stunt company and accomplished actors and directors who went on to star in and produce a number of popular follow-up programs. The series' music was written by Chunmei Watanabe, who created the soundtracks for other popular shows such as *Kikaider* and *Mazinger Z*. *Spider-Man* also has the distinction of having the first appearance of a live-action giant robot in the history of Toei's TV programming. Thanks to *Spider-Man's* success, the Sentai genre was revived and is still going strongly to this day.

For many years *Spider-Man* was in rights limbo due to the original short-term contracts between Marvel and Toei, but new agreements were recently worked out, allowing Toei to exploit their version of Spider-Man in Japan again. Interestingly, the Toei deal for *Spider-Man* didn't block the live-action American version from being shown in Japan as well. Fries and Goodman's *Spider-Man* production was shown on Japanese television and released on a series of videotapes where it was more commonly available than Toei's own version.

But that changed after the new agreements when Toei's entire series was finally released as a DVD box set in Japan in December 2005. A new metal toy of Spider-Man's robot Leopardon was released a year later. Starting March 3, 2009, American audiences finally got their first official chance to see Toei's very different version of

Spider-Man. The marvel.com website began adding English-subtitled episodes at the rate of one per week. As far as we can determine, this version of *Spider-Man* remains the only fully-licensed, foreign-produced live-action TV program for an American comic hero. Marvel has done *Spider-Man* fans a real service by making these rarely-seen episodes available.

Spider-Man hasn't been seen in a new live-action production on television since the late 1970s. Whether or not this will change remains to be seen. With the massive success of the three *Spider-Man* feature films, anything could now be possible. With a forty-plus year, multiple-title comic book life, there is obviously no shortage of Spider-Man tales left to tell.



Spider-Man in his vehicle, the Spider Machine GP-7.



A series planning notebook (top) and scripts for the first two episodes of Toei's *Spider-Man* (middle and bottom).



Spider-Man leaps into action against the Deep-sea King, from episode eleven of Toei's *Spider-Man* production.

LEGENDS OF THE SUPERHEROES

If you thought it was a mirage that you had seen a primetime network television special with the biggest gathering of DC superheroes ever assembled—it wasn't a hoax, it wasn't a dream, but something that happened (and could only happen) in the seventies!

Legends of The Superheroes consisted of two hour-long specials that aired 8 P.M on NBC a week apart: "The Challenge" (January 18, 1979) and "The Roast" (January 25, 1979). The shows were a rare live-action effort from Hanna-Barbera, the very same producers of *The Super Friends* cartoons that ran throughout the seventies and eighties and featured almost all of DC Comics' key characters. Although it was a comedy show, complete with laugh track, the most significant attraction was that it marked the final television appearance of Adam West and

Burt Ward, in costume, as Batman and Robin. Without West, Ward and Frank Gorshin (returning as The Riddler in only "The Challenge" installment), *Legends* may never have been filmed. Other than them, the cast consisted of mostly unknowns and character actors.

The specials were written by Mike Marmer and Peter Gally; both had received Emmy nominations for their comedy writing on *The Flip Wilson Show*, and became friends while working on the seventies classic. It was producer Louis "Deke" Hayward that approached his pal Marmer about scripting the specials that he was supervising for Hanna-Barbera; the writer accepted the offer and invited Peter Galley to join him as a writing partner on the project. They gave Hanna-Barbera exactly what they wanted: two variety comedy specials. Although they

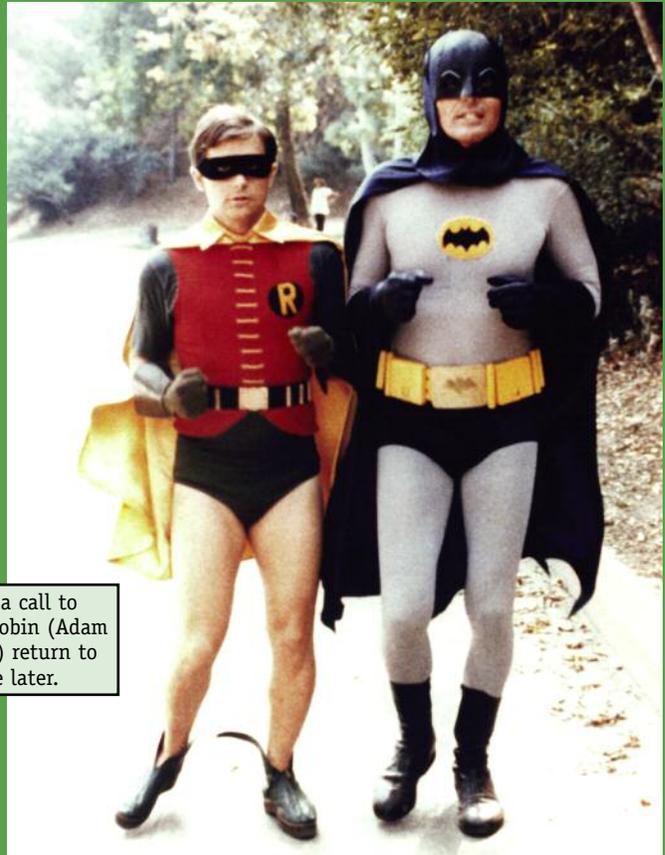
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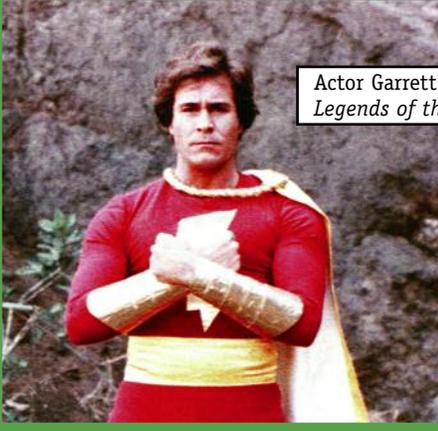
Summing up '70s suave, Howard Murphy portrayed a sure-of-himself Green Lantern.

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Never one to refuse a call to duty, Batman and Robin (Adam West and Burt Ward) return to action over a decade later.



NBC press release for the airing of the first episode, *The Challenge*.



Actor Garrett Craig as Captain Marvel in *Legends of the Superheroes*.

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Actress Barbara Joyce springs to action as The Huntress.

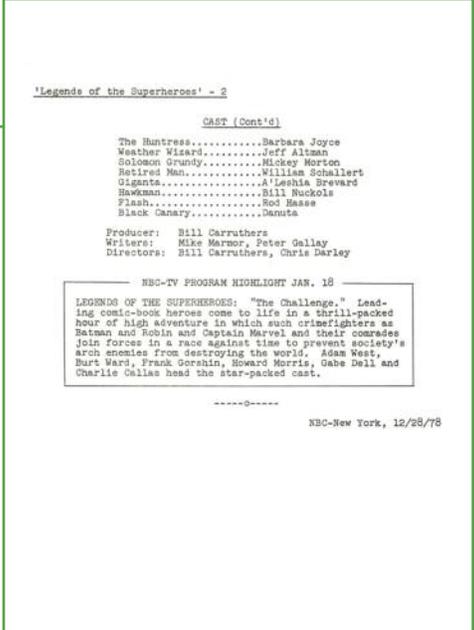
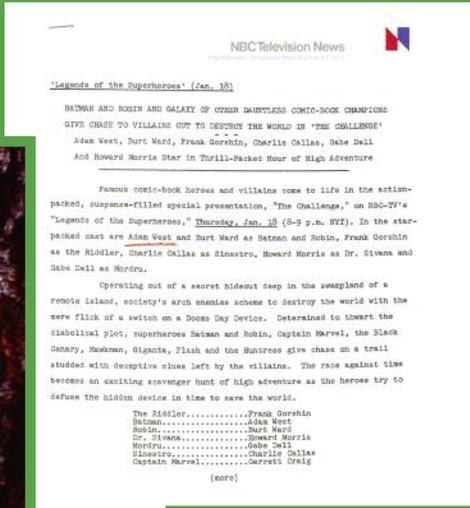
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weren't comic book fans, they did their best to become acquainted with the essence of the characters in these hurried productions that were shot on videotape. Noticeably absent from the DC Heroes character line-up were Superman and Wonder Woman, as both character's rights were licensed to television and film endeavors.

"It was supposed to be silly and outrageous," stated writer Peter Gallay. "I'm not saying that nobody connected with the show took comics as seriously as certainly you or comics aficionados now do, or even then, and I guess there were two kind of separate audiences that eventually saw the show. You could divide the audience into two camps: One would be the people who really liked comics and were into comics and knew the characters, and, as you say, by and large they have fond memories of it. And then there's, the rest of them were, like, the general public and the critics, and they probably roundly hated the show down the line. Strangely enough, I, not knowing anything about comics and not being a comic

fan, we wrote the show, we did the best we could, and I thought it was still pretty funny. I mean, to my mind it was a lot funnier on paper than in the actual execution, but I thought it was fairly successful for what we set out to do. Critics rapped it, as you know."

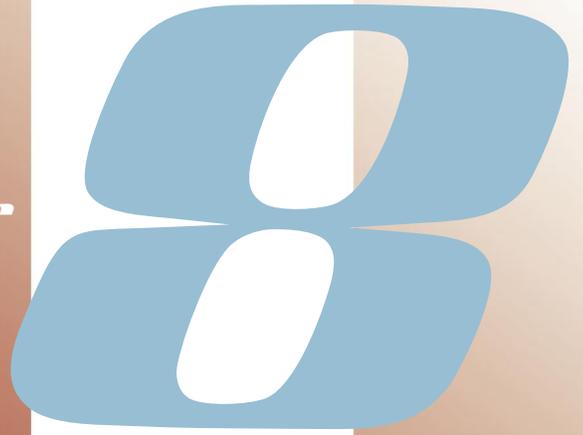
"The Challenge" is written and filmed with a bit of the feel of the sixties *Batman* tradition. In the show, we see the DC Heroes trying to stop a doomsday device from going off while battling the pesky DC villains. "The Roast" takes place in the heroes' headquarters, allowing it to be shot entirely on one set. The show is done in the style of *The Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts* of the seventies; the superheroes are roasted (and even serenaded) by their relatives, friends and villains. Heck, most of the comedy comes from the villains in the show, as they seemingly have all the funny lines (and also consist of seasoned performers). Oddly enough the Roast idea



The perfectly cast A'leshia Brevard as Giganta.

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chapter



CAPTAIN AMERICA

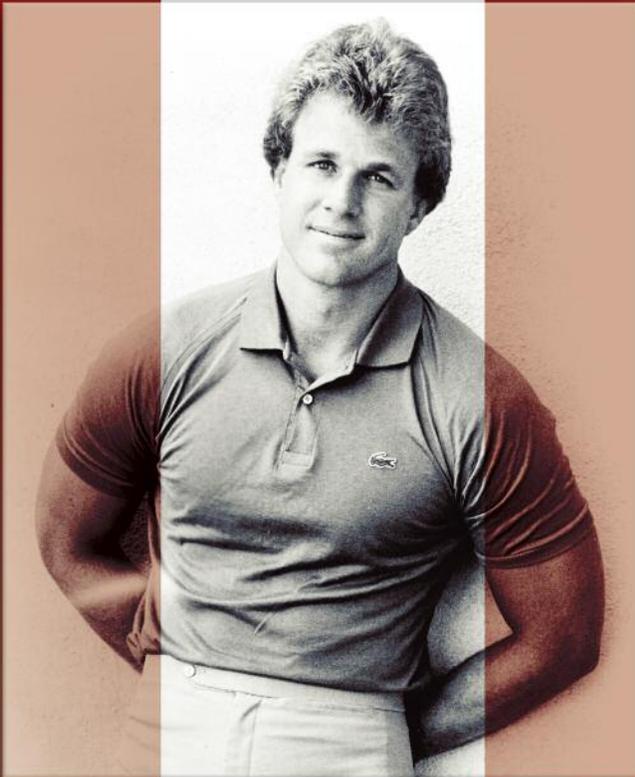
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One of the earliest and most prominent superheroes, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's Captain America was created as a symbol for worldwide freedom when he first appeared at the end of 1940 in his own, self-titled comic book. His main job was to defeat the threat posed by the Nazis and their Axis partners. The history of this hero starts with a youth named Steve Rogers, who is eager to do his part for America in the upcoming war effort. But his poor health precludes acceptance into standard military service. But because of his slim physique, he is tapped by a government

agency that is developing a secret method to alter even the weakest man into a powerful fighting machine. After many trials, Rogers is accepted as the first test case for the treatments. But just as they are completed and Rogers has become the super soldier everyone was hoping for, the scientist who came up with the idea is killed by a traitor... and the secrets of his method apparently die with him. Rogers will be the only super soldier. With the addition of a disguise and shield, Captain America is born. He is immediately sent undercover to Europe on his first mission, to help the US and its allies rid the world of would-be oppressors.

In 1978 at the height of comic book adaptations for television, Marvel had several series on the air or in development. So it was natural that Captain America, one of the company's most visible and successful heroes, should join the ranks of The Hulk, Spider-Man and Doctor Strange with a pilot. The initial project for Captain America came in the form of a TV movie, with the aim of creating a weekly series. Reaction to the pilot would determine if the character would see any further live-action adventures.

Like many other characters, Captain America's origins and motivations were changed for television. This Steve Rogers is an ex-Marine who is working as an artist. He was the son of a deceased soldier, a top crimefighter who was nicknamed "Captain America." During World War II, Rogers' father developed a serum called FLAG (Full Latent Ability Gain) that increased an individual's physique and mental abilities to their fullest potential. When criminals break into Steve's home hoping to find his father's FLAG secrets, they attack Rogers and leave



The all-American Reb Brown was the perfect choice for ultimate good guy, Steve Rogers.



chapter

100 THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Popular 1970s Hulk licensing illustration by artist John Romita.

During a test of his Gamma-Bomb creation for the military, physicist Dr. Robert Bruce Banner finds himself caught in the eye of a nuclear explosion while saving the life of a young trespasser. Instead of killing him, the radiation now transforms the inhibited Banner—when enraged—into a seven-foot, one-thousand pound, savage, green creature of rage. He is an ogre-like monster of unlimited power whose strength only increases the madder he becomes, while his mind only becomes increasingly more childlike. There are those that say that the monster's fury is a result of Banner's emotional repression from an abusive childhood and being a social outsider. At the core, the creature only wants to be left alone in a "peace" that he will never find. Thus Bruce Banner is cursed, hunted by everyone, including his own demons, and destined to share the rest of his life with the monster inside of him known to the world as The Incredible Hulk.

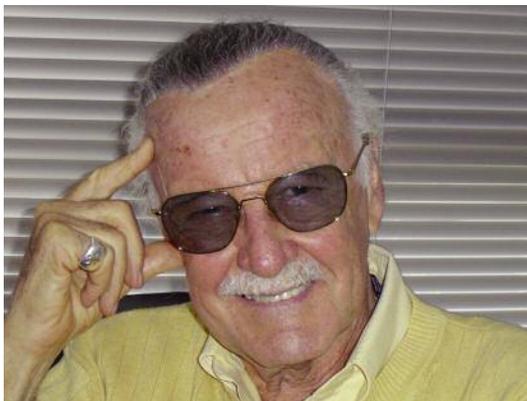
One of the key characters who brought the Marvel Age to the forefront during the Silver Age was The Hulk. Conceived by the brilliant minds of writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, the character was heavily based upon the literary classics of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. With his debut, in his 1962 self-titled comic book, the creature struck a nerve with readers who could relate to the inner pathos of The Hulk—understanding

that the true hero of the book was the misunderstood monster who never wanted to hurt anyone in the first place. The Marvel Comics of the sixties were modern day parables that showed a generation of readers that were ready to open their imaginations that superhero comics weren't just for kids anymore. With his cosmic appeal, The Hulk quickly made his first small-screen appearance in 1966, as part of *The Marvel Super-Heroes* cartoon show by Grantray-Lawrence.

During the mid-seventies, James Galton, then Marvel's president, realized the untapped potential his library of characters would have in terms of licensing revenue in Hollywood. "I started working on the live-action side of it," explained Galton. "And we made contact with Universal—I made them come to us. And we made our first deal for live-action [shows] with Universal." That deal would lead to the development of several Marvel properties for CBS Television. Immediately, Frank Price, head of Universal's Television Division at the time, looked to producer/writer/director Kenneth Johnson, the man who revitalized *The Six Million Dollar Man* and created *The Bionic Woman*, to choose any project he wanted from a list that included Captain America, Sub-Mariner, Human Torch, Doctor Strange and The Hulk.

Initially, Johnson resisted the entire notion of doing any more superhero-type shows, not wanting to be pigeon-holed in

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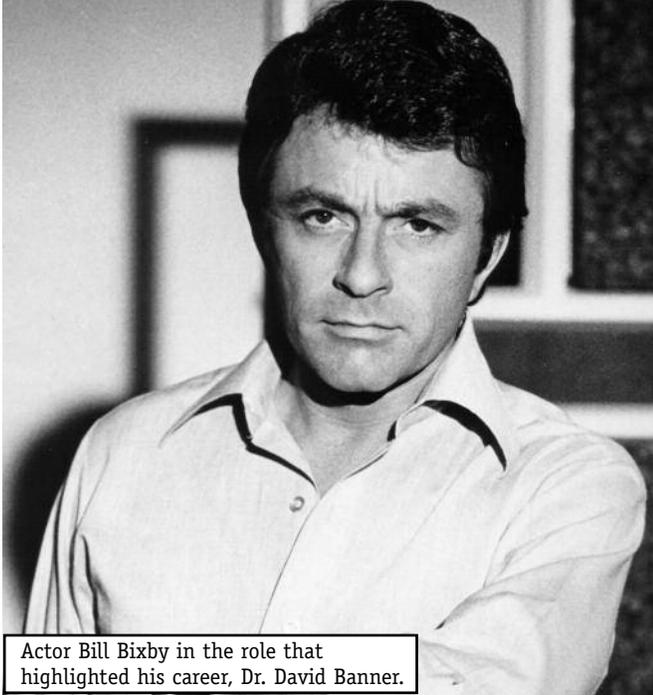


Writer and Hulk co-creator Stan "The Man" Lee, a pivotal force behind the Marvel Comics universe.

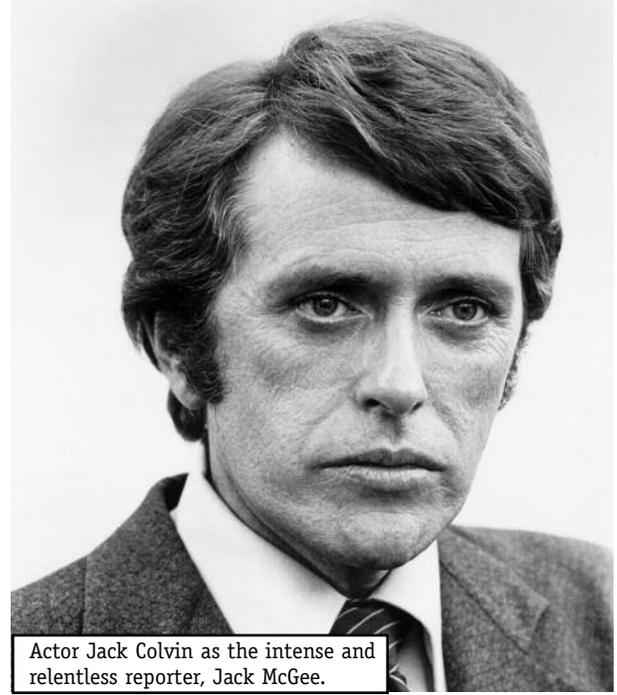


Iconic comics artist and Hulk co-creator Jack Kirby at work in 1965.





Actor Bill Bixby in the role that highlighted his career, Dr. David Banner.



Actor Jack Colvin as the intense and relentless reporter, Jack McGee.

134 the genre, until an encounter with a classic novel brought forth the potential of one of the projects. “I don’t deal with people in spandex,” said Kenneth. “And it was only because my wife Suzie had given me *Les Miserables* to read that I had the whole fugitive thing in my head, and that’s where I realized there was a way to make [it], take a little Robert Louis Stevenson, a little Jekyll and Hyde, a little Victor Hugo, and this ludicrous thing called *The Incredible Hulk*, and make a psychological drama out of it.”

Writing about the inner-turmoil of Hulk came relatively easy to Johnson, who within a week had written the script to what would be the two-hour pilot. Quickly, he realized the need for a lead actor who could capture the sensitive complexities of Dr. Banner, and he found those qualities in his only choice to lead the series—Bill Bixby. The veteran actor had zero interest in playing the character, perhaps perceiving the project to be childish, but his agent persisted. When he finally read the screenplay, he was immediately smitten. “When I read the script, I realized that I had the opportunity of doing a series in the genre of the ‘creature films’ of the forties that featured Frankenstein, the Wolfman, Jekyll and Hyde,” uttered the late

actor in an interview for *The Hulk* magazine in 1978. “I believe that, in the long run, the original movie itself will become a classic—a television classic. I really do believe that... He is the personification of anger. He is anger brought to a physical sense.”

With Bixby and Johnson’s involvement, the network ordered two two-hour movies based upon the treatment. In adapting *The Hulk’s* plight, the writer changed a few things from the comics, most noticeably the name of Bruce to David Banner because, “I was trying to get away from that comic book Lois Lane alliteration kind of stuff, so that it sounded a little more real.” To keep the believability of the show, super-villains like The Leader and Abomination were out as well. Rather, Banner’s adversary was a meddling reporter named Jack McGee, played sharply by character actor Jack Colvin, who was only seeking the truth behind Banner’s experiment. Johnson thought that it was enough work asking viewers to accept the destructive Hulk, and having other colorful larger-than-life characters would have diminished the drama he was presenting.

Ken’s strongest revision was within *The Hulk’s* origin, which made the creature’s plight even more tragic. In it, Dr.



A facial make-up appliance being applied to Bill Bixby, a process which the actor reportedly did not like.



"The Three Musketeers"—Bill Bixby with his white contact lenses, Ken Johnson and Lou Ferrigno in the earlier, more primitive-looking Hulk make-up during the filming of the pilot.

David Banner, a geneticist, is a happily married man with a lovely wife, and lives a life that seems perfect. Yet, when he doesn't have the stamina to save his bride from a burning car, his world crumbles—he becomes obsessed with discovering a way to tap into man's superhuman strength. David can't live with the fact that others in similar dire scenarios had summoned an inner-strength that they didn't even know they possessed to save their loved ones. While experimenting with gamma rays in

the hopes that they can trigger that power, he overdoses on the dangerous radiation, and develops a Jekyll and Hyde personality that he can't control when he loses his cool. Coincidentally, this tale is much closer to what inspired Jack Kirby when creating the character. "The Hulk I created when I saw a woman lift a car," he uttered to Gary Groth, back in a 1990 interview. "Her baby was caught under the running board... His mother was horrified... and this woman in desperation lifted the rear end of



The first appearance of The Hulk (Lou Ferrigno) in the series' pilot episode.



Any kind of severe emotional trauma forced David Banner (Bill Bixby) to transform into the monster he wanted to bury.

SWAMP THING

From the muck and moss of the humid Louisiana bayou came a classic green monster. It sprung from the imaginations of writer Len Wein and artist Bernie Wrightson in *House of Secrets* #92. In the pages of *Swamp Thing* #1 (1972), the tyrant trying to steal Dr. Alec Holland's bio-restorative formula sets the scientist ablaze. He runs into the swamp towards his death, drenched in his own creation. Soon after, a vegetative creature emerges from the same waters; the few that see it call it Swamp Thing. Under the pen of Alan Moore in later years, Swampy was shown to be a plant elemental—one in a long line of powerful plant elementals on earth—whose only true relation to Alec Holland was that his consciousness was based on that of the deceased scientist.

The success of 1982's *Swamp Thing* film, directed and written by Wes Craven, and its subsequent sequel, *The Return of Swamp Thing*, inspired television executives to develop a series for the mossy crusader. Michael E. Uslan (producer of both films and executive producer of the TV series) recalled the staggering success of the first big screen project. "I remember at some point Ben [Melniker] and I received independently over a period of a few weeks, a call from an exec at Showtime and an executive at HBO, and they both asked us to come into meetings. We went to these meetings independently and they said, 'Alright, this movie, this

little picture *Swamp Thing* with the rubber suit, did huge numbers on video and it went to TV and it went into syndicated TV, and at the time it came out it was ranked the fourth highest-rated movie in syndicated television history.' And then it went to HBO and Showtime and the meetings were very similar. 'Explain what are we seeing here? We put it on and the ratings were terrific, so we brought it back three months later and the ratings went up. So we brought it back six months later and the ratings went up.' They said, 'What's going on here? What is this all about?'"

When *The Return of Swamp Thing* movie proved lighter in tone and more accessible to children, the character became even more attractive to entertainment companies. As Uslan said, "That turned out to work particularly well, because as a result of that, we got a Kenner toy line, an animated mini-series from Fox Kids, and then DiC—we had worked with Andy Kayward and DiC on *Dinosaucers*—came in and said, 'We're trying to expand and do more live-action.' And Universal was interested in doing *Swamp Thing* as a live-action TV series. So Universal, who brought in USA Networks/Science Fiction channel, they won a one-time license to do a live-action TV series, and we gave Fox Kids a one-time license to do an animated *Swamp Thing* series. We made the deal with Kenner, the toy line, and actually I



Swamp Thing (Dick Durock) encourages you to think green in his swamps.

Adrienne Barbeau and Dick Durock from the first *Swamp Thing* feature film, 1982.



Despite the complexities of heavy make-up, actor Dick Durock gave his character plenty of soul and personality.

think both the live-action and the animation came out roughly around the same time, with one having nothing to do with the other."

Developing *Swamp Thing: The Series* were fine writers like Joseph Stefano, the screenwriter of *Psycho* and a key visionary on *The Outer Limits* series. With the help of producer Boris Malden, Stefano would bring the show closer to its horror comic roots than the previous two films. The series was a fresh start for the character since it didn't follow the continuity of the films. The show's format was somewhat that of a half-hour anthology series that would have the green hero facing the latest terrifying dilemmas or troublemakers that would disturb his muddy lair. During the first season, the hero interacted with a young troubled companion named Jimmy Kipp (played by young actor Jesse Zeigler) that merely needed someone to look up to (and hopefully lure in younger viewers). All throughout the series, his constant nemesis was Dr. Anton Arcane. British actor Mark Lindsay Chapman portrayed the gentleman villain as a suave yet fundamentally sinister figure that would unleash his hatred and his

horrific monsters at the courageous marshy champion of the bayou.

To play the titular role of Swamp Thing, the late Dick Durock was the only choice after portraying the character twice on the big screen with so much integrity and nobility. At 6'6" tall, Durock used his size and grit to break into Hollywood as a stuntman in many great Hollywood films and classic television shows. Despite having acted in various small roles in his career, the *Swamp Thing* films showcased much of his dramatic side, despite his being covered by his mossy costume.

"It was something I always had on my mind," Dick Durock reflected about the beginnings of his career. "It wasn't acting in particular, but it certainly had no influence being born in South Bend, Indiana. The only Hollywood influence was the neighborhood theater. Like all the kids who go out on Saturday mornings and cheer and boo and see the serials, sometimes it stuck in my head. I said, 'God, I want to do it someday.' I didn't know exactly why, but I knew that I was going to do it. It wasn't a dream; I just knew it, for some reason. After I got out of the [Marine] Corps, I bounced around in



John Candy, unknown actor, Mariel Hemingway, Dick Durock and John Candy's stand-in on the set of *Delirious*, 1990.

chapter 12

SUPERBOY

Soon after Superman was picked up by *Detective Comics* (the company that is DC Comics today) in 1938, Jerry Siegel pitched *Superboy* to his editors as kid-friendly stories that would show readers Superman's adolescent adventures and upbringing. Initially passed over, it wasn't until 1944 that the character finally appeared in *More Fun Comics* #101, within a short story illustrated by Joe Shuster, unbeknownst to his partner Siegel, who was stationed abroad as an army officer. By 1949, Superboy received his own self-titled book, a hometown now named Smallville and Lana Lang, his small-town sweetheart. Because these stories were grounded in the American heartland, it added much to Superman's mythos by showing how the Kryptonian was surrounded by good old-fashioned American ideals and the unconditional love of his adoptive parents, the Kents.

The first attempt to bring Superboy to television audiences came in 1962, shortly after the end of *Adventures of Superman*. With the very appropriate title, *The Adventures of Superboy*, the half-hour pilot was directed by George Blair and written by Vernon E. Clark and Whitney Ellsworth for Encore Entertainment. It starred John Rockwell as the young Clark Kent/Superboy, referred to as the "Champion of the Opressed and Enemy of Evil-doers!", and Bunny Henning as Lana Lang. The pilot briefly, but effectively, retold his origins in the beginning credits, which allowed the rest of the time to be devoted to a full story. It centered around a group of

small-time crooks who are in Smallville to commit the robbery of \$200,000 worth of uncut diamonds. The Smallville police are able to contact Superboy through their patrol car radios, and he responds to them from a secret room within the Kent household. While the pilot was put together well, and showed definite potential, it unfortunately did not get a series commitment. It would be more than twenty years before anyone explored the possibility of a Superboy series again.

Following the phenomenal worldwide success of the Alexander and Ilya Salkind's Superman films (*Superman* through *Superman III* and *Supergirl*), a gentleman named Dino Marino approached producer Alexander Salkind about bringing this adolescent version of Superman to life. Salkind's production company still retained the rights to the Superman family of characters, and after discussions with Marino, he warmed to the possibility of a weekly *Superboy* series. Salkind was on board, but there was one major snag in the plan.

According to Alexander's son, Ilya, ever since the end of production on *Santa Claus: The Movie* in 1985, the two "were not seeing eye-to-eye" and were not in a big hurry to work with one another again. Now the idea of a major TV series certainly appealed to them, so the father and son team came together and made a fixed deal. Ilya Salkind explained, "My father was an absolute wizard at raising money, but he was not a technical producer. Plus, he wouldn't fly. He wouldn't

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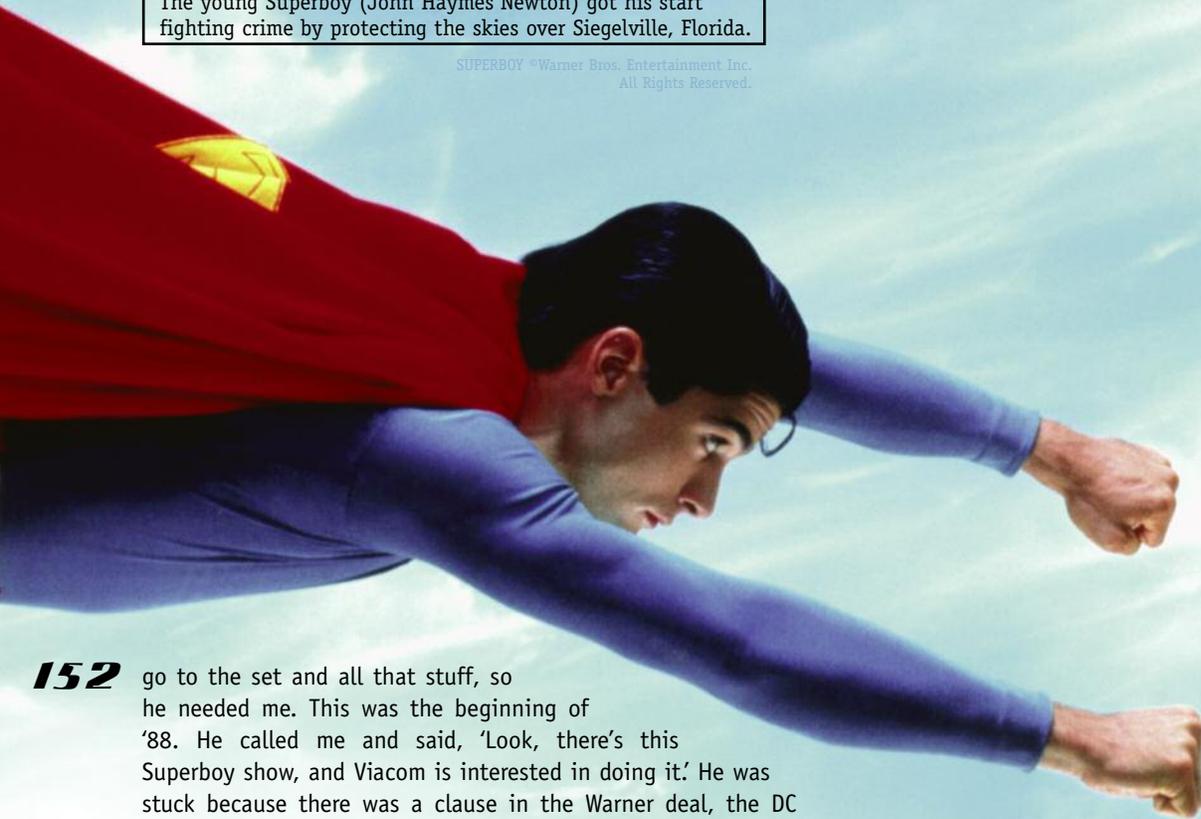


SUPERBOY ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Top left:
This advance promotional folder for television syndicators promised the first Super series in almost thirty years!

The young Superboy (John Haymes Newton) got his start fighting crime by protecting the skies over Siegelville, Florida.

SUPERBOY © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.
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152 go to the set and all that stuff, so he needed me. This was the beginning of '88. He called me and said, 'Look, there's this Superboy show, and Viacom is interested in doing it.' He was stuck because there was a clause in the Warner deal, the DC Comic deal that said any project that was based on the (Superman) family of heroes and villains had to be produced by Alexander and Ilya Salkind, so he was kind of stuck. Without me, it was very hard to do it because he was not hands-on, he was more the great moments of instincts and opinions, but he was not hands-on, following the thing from scratch. So we made an agreement – very different from the old times when we were partners."

"So I said, 'Okay, let's do *Superboy*,'" continued Salkind, "We agreed on the deal; I was going to be the executive producer, but without any kind of involvement on the financial side. For this basically I was just a hired gun and he had to make me an offer that I couldn't refuse [*laughs*]!" So it came to be that thirty years after *Adventures of Superman* concluded and a full fifty years after the first comic appearance of Superman, the character would again take flight in a weekly television show centered for the first time on Superboy.

Superboy was never intended to be a network show; it was always aimed at the syndicated market. This was mainly because Viacom had been on board as a distributor from the earliest discussions and that was their business. But there was another coincidental and very helpful reason to avoid a network situation, which Salkind explained. "Now, what was the advantage of having it syndicated? Oh, very important because we didn't have all these opinions—'Don't do this, do this, do that...' Of course we had DC Comics and Viacom, but Viacom was represented by first Mary James then Julia Pistor, and of course we were all in sync with the comic book guys who wrote a lot of shows."

Going the way of syndication meant only the Salkinds, DC and the actual day-to-day creators of the series would be

involved in its development and direction. No outside network influences could force them to do something they were

uncomfortable with, or for which they had not planned. The major drawbacks of course, were the financial stability and guaranteed location to air the series that come with a network deal would not be in place. With syndication, a lot of the initial funding and selling of the show to stations had to be done in-house.

But even then, *Superboy* was fortunate. "That was the interesting thing," continued Salkind. "At that point syndication was very hot. Michael Gerber, who is a very dear friend, was the head of acquisitions [at Viacom] and he's the one who, once Marino sort of warmed my father to that and I agreed, they got all excited and they made a fantastic presentation for the stations." At the time of *Superboy's* development, there were no regularly-scheduled comic hero programs on television. It also didn't hurt, as Salkind mentioned, that the syndicated market was booming at the time due to the recent success of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Syndication was seen as a viable manner to distribute new programming, and stations across the nation were eagerly looking for the next hit property. With the Salkinds backing the show, and Viacom's impressive sales pitch, *Superboy* was guaranteed to generate hit numbers before it aired its first episode.

Newcomer John Haymes Newton was cast as Clark Kent/Superboy after a long search. Salkind remembered, "Well it was not that simple, I mean, you know he had to be Superboy. The first thought was it's got to be real, Superboy has to be perfectly comic-wise believable. It's the real stuff here, no camp, and then a lot of story." Since the storyline would be placed years before Clark Kent's journey to Metropolis and introduction to Lois Lane, Superboy's lead female character was Lana Lang.

SMALLVILLE

What started out as an idea to explore the life of a young Bruce Wayne ended up changing focus to instead center on the adolescence of fellow hero-to-be, Clark Kent. Eventually titled *Smallville*, after the hometown of the Kent family, the series went on to become the longest continuously running comic-based TV production. While not a direct adaptation of any set title, *Smallville* very clearly owes its existence to the entire Superboy/Superman mythos. Many of the series' characters and elements had their roots in the comics, but they were drastically changed, mixed-up and altered to fit a new, unique version of how Clark Kent grew up to become the world's most famous hero.

On the surface, the vast amount of changes, new characters and alterations to the familiar story shouldn't have worked. With Superman having one of the world's best-known

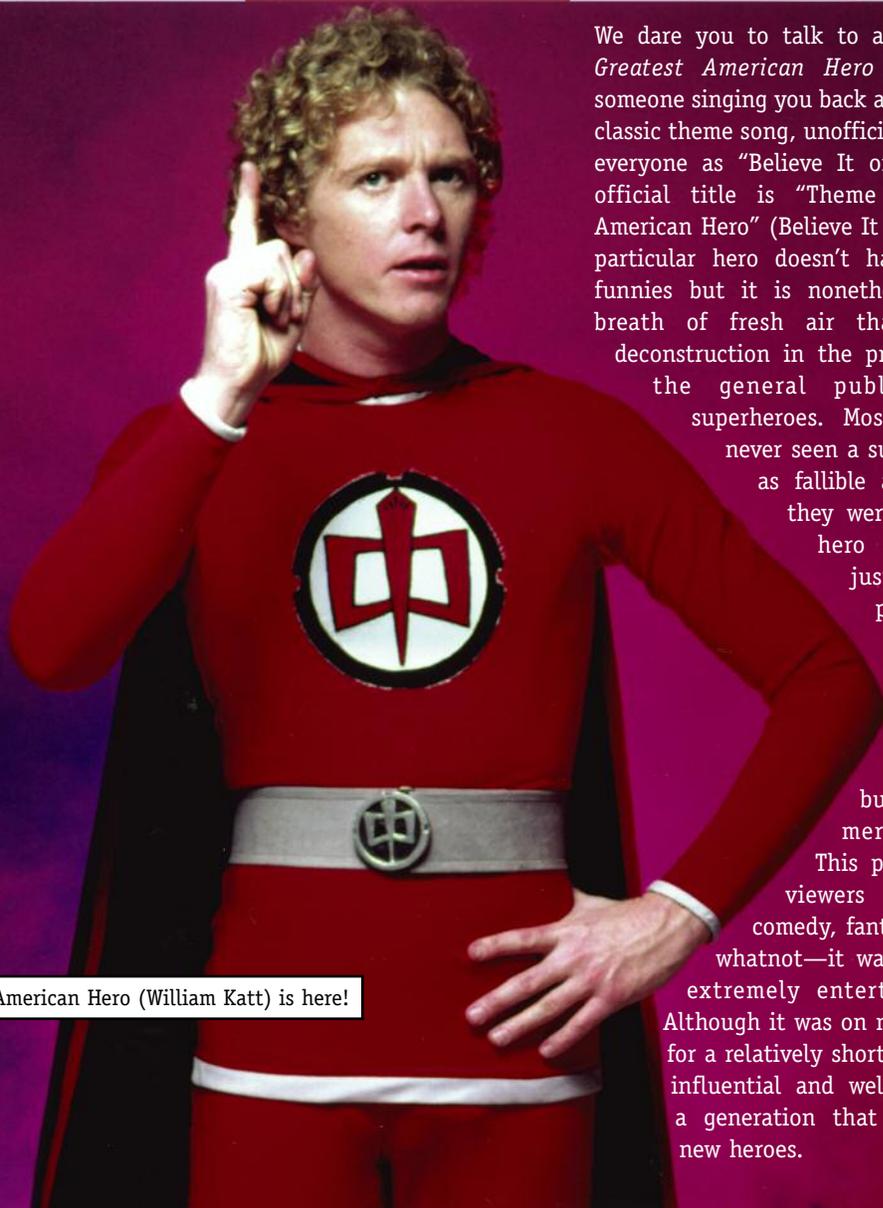
backstories, the creators of *Smallville* would have painted themselves into a corner had they not forgone the familiar history and taken the bold, daring steps they did. Their new directions allowed them to explore areas and situations never before covered in any of Clark Kent's previous adventures. *Smallville's* creators took great care with their new decisions to make sure everything fit nicely within their own work, made sense and most importantly, kept the weekly storylines fresh and engaging.

Series creators Miles Millar and Alfred Gough had a history of working together as writers for both television and feature films. One of their first television projects was the dramatic *TimeCop* series, based on the earlier feature film. Their own feature work included projects like *Lethal Weapon 4* and the



Three:

THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO



Have no fear USA, the Greatest American Hero (William Katt) is here!

We dare you to talk to anyone about *The Greatest American Hero* without having someone singing you back a few lines from its classic theme song, unofficially christened by everyone as "Believe It or Not!" [The full official title is "Theme From "Greatest American Hero" (Believe It Or Not)] Yes, this particular hero doesn't have roots in the funnies but it is nonetheless a complete breath of fresh air that served as a deconstruction in the preconception that the general public had about superheroes. Most audiences had never seen a superhero that was as fallible and imperfect as they were. This particular hero was more than just another well-proportioned, immortal, invulnerable, intelligent, and powerful costumed being, but rather just a mere ordinary Joe. This production offered viewers more than just comedy, fantasy, adventure or whatnot—it was all of that and extremely entertaining as well. Although it was on network television for a relatively short time, it was very influential and well remembered by a generation that was craving for new heroes.

Commercial Break Three:

chapter

13

THE FLASH

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The start of the new TV season in 1990 brought a new DC character life, this time in the form of The Flash. The first significant comic character to appear on one of the major networks since 1978, the crimson-suited hero was getting a chance to show off what made him so popular with comic readers. *The Flash* debuted on CBS on September 20, 1990 as a showcase series, right alongside the network's other new offerings and returning favorites.

The character was originally created by Gardner Fox and Harry Lampert for the first issue of *Flash Comics* in 1940. While The Flash was a popular comic character, he never really exploded enough to get attention in other media like radio or chapter play films. The comic series started strong, but within a few years its popularity waned and his title was cancelled. When The Flash was brought back as a completely new character in 1956, the hero gained new popularity and fan following. The new Flash was created when a police forensics scientist named Barry Allen is covered in multiple chemicals after a lightning bolt crashed through his laboratory window. Following the accident, Allen discovers he is able to move incredibly fast. From that moment, he becomes the red-suited speedster. It would take another twenty-plus years before the character saw his first live-action television appearance in the two NBC *Legends of the Superheroes* specials. But he was part of an ensemble cast in those productions and was never really given any real spotlight moments. Yet another twelve years passed before The Flash got his chance to star in his own program.

This television Flash would be an amalgam of different comic storylines, essentially taking the most interesting characters and aspects from the many Flash stories and continuities and mixing them all together. While most closely based on the Barry Allen version of The Flash, there were also very visible inclusions from the Wally West era as well as the original 1940 version. The producers of the show, Paul De Meo and Danny Bilson, were comic book fans. De Meo explained, "I probably read more superhero comics as a kid than Danny did—

mostly DC. From the late seventies and into the eighties, we read a lot of the new books that were coming out—vastly different material than what I read as an eight-year-old, of course. We both have a love of comics and pulp in general—science fiction, fantasy, and classic detective fiction."

De Meo and Bilson were able to bring the character to life at CBS, even though they were relatively fresh faces in Hollywood. De Meo described how *The Flash* came to exist. "We went to Warner Brothers Television in 1986. There was some interest in the work we'd done at Empire Films—low budget sci-fi features. We'd also already sold *The Rocketeer* to Disney. We'd end up doing endless drafts on that all the way to production. We weren't signed on specifically for the DC character development; that came later. We wrote a few pilots that didn't go to series before we got into the DC material."

"Warner Brothers owns DC," continued De Meo, "and there was a push to exploit the properties for movies and TV. We went to a meeting with DC and WB execs, and they gave us a fat catalogue of all their characters, new and old. Aside from major figures like Batman and Superman, we were told to pick some characters we liked and come up with a viable concept. What we came up with was *Unlimited Powers*. We always admit that *Unlimited Powers* was influenced by *Watchmen*. We kept thinking, how can we get something like this on TV, how can we approach the sensibility, obviously without pushing limits of violence and so on which would kill it immediately. The script featured the Barry Allen version of The Flash, along with a young Dr. Occult, the daughter of the Green Arrow (we killed him off in the pilot), and Blok, who was kind of like a cross between the Thing and Paul Chadwick's Concrete. For nuclear détente with the Soviets (late eighties, remember), the US agrees to outlaw the use of superpowers—the 'Limited Powers Act.' All the heroes have to step down. 'Use a power, go to jail.' Everyone surrenders or just leaves the planet but The Flash, who we play older and kind of hard-boiled. He's captured and put in suspended animation. There's a glitch and he wakes up in a future dystopia—

The birth of the Silver Age of comics began with *Showcase* #4, the first appearance of the modern day Flash.

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which he eventually learns is run by all the ex-supervillains. So The Flash teams up with the other outlaw characters to fight the powers."

"The younger creative executives loved the script and wanted to do it," said De Meo, "but the CBS brass were pretty conservative. Frankly, this script was so ambitious—four superheroes, all with SFX-created powers, and Blok would have to be a guy in a big latex suit—I don't know if we could have pulled it off every week, on budget and on time. But it remains our favorite unproduced pilot." De Meo concluded, "*Unlimited Powers* was just too extreme, but what emerged was take just The Flash and build a show around him. There was only the pilot deal at first, with no guaranteed episodes. We wrote a two-hour script and had to build a presentation reel from the first footage, with a ton of action with The Flash in costume so we could sell the look, effects, and so on. So, that was assembled as we were filming. Even if the show didn't go, CBS would have a two-hour 'movie-of-the-week' to air. But they loved the presentation and we got the series order while we were still filming the pilot."

Lead actor John Wesley Shipp described how he became involved with *The Flash*. "I had just done *Neverending Story II* and the casting director on that project brought me out from New York to LA. Shortly after I got there, there was a buzz about Warner Brothers going to do this superhero treatment for television, and they asked if I had any interest in reading and



Barry Allen (John Wesley Shipp) in his crime lab, the scene of the accident that led to the creation of The Flash!

auditioning for it. My first reaction was 'no,' because I was used to the low-budget treatments of superheroes, and when I found out it was The Flash, I just had a nightmare in my head of running around in a pair of red tights. Then they assured me that, no, it was going to be a darker sensibility, very high-tech. It wasn't cheesy or anything like that. So I agreed to go in and read for it and I was the first guy that they read for the role. Danny and Paul read about sixty guys, and then they took me and one other guy to the network and read through a couple scenes for about fifteen, twenty people at CBS and that basically was the procedure. Then they wanted to see more videotape and film on me, so after we did the screen test at CBS, waited for about four, five days, and then it was announced that I had the part."

De Meo also remembered Shipp's introduction. "When John auditioned, we knew immediately that he'd be a great

Wherever there is evil and its evildoers...

Wherever there's injustice and jaywalking...

Wherever there are thugs, crooks, and politicians...

Wherever there's a blue plate special...

Rest assured, good citizen—

The Tick will be there!

THE TICK

In the summer of 1986, *The Tick* first appeared in the pages of *New England Comics Newsletter*, the in-house publication of the Boston comic book store chain of the same name. By 1988, Tick spread his brand of justice in his very own series; his moth-outfitted sidekick, Arthur, made his debut in issue four of the book. In the first story, the Big Blue Arachnid is described as the following: "He is superhumanly strong and nigh invulnerable, with the intelligence level of top soil."

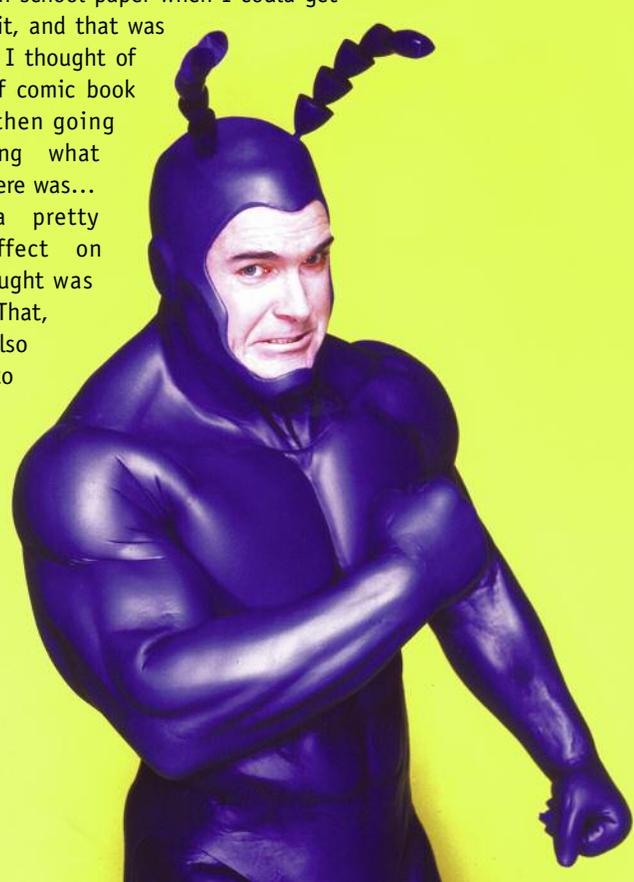
Born in 1968, Massachusetts native Ben Edlund was only seventeen when he made his deal with George Suarez, owner of New England Comics (NEC), to publish *The Tick* as a series. Although not heavily into comic books while growing up, he did enjoy *Richie Rich* and other kid comics until the involving nature of Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* run lured him into appreciating the potential of the comics medium. The son of the accomplished artist and commercial art designer Richard Edlund, Ben was someone who always had the support of his parents in all his artistic endeavors, and they nurtured his desire to create. Edlund said, "I think my father's example was one thing, and I got a lot of the osmosis, a lot of training from my dad. He just would show up when I was drawing something and offer approval."

The Tick creator humbly added, "As far as other motivating factors, I think the big thing was, I was relatively shy, and drawing was kind of a chance to escape into somewhere where you had complete control. I was curious about the connections between shyness and obsessive, meticulous excellence. That's a large part of I think what kept me going. I kept getting positive results from drawing, and it sort of filled

out an area that would otherwise have probably been filled out by sports and popularity. [laughs]"

As he began to get sucked into the comic book culture, he started to become a somewhat regular customer at a New England Comics store for his regular dose of books. Ben informed, "The idea of a comic book store was unknown to me until friends of mine got a license to drive, and then we drove over to Boston. And I was coming to admiration because I didn't realize there were that many comic books. Like, you'd see in the back pages of, say, *Epic*, ads for other comic books and stuff, and it seemed like there was something going on out there, but the idea of hundreds of thousands of books, different ones, independent titles, not just the ones you find with the covers torn off at a drugstore—that was pretty big. I was doing a strip for the high school paper when I could get around to it, and that was more what I thought of in terms of comic book stuff. And then going and seeing what was out there was... it had a pretty strong effect on what I thought was possible. That, plus we also started to play a

Come get a fistful of comeuppance, evildoer!



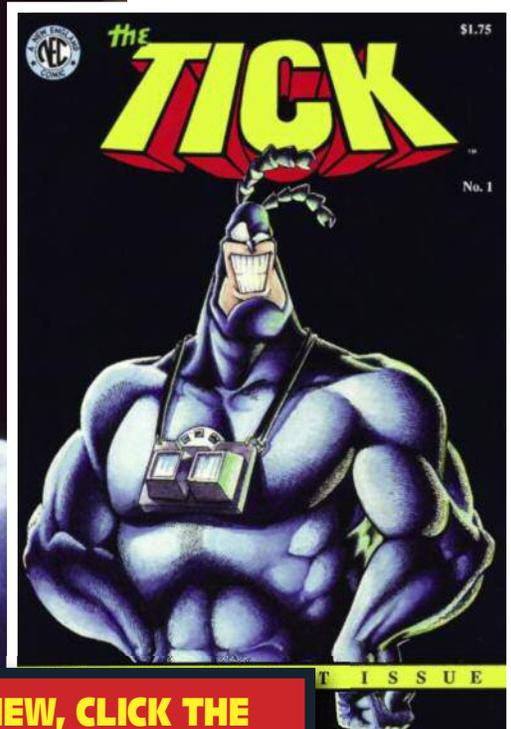
The Tick promotional subway poster.



Writer-artist Ben Edlund, the man responsible for unleashing the unstoppable Tick on all of us!



The Tick's bizarre origins started strangely enough, in this very book.



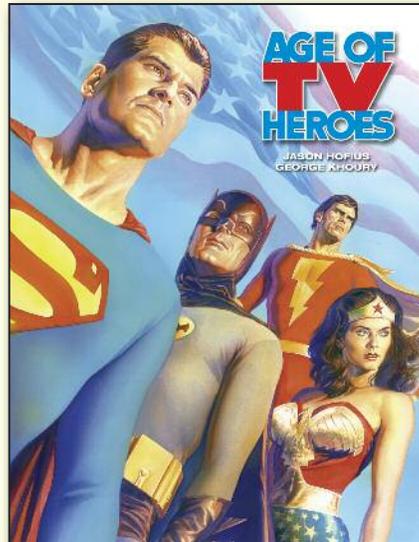
186 role-playing game called *Marvel Superheroes*, which wasn't a badly-designed game, but it also kind of took the veil off of superheroes, in a sense. You'd have to take all of their abilities and all of their strengths, itemize them, and it began a series of superheroes and seeing what was real and also what was kind of naïve, and then parodying them, which really started to get into superhero parody, which is of course a

Begun as a spec strip, Tick was created during a role-playing game session. Intrigued by the character that he had drawn, Edlund decided to think and draw him out as "an unusual, somehow deeply disconnected god character." Not long after, the artist was beginning to do some work and drew some superhero characters, procuring some paying work. He was hired by Bob Polio and comic store owner Bob NEC, who were impressed enough to commission a comic book they were developing. Edlund wrote the script to the comic arriving in 1988. He pondered on the opportunity when

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