



# Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon

*Jake Rossen, Mark Millar (Foreword)*

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## **Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers**

**Grounded an American Icon** Jake Rossen , Mark Millar (Foreword)

Superman has fought for nearly seven decades to conquer radio, television, and film—but his battles behind the scenes have proved a far greater threat than any fictional foe. For the first time, one book unearths all the details of his turbulent adventures in Tinseltown.

Based on extensive interviews with producers, screenwriters, cast members, and crew, *Superman vs. Hollywood* spills the beans on Marlon Brando's eccentricities; the challenges of making Superman appear to fly; the casting process that at various points had Superman being played by Sylvester Stallone, Neil Diamond, Nicolas Cage, Ashton Kutcher, and even Muhammad Ali; and the Superman movies, fashioned by such maverick filmmakers as Kevin Smith and Tim Burton, that never made it to the screen.

## **Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon Details**

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# From Reader Review Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon for online ebook

## Johnny says

One Winter Consumer Electronics Show, I managed to get as close as I ever will to a childhood fantasy. I was just a young child when George Reeves either killed himself or was murdered. George Reeves was very much Superman to me and I was privileged to handle an actual script from the television show and see one of the suits. The materials had been brought in from the Superman Museum (a traveling exhibition at the time) to promote a Superman computer game. The game was as disappointing as the later *Superman 64* on the Nintendo 64—even though it debuted on 8-bit computers.

Just that simple experience made me feel like a Superman insider. The promoter intrigued me with the rumors (and possible realities) that later birthed *Hollywoodland*. But that experience was nothing compared with reading *Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon*. Jae Rossen's book fascinated me as it told of how original Superman animators, Max, and Dave Fleischer used jerry-rigged equipment to develop their *Superman* cartoons (p. 8). That may have made a bit of sense since their brother Charles was the inventor of the arcade claw machine prior to this (p. 5). But the sad part of the story was when Rossen wrote about Paramount Pictures deciding to call in their ten-year \$100,000 loan to the Fleischer's seven years early. Max and Dave claimed the contract didn't allow Paramount to do that, but vandals (you connect the dots) came in and burned the files in the Fleischer offices. This ensured that the brothers would not be able to produce the contract.

*Superman vs. Hollywood* is replete with such stories. In the more modern era, I didn't realize that David Prowse (the actor in Darth Vader's armor) had been Christopher Reeve's trainer for the physical conditioning prior to *Superman: The Movie* nor that he had tried to get the part of Non, head of the trio of villains from Krypton in what eventually became the sequel (pp. 82-83). He didn't get the part.

By far the most successful adaption of the Man of Steel in recent years has been the animated franchise. What I learned from *Superman vs. Hollywood* was that the short-lived, 13-episode *Superman* animated series was penned by Marv Wolfman, one of my favorite comic authors, after he had worked on a *Garbage Pail Kids* episode which did a parody of Superman (p. 172). Nor had I realized that the *Lois & Clark* was consciously modeled on the Cybil Shepherd/Bruce Willis *Moonlighting* series and its constant sparks and sexual tension between the two co-protagonists (p. 202). And, though I knew how important toy considerations were to the *Star Wars* franchise, it hadn't registered that decisions to have an animated series where Superman couldn't breathe underwater or breathe in space—primarily because of potential toy designs (p. 246).

Some of the weirdest tales in the book revolved around live-action, of course. In particular, the very strange casting, directing, and writing decisions related to Jon Peters and an attempted film which involved Nicholas Cage (p. 227) and even Tim Burton. It is hard to believe how many millions were wasted due to ego-stroking decisions. Even stranger decisions were Warner's decision to switch horses in the middle of the stream from *Bruce Wayne* (a pre-Batman series akin to the eventual, but much darker *Gotham*) to *Smallville*, a promising *Superboy* series which, in my opinion became the "Monster of the Week." (p. 252). Ironically, a coincidental appearance between a young Bruce Wayne and a young Clark Kent was scripted as an episode called "Smallville." From such beginnings, the tail began to wag the dog. Naturally, this led to another round of

*Superboy* litigation (p. 261), but the decision to portray Superman's teen-angst years proved providential. Thankfully, I wasn't watching in the sixth season when the show jumped the shark with Chloe developing super powers and Bizarro showing up (p. 263).

By the time I finished the book, I was so disgusted with Peters and the amount of rope Warner gave him to hang the franchise. If I never read another word about *Superman vs. Batman*, it will be too soon. In fact, this fantastic volume made me ill when I reached that point.

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### **Joel Griswell says**

Terrific look not only into the history of the Man of Steel on the screen from his origins to now, but also a brutal look into Hollywood's corrupt system, tales of greed, extortion, lies and outright stupidity, not to mention insult upon insult to this American icon, a great look behind the curtain our popular media.

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### **Fraser Sherman says**

3.5 stars. This is really good plunging into the insanity of the Salkind's first Chris Reeve movie (and those that followed) back when a big-budget Superman movie seemed insane in itself. It's competent but not as effective on Superman's many TV series (Dini/Timm Superman, Lois and Clark, Smallville), better with Superman Returns (movies seem to be more Rossen's thing than TV), but really, really bad on comics. For example he assumes that Mario Puzo's script for the first Superman film made up a Kryptonian relative called Kru-El and arbitrarily switched Clark from newspaper to TV reporter; both those are from the comics. Still, as the comics aren't the primary focus, I can live with that.

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### **Robert Wright says**

Good, fun treatment of the subject. Obviously needs an update to bring it current.

Other than that, my only quibble is that its facts are sometimes shaky. Assertion and hearsay are presented as truths and old chestnuts that have been repeated are accepted as facts, even when they've been long disproved. In particular, the incidents around George Reeves and his appearance in *From Here to Eternity* in a non-Super role. No cuts were made based on public reaction at a preview screening. Director Fred Zinnemann is on record maintaining that all Reeves' scenes were kept intact from the first draft of the screenplay to the theatrical cut, nor was there ever a preview screening.

That this bit of fact checking got past makes me doubt other assertions in the book, especially from the main source of the story Jack Larson (Reeves' TV Jimmy Olsen).

Still a good read, with original research and interviews, and not just a rehash of basic Google-able articles.

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## **William says**

Despite some detail goofs (referring to kids "watching" *The Adventures of Superman...the radio series; asserting that nemeses created in the 1940s were products of "acid-trip" 1950s and 1960s*), this is a nicely researched and written study of the iconic character's strangely troubled history with television and movies.

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## **Jennifer says**

This book is a really fun dishing of the dirt about just about every Superman project ever. Most notable for its long discussion of the total insanity surrounding the Donner/Lester movies and the detailing of various failed Superman projects through the 90s. I never thought I'd be so relieved to hear about failed Superman projects, but a movie where Luthor is a CIA agent assigned to hunt Kryptonians...and then in a twist we discover HE IS ACTUALLY KRYPTONIAN...yeah, I can live without that. It's amazingly enlightening about all the crazy intricacies of making a movie, how all the egos clash, and how everyone has a vision of Superman and most of them simply do not match up.

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## **Bekki Suorez says**

The man is someone who will list Superman as his own personal Jesus, so I wasn't too surprised to find this on the shared kindle account.

As a burgeoning (but by no means comprehensive) comics fan myself, and a passing fan of Superman, I started reading out of boredom - which quickly turned to genuine interest. The evolution of the comic, and how the character and story has been portrayed throughout the years, quickly pulled me in.

There were side mysteries and the like as well, which intrigued me.

Perhaps what I liked most about this was that, though the authors were clearly fans, they didn't treat the Man of Steel (and his associated franchise) as infallible. Nor did they hasten to call all things a failure.

All in all, a book by fans, for fans and non-fans alike. Given the recent proclivity to superhero movies, it sheds a bit of light on the process that other such titles might have gone through to reach the big screen.

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## **Zach Koenig says**

Have you ever wondered why there is a Richard Donner "cut" of Superman II? Perhaps, as a child, you were thrilled by the adventures of Gerard Christopher's "Superboy" before it suddenly vanished from the airwaves leaving you utterly confused? Wondering why Tom Welling's Clark Kent may never wear the traditional red/blue suit and fly? All those answers, and many, many, more, are found in this book.

Basically, this book focuses on all the media (film, radio, TV, theater) incarnations of the iconic Superman character we have grown to know and love. From the Kirk Allyn serials to the George Reeves TV show to the Christopher Reeve "verisimilitude" to the Brandon Routh reboot, the pages are filled with information that

Supes fans will be fascinated by.

The hook, of course, is the fact that the Superman franchise (in any and every possible incarnation) has had enough legal troubles to make even the best of lawyers think twice about getting involved. Such figures as the Siegel Bros. (original creators), DC Comics, the Salkind family (movie financers), Warner Bros., and Viacom (film distribution) have had their hands dirty in a legal battle that, much like Superman's task itself, is never-ending. This book is likely the only one of its kind to really get to the bottom of those legal fiascos and help the "common fan" of Superman understand why the character gets jerked around so much.

Thus, if you are a "Superman nut", and those who aren't will find the minutia in this book too tedious to begin with, you will be at the glossary mere hours after cracking the foreword, as the material is just too good and interesting to put down even for a moment. Highly recommended for its ability to tell the true story of Superman's shady legal past.

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### **Brad Foster says**

Competent and well researched. Learned a lot about the behind-the-scenes drama of all the various Superman projects, those that we have seen and those that we never will see.

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### **P.M. Bradshaw says**

I read this book while doing research for a class I was to give, Graphic Novels 101 (for OLSSI: the Ohio Library Support Staff Institute).

It was an excellent read. From the comic books, to the movies, to the radio show, to the TV shows, there seems to be no end to interesting stories about all the incarnations of Superman. If you're a fan of any of these, you'll find it an enjoyable read.

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### **Chris says**

An entertaining look at the various radio, TV and film incarnations of the Man of Steel, and the occasional idiocy of the people trying to make these things. This book offers some jaw-droppers I didn't know about the making of the original Superman movies as well as the development hell plaguing the most recent clunker.

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### **Marco G says**

Awesome book; great retelling of the story of how Supes was been brought to radio, the small screen, and the big screen in spite of some really greedy, money hungry hollywood types with little appreciation for the Superman mythos. The pages covering everything post Superman IV were my favorite and the book is a walk down memory lane as many of the things covered were broken on aint it cool news.com from 1999-2006. As an avid reader of the site I found myself thinking "Wow I remember reading that at AICN!" Hopefully Supes will fly again.

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### **Will Stape says**

A fun and informative history of the Man of Steel from his early print days, through radio and TV, up to Bryan Singer's movie 'Superman Returns' - starring Brandon Routh as Clark 'Kal-El' Kent.

More than merely another comic encyclopedia or simple fact guide, the authors trace one of the most well known, popular and filmed super heroes in American pop culture history and provide tons of facts on how Superman struggled against real foes in the entertainment industry. From the quaint Superman movie serials, the George Reeves TV show, the Superboy adventures, the cartoons and the mature and solid production values of 'Smallville', the Kryptonian boy scout will probably forever wear the crown of most filmed hero to ever wear a cape. Read the book to find out how often he was grounded or delayed from leaping over tall buildings in a single bound.

Some moan over this edition needing updates to include Zack Snyder's 'Man of Steel' - I can make a case to argue it's really not required. While more info on a new era of Superman would be nice, comic books - as we all know and love or hate - are now **HUGE BUSINESS**. They may get temporarily delayed or a director may quit or get fired, but the whole notion of superheroes being untested or untried is far behind us. These days huge media machines like Disney and Time Warner simply churn out movies and TV shows - not to mention video games - chock full of Superman, Batman and the rest. This volume told how much Superman struggled to fly as a pioneer comic icon. Today, it's a case for struggling for **QUALITY** productions - not for getting anything produced at all. That's the easy part.

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### **Matt says**

definitely a worthy read, if only for the casual superman fan to learn more about his on-screen exploits. toward the end, it gets a little slow as one then another actor/writer/director are shuffled into and out of focus, but still recommendable.

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### **Craig says**

Some interesting tidbits are buried in here (Jor El as a briefcase?! The old fella out of Keeping up with the Kardashians was nearly Superman?!) but it's let down by having to deal with the totality of Superman at the movies/on TV, so for example the crappy Superboy TV series gets the same amount of time dedicated to it as Superman II.

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