

SUPERBOY IN THE SILVER AGE

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Once upon a time, a long time ago, comicbooks filled with wonder and fun were found at candy stores, drugstores and newsstands. Children read them, and even some adults. And as times changed, the comics changed, too, trying to keep pace. Few decades saw as much experimentation and change as the 1960s, with real-life events bringing hope and optimism, anger and disillusionment, or fear and loathing -- especially among the young. It was a decade where old heroes were dethroned, or lampooned as passé, while new modern heroes (or anti-heroes) arose to take their place in the public consciousness. DC (then known as National, or "Superman DC") was the Establishment of the comicbook scene, with true-blue heroes that were increasingly deemed corny and old-fashioned by a readership that was growing up too fast. The men producing these comics were mainly a much older generation, crafting tightly-structured flights of fancy to amuse a young audience that was each year becoming more sophisticated and demanding. However, if *Superboy* comics of the 1960s could be charged with being "out of touch" with the realities of teenage life in that decade, at least the Boy of Steel had a good defense: his adventures took place many years earlier, during a simpler time.

In the late 1950s, Mort Weisinger officially took over the editorial reigns of the Superman family of titles from his predecessor Whitney Ellsworth, and began introducing more fanciful science-fiction themes to the stories. Weisinger shaped a growing Superman "mythology," adding to the legend with such major elements as Supergirl, Krypto, Bizarro, Brainiac, the Legion of Super-Heroes, the Phantom Zone and so on. Even such a basic concept as the "red sun" explanation for the origin of Superman's powers was not established until the Weisinger era. Within comics fandom, Weisinger's Superman comics are often viewed as a silly and staid status quo that deserved to be squashed by the more contemporary style of Lee and Kirby's Marvel. To use a musical comparison, Weisinger's comics are judged the equivalent of the unhip American pop music of the early 1960s prior to the arrival of the Beatles. In retrospect, the Weisinger-era "Superman family" comics were a wonderfully new approach to an old icon, introducing a flurry of innovations and enduring concepts, and opening the door to many new types of stories that could be told with the world's first superhero.

SECRET ORIGINS OF THE SILVER AGE

Mort Weisinger's reimagining of the Superman line of comics in the late 1950s had its roots in characters and ideas that had appeared previously. Supporting characters such as Lois Lane, Perry White, and Jimmy Olsen had appeared in Superman comics almost since the beginning. Jor-El, the Kents, even the infant Superman had all been seen before, too. Superboy debuted in *More Fun Comics* #101 (1945), and won his own title in 1949, in which his childhood sweetheart Lana Lang was soon introduced. But many of these concepts, tangential to the Superman legend, were not fully developed and synthesized until the Weisinger era.

Credits in *Superboy* comics did not begin to regularly appear until the late 1960s, so the creator credits that appear in this article come from the *Grand Comics Database* website unless otherwise noted. According to the GCD, Mort Weisinger began as an assistant to editor Whitney Ellsworth on *Action Comics*, *Detective Comics*, *More Fun Comics*, and *Superman* as early as 1941. In the 1950s, Weisinger was an uncredited story editor on the Superman titles, including *Superboy* and *Adventure Comics* (which featured Superboy in the lead slot) although Ellsworth's name appeared as editor in the indicia's fine print. It wasn't until issues cover-dated 1959 that Weisinger received a printed credit as editor of the Superman family of titles, with his first credit as editor of *Superboy* appearing in #71 and in *Adventure Comics* with #258, both from March 1959.

The beginnings of the Silver-Age of Superboy can be traced much earlier than 1959, however. For example, Krypto the Super-Dog first appeared in *Adventure Comics* #210 (March 1955) in a 10-page tale by Otto Binder and Curt Swan, on which Weisinger was an uncredited story editor. Most fans consider *Showcase* #4 (Sept.-Oct. 1956) to be the beginning of the Silver Age of Comics, therefore Krypto's introduction is a bit too early. On the other hand, one could argue that the introduction of Superboy himself in 1945 was the first true "Silver Age" story in DC continuity, since the Golden-Age Superman did not have a Superboy career. DC itself marks *Action Comics* #241 (June 1958) as the beginning of the Silver-Age of Superman in their *Showcase Presents* volumes. (That issue marked the reintroduction of the Fortress of Solitude with its giant key.)

It was during the period in which Ellsworth was still listed as editor in the indicia that such concepts as the Legion of Super-Heroes (in *Adventure Comics* #247, April 1958) and Bizarro (*Superboy* #68, Oct. 1958) were introduced. (Both are strong contenders to mark the beginning of the Silver Age of Superboy, by the way, should DC ever publish a *Showcase* book of Superboy.) By the time that Supergirl was introduced in *Action Comics* #252 (May 1959), Weisinger was finally receiving a printed credit as the editor. Weisinger responded to the reader popularity of all three concepts by further developing the characters in their own stories in *Adventure* and *Action*. For many years, Superboy shared tales in *Adventure* with Green Arrow and Aquaman. In 1960, Congorilla took over Green Arrow's spot. "Tales of the Bizarro World" took over the backup slot with *Adventure* #285 (June 1961), replaced by "Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes" in *Adventure* #300 (Sept. 1962). The last new Superboy solo story in *Adventure* during the 1960s appeared in #315 (Dec. 1963) although reprints of older Superboy tales continued to appear as back-ups.

This willingness to develop new concepts suggests a responsive attitude from Weisinger to what readers said they wanted to see. Long before Marvel began running letters pages and answering the fans, it was DC that gave fans a forum to express themselves in print. The "Smallville Mailsack" lettercol first appeared in *Superboy* #68 and *Adventure Comics* #253, both cover-dated October 1958. Unfortunately, the mailsack was often filled with complaints from nitpicking readers about perceived mistakes in the stories, followed by weak defenses from the editor. However, these pages can also offer interesting insights and background information, not only to the readers of that time but to comics historians today. For example, the editor would sometimes mention the identity of a writer or artist in response to a reader's question about the story. In *Adventure* #283 (April 1961), the editor revealed that "Smallville is a suburb in an Eastern state of the United States." DC often used fictional cities for their heroes' locations, unlike the real locations that Marvel would begin using in their own superhero comics (such as Peter Parker's Forest Hills or Stephen Strange's Greenwich Village). While fictitious locales have the advantage of a universal quality, as if it could be taking place in the reader's own state (or country for that matter), Marvel's real-life references provided a more "realistic" vibe, a kind of credibility and truthfulness to the fantasy.

One of the letter-writers in *Adventure* #264 (Sept. 1959) wanted to know what age Superboy was. The editor replied, "*In the Superboy story presented in this issue, he is about fifteen years old. You must remember that all Superboy stories go back into the past and are about the adventures of Superman when he was a youth. The exploits involve him at various age levels, from six to eighteen. Below the age of five he was Superbaby. This does not mean that Superboy will be 16 years old a year from now. He will still be the same teen-ager you see in the current issue. As you know, it is the tradition of American comic strips that the characters never grow up and stay 'ageless.'* Little Orphan Annie, who looks today exactly the way she did more than thirty years ago is a perfect example." One of the older Superboy artists, John Sikela, tended to draw Superboy as a younger-looking child, perhaps under age 12, while George Papp's version depicted a teenager. Papp, Sikela, Curt Swan and Al Plastino were the main Superboy artists during the Weisinger years.

WITH GREAT POWER...

This stream of new concepts to Superman lore inevitably undermined the logic of stories that preceded their introduction, where that new element was not known to the character. Old comics were not readily available to

readers back then, and editors believed that the audience turned over every few years, allowing old plots to be recycled and old characters' histories gradually revised to accommodate changes. Weisinger, as editor of the entire Superman line, was easily able to integrate the new concepts of one title into another, creating an early form of multi-title continuity. For example, Superboy's robots first appeared in *Adventure Comics* #251 (Aug. 1958), allowing Superboy to more effectively hide his true identity, and soon Superman had his own set of adult robots in *Action Comics* #247 (Dec. 1958).

“The First Superman Robot!” from *Adventure Comics* #265 (Oct. 1959) is an interesting story because of its many twists and turns, although relying on so many coincidences as to be contrived. Written by Otto Binder and drawn by George Papp, the tale begins with Superboy reminding Pa Kent that he is not to operate any of his Superboy robots “except for a great emergency!” Pa agrees, but shortly afterward decides to break his son's rule by using the robot's x-ray (heat) vision to open a locked tool chest. Superboy, from afar, witnesses this violation and decides, “I must teach Dad a good lesson for breaking the rules, even if he is my father!” Thus, Superboy creates a Superman robot and tries to fool his father into thinking it is his son transformed into an adult. Superboy based the features of the Superman robot on his own future self's appearance by viewing him through a “time telescope.” Pa Kent overhears Superboy's plot to fool him and pretends to believe it; he begins to toss out his son's toys, saying “Since you're a grown man now, you won't need these things anymore! I'll give them away!” Later, Superboy peers into his time telescope (it looks like a TV) to view his future self again, only to find that the adult Superman is also looking into a time telescope at that precise moment, viewing *him*, creating an infinity effect in the panel. This somehow causes the two to switch places, and now the adult Superman really has taken Superboy's place. Pa Kent still thinks he's merely a robot, but after Superman's protestations he begins to suspect him of being an enemy of his son. So, Pa Kent orders Krypto to keep the adult intruder away from the house, preventing Superman from returning to the time telescope to switch back with his younger self. (Got all that?) Of course, all is eventually restored to the status quo by the final panels, and Pa Kent tells his son “I learned my lesson!” and Superboy replies in similar fashion, “I won't pull another hoax like that on you again!” Both father and son have received their comeuppance.

Because this story was published in 1959, the entire saga was told in a mere 12 pages. (Also in that issue, there was a 6-page Aquaman tale, a 7-page Green Arrow story, a Henry Boltinoff gag page and a letters page. Readers in the Silver Age got a lot for their dime!) Today – or even 25 years ago – if such a story was printed, it would likely cross-over with Superman's own comic, showing Superboy's experience in Metropolis (which we aren't shown in this story). Modern crossover events are a way of satisfying reader curiosity about such things, but often simply pad out little stories to fill more pages rather than enhance their entertainment value. Weisinger did introduce occasional full-length stories to the Superman titles in the late 1950s, however, when the story warranted.

Some of today's readers object to a character like Superboy because his invulnerability and inevitability (growing up to be Superman) signals to them that he can't be killed and therefore spoils their sense of suspense. This misses the point of what these older stories were about. The emphasis in a Silver-Age Superboy comic was normally not on slugfests and power levels, but on mental challenges and ironic twists of fate. Certainly Lex Luthor is no match for a Superboy, for example, if one expects these comics to be straight-forward matchups; even Lex's intelligent mind would be no match for a super Kryptonian mind. The fun from these comics was often from seeing the norm turned on its head – a story where Lex was the beloved hero, for example, and Superboy the jeered foe. Or a cover showing an impossible situation that forced the reader to open its pages and see how it could possibly be true.

The Silver-Age Superboy comics were power fantasies in the gentlest sense, without real consequences considered. For example, one infamous panel in *Superboy* #140 (July 1967) depicts the Boy of Steel in outer space, carrying a large chain over his shoulder, and a row of huge planets pulled along behind him. “By moving these worlds from their own dying galaxy to new suns at the other side of the universe, I'm saving countless billions of lives!” he thinks to himself with a look of satisfaction. Certainly the feeble feats of the Golden-Age Superman – or anybody else, for that matter – can't compare to the godlike power being displayed

by Superboy in this one panel. But such power was not meant to be taken seriously and analyzed in this way; it was done simply to entertain a young reader, like a science-fiction fairy tale to provide a momentary diversion. In the next panel, Superboy exclaims with alarm, “Gaping Gridzaks!” This comment caused a reader to ask in the lettercol of #144 what a “Gridzak” is, to which the editor replied, “It was a lizard-like creature of Krypton which had a large, gaping mouth. All members of this species are believed to have perished when Krypton exploded, but nobody ever missed them.” But somehow I think the editor was putting us on!



Superboy’s ability to travel through time and meet historical (and mythical) figures also occurred frequently during the Silver Age. In *Superboy* #85 (Dec. 1960), he undertook “The Impossible Mission” of going back in time to prevent the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Unfortunately (how did you guess?), Superboy does not succeed in this goal. Upon arriving in 1865, the Boy of Steel immediately encounters the adult Lex Luthor, who is hiding out in this time period thanks to a time machine. Luthor happens to possess a chunk of Red Kryptonite, in case he happened to meet Superman, and with it he renders Superboy unable to move or speak. While Luthor gloats at the frozen figure of Superboy, Lincoln is shot by John Wilkes Booth. Luthor hears the commotion outside and realizes that he has prevented Superboy from saving Lincoln. Luthor angrily escapes into his time machine, shouting “I had nothing against Lincoln! I may be evil – but I had no hate for him!” As Luthor heads back to his own era, he holds his hand on his forehead, “his wicked features twisted with regret,” thinking, “Lincoln’s blood is on my hands...! I – I’m sorry... sorry... sorry...” In the final panel, back in his own time at the Lincoln Memorial, Superboy stares up at the large statue, thinking, “I tried, Mr. Lincoln! I tried awfully hard! But I learned... no mere mortal, not even a Superboy, can change fate...” So, whenever readers wondered why Superboy didn’t go back in time to save Lincoln (and perhaps such queries inspired this story), or why he didn’t change any other significant historical event, the editor could point to this story to show why history can’t be altered. This memorable story, incidentally, was written by Superman’s co-creator Jerry Siegel and drawn by George Papp; this great team would also produce the classic Kryptonite Kid stories.

IMAGINARY STORIES

In the Silver-Age stories, Superboy’s Kryptonian heritage is far more prevalent than in pre-Silver stories; indeed, the frequent presence of other Kryptonians is a hallmark of this era. Even Kal-El’s dead parents, Jor-El and Lara, figure more prominently, seen again in “Life on Krypton” flashback tales or escaping their doom in imaginary tales.

Superboy #95 (March 1962), by Jerry Coleman and George Papp, is a perfect example of the Mort Weisinger era: an “imaginary novel” where the whole family (Jor-El, Lara, Kal-El and Krypto) survived the explosion of Krypton and landed on earth together. Along the way, they prevent Lex Luthor from becoming bald, trap Mr. Mxyzptlk in his home dimension, allow Lori Lemaris to walk on land, rescue the bottle city of Kandor from Brainiac, defeat villains from the Phantom Zone, and destroy all Kryptonite in existence (both Green and Red types, we are told). Whew!

The fun of the story comes from seeing the status quo being dramatically changed, without it being a permanent change that a reader may not want to see in every story. (Eventually, Weisinger would make one surprisingly permanent change in a Superboy comic. More on that later, though.) Ironic twists, also emphasized in early Marvel stories, could be found throughout *Superboy #95*, such as the ending when a new Superboy (not Kal-El) disguises his true identity by wearing glasses when in costume, the opposite of the familiar scenario. If the reader knows the conventions of the comic (and perhaps has grown bored by them), the imaginary-story format entertains the reader by turning those rules upside down.

One of my favorite Superboy imaginary stories is “The Scoundrel of Steel!” in *Superboy #134* (Dec. 1966). In this story, Superboy is making his debut as a superhero when he is exposed to Red Kryptonite, and temporarily becomes a brat of steel, using his powers for wicked and mischievous ends. When Ma Kent serves him his supper, he tosses the dishes on the floor, complaining “I’m sick of the miserable food in this dump!” He even throws the whole stove out the door, saying “*Here’s* what I think of your cooking!” Pa Kent raises his hand to the boy, warning “You may be Superboy, but you’ll pay for this tantrum in the woodshed!” But the wicked little boy just laughs at the old man as he tries to deliver a spanking against the boy’s invulnerable body.

The next day, the defiant Boy of Steel goes to school, in costume, and sits in mid-air mocking the teacher. He decides to give a demonstration of his might to the entire school and proceeds to blow the whole building down with his super-breath. Flying away from the rubble, the evil Superboy encourages the children to recite an anti-teacher poem as they enjoy their unscheduled vacation. Later, at the Kent farm, Pa Kent confronts his son, having heard of his knocking down the school building. Eating a fruit with his feet up on the kitchen table, the lad replies, “Get off my back! You’re not my *real* father! You can’t tell me what to do!” When Pa Kent reaches for the phone to call the police, Superboy rips it out of the wall, saying “The phone’s out of order!” He then digs a deep trench around the Kent farm to prevent them from contacting the authorities.

Soon the military has become involved to bring down this super-menace, but all the armies of the world can’t stop him. “So now it’s the world against Superboy, eh?” he thinks, shrugging off attacks by ships and planes. “That’s just too bad... for the world!” After attempting to drown a fleet of battleships (by dropping the Rock of Gibraltar on them from above), the effects of the Red Kryptonite finally wear off, and Superboy proceeds back to Smallville with no memory of the destruction he has caused. Arriving in his Clark Kent identity at the rubble where his schoolhouse once stood, he finds that classes are being held outdoors now. Pa Kent also shows up, with police and FBI at his side, and exposes Clark’s identity to all present by tearing open Clark’s shirt. Learning of his evil deeds, Clark rebuilds the school building and puts the Rock of Gibraltar back in place. But his secret identity has been forever revealed and “people will always remember that I began my super-career as an evil-doer.” Superboy looks to the heavens and says, “I’ll leave this world and start life on some other planet!” (When I first read this line, I was reminded of Dr. Manhattan’s words at the end of *Watchmen*, where he mentioned an interest in creating life on another planet. With Superboy’s great powers, one may wonder whether Kal-el meant he would “start [his] life” again on another world, or whether he would “start life” there in a godlike sense!)

The final panel of this imaginary tale – the predecessor to the type of story that Marvel would later tell in their *What If?* series and DC would attempt in their *Elseworlds* books – shows Superboy flying off in the sky as a plane’s pilot observes that Superboy’s leaving Earth is “the greatest loss our world has ever known!” The

panel has an ironically-worded caption at the end: “Fortunately, this imaginary story never really happened... and the world never sustained that terrible loss.”

THE KRYPTONITE KID

Among the best non-imaginary stories, leaving the reader on the edge of their seat wondering if Superboy would really survive in the end, were the first two tales featuring a villain called The Kryptonite Kid. The Kid and his evil dog were polar opposites of Superboy and Krypto, with the power to destroy them both with a simple touch. This villain, Superboy’s worst nightmare, fittingly first appeared in “The Dreams of Doom!” (*Superboy* #83, Sept. 1960), written by Jerry Siegel and drawn by George Papp. Clark began having dreams about a Kryptonite Kid who taunted him in his sleep, only to find that Krypto was having the same dreams. Eventually the Kid began showing up in real life, turning every object that he touched into Green K, even a lead pipe that Superboy tried to hide in. Clark tried to attend school, but the Kid changed the building into the deadly element, forcing Clark home – only to find the houses on his street were similarly affected. As the Kid and his dog confronted Superboy and his superdog, bombarding them with their harmful green rays, slowly killing them, he finally gave our hero an explanation for his powers. The Kid had been a prison convict on the planet Blor who volunteered for a risky space test, accompanied by a laboratory dog. Passing through a green cloud in space, they found that their bodies had turned green, and when they concentrated could turn objects into Kryptonite. Having observed Superboy through a TV-like screen in their ship, they decided to defeat him as the first step in their takeover of Earth. Using “Blorian telepathic powers,” they had “mind-cast” those dreams to him and Krypto, warning them to leave Earth. Since the two had failed to take heed of the warning, Superboy and Krypto now lay dying by the hand of the Kryptonite Kid, with no chance of escape. On the story’s last page, however, the Kryptonite Kid and his dog miraculously disappeared! The young Mxyzptlk popped into view, having transported the two villains to his own 5th dimension and then, with a wave of his hands, changed the Green K objects they had touched back to normal. Before sending himself back to his own world, Mxyzptlk explained that he saved Superboy this time because “Nobody can deprive *me* of the pleasure of tormenting you!”

Superboy wouldn’t have Mxyzptlk to save him in the sequel, titled “The Kryptonite Kid,” also by the team of Siegel and Papp, in *Superboy* #99 (Sept. 1962). The Kid and his dog surprised Clark when he was alone in the kitchen at a party, turning a globe into Green K and watching him suffer. The Kid said that he was back from the 5th dimension and laughed, “soon, you’ll be very, very dead!” Pete Ross witnessed Clark’s dilemma and blindfolded himself, wandered into the kitchen pretending not to be able to see, and kicked the Kryptonite ball out the back door. Ironically, the Kryptonite Kid had no power against ordinary humans and was forced to flee. Later Superboy sent one of his robots to capture the Kid, but the robot turned green when he grabbed the Kid and was forced to exile himself into space to avoid harming his “beloved master.” The Kid knocked the real Superboy onto the ground with a Green K cannonball but offered him a deal: “I’ll let you live, if you turn Krypto over to me so I can kill him in your place!” Incredibly, the Boy of Steel agreed to his cruel demand, and gathered Krypto in his arms to turn him over to his sadistic foe. “Please stop looking at me like that,” Superboy told his faithful pet. “I didn’t want to betray you, but I... I...” Krypto flies out of his arms while Superboy calls out to him that it’s useless to fight. The Kid and his green dog pursue Krypto in their ship, finally forcing him down on an asteroid where the superdog rolls in pain from the rays they emit. Unexpectedly, Krypto jumps up toward the ship and pushes it into a red cloud. The Kid and his dog are now red as a result, and also no longer evil. The red cloud was Red Kryptonite, which temporarily has changed their demeanor. Superboy explains that the Krypto he turned over to the Kid was actually a robot lookalike designed to lure him into the red cloud. Even so, the reformed Kid (perhaps anticipating the objections of nitpicking readers) tells Superboy, “You lied! You promised to deliver Krypto to me!” The clever hero replies that he hadn’t promised to deliver the “real Krypto” to him! Once again Superboy had narrowly escaped death from the Kryptonite Kid, as well as upheld his vow to never tell a lie.

The Kryptonite Kid's subsequent appearances were few and minor, playing small roles at the end of a dream sequence in *Superboy* #128 (April 1966), for example, and *Superboy* #151 (Oct. 1968). An adult version of the character, The Kryptonite Man, was later (and very rarely) used in the Superman stories. A possible reason for the lack of use of such a formidable foe was his tremendous power, meaning it would be more difficult for the writer to credibly allow Superboy's survival after every encounter. There was already a scaling back of the Kid's power in the second story: in the first tale, he was able to turn a lead pipe into Kryptonite, but in the sequel it was established that he was unable to change lead. (The notion of lead being able to block Kryptonite rays, incidentally, was a facet of the Superman legend "established as early as 1954's *Superman* #92," according to DC Answer Man, Bob Rozakis.)

TOO MANY HEROES

A common complaint about the Weisinger era is that the introduction of so many other surviving Kryptonians and super spin-offs diminished Kal-El's unique position as the last son of Krypton. If you have Supergirls, -boys, -babies, -dogs and -cats flying around, who needs the Man of Steel? On the other hand, all these variations undeniably had their own charm and helped to spread the scope of Superman's appeal – for example, the *Supergirl* and *Lois Lane* comics were aimed more at the female reader than *Superman* was. The introduction of so many super-powered rivals was not a new development in Superboy comics; in fact, *Superboy* #1 (March-April, 1949) contained a story titled "Superboy Meets Mighty Boy!" where the Boy of Steel was bested at feats of strength by another caped lad. That tale ended with Mighty Boy's power revealed as having been faked, however. Another Mighty Boy appeared in *Superboy* #85 (Dec. 1960), whose origin was similar to Superboy's; that story was a reworking (with some changes) of a previous tale called "The Power-Boy from Earth" from *Superboy* #52, Oct. 1956 (reprinted in *Superboy Annual* #1, 1964). Most of these characters appeared once and never returned, which likely would have remained the pattern had Weisinger not decided to start making permanent additions to the canon. Prior to Weisinger, such characters as Mon-El, the Legion, even Supergirl might well have remained characters who appeared once and then were discarded (as was the case with the one-shot "Supergirl" character who appeared in *Superboy* #5 back in 1949).

Mon-El first appeared in *Superboy* #89 (June 1961) – later reprinted in #129 (May 1966) – in a story by Robert Bernstein and George Papp titled "Superboy's Big Brother!" In this story, a super-powered young man who wore a costume with colors the opposite of Superboy's crash-landed on Earth with amnesia and was mistakenly assumed to be Superboy's older brother. When Superboy learns that Mon-El is unaffected by Kryptonite, Superboy suspects trickery, but eventually Mon-El's memory returns and he reveals himself as Lar Gand from the planet Daxam whose fatal weakness is lead. Having been exposed to lead by Superboy, Mon-El lay dying, but Superboy projects him into the Phantom Zone hoping that he can cure him in the future. Mon-El was finally cured in the 30th Century by Brainiac 5 and became a member of the Legion of Super-Heroes.

As noted earlier, the Legion of Super-Heroes first appeared in the Superboy tale in *Adventure Comics* #247 (April 1958) by Otto Binder and Al Plastino. Interestingly, the group's second appearance was not until almost two years later, in *Adventure* #267 (Dec. 1959) in a Superboy tale by Siegel and Papp. The Legion's third appearance was in the Supergirl backup of *Action Comics* #267 (Aug. 1960) by Jerry Siegel and Supergirl's regular artist Jim Mooney, in a story titled "The Three Super-Heroes." Clearly it was taking a while for Weisinger to realize what he had on his hands -- that the Legion was more than just a one-shot story idea but an exciting concept with real lasting appeal. Legion cameos increasingly bounced back and forth between *Action*, *Adventure*, and *Superboy* until the group finally won its own series in *Adventure* #300 (Sept. 1962), four years after the group's first appearance.

However, this did not mean the end of the Legion's influence in Superboy's own series. The Legion continued to occasionally appear in other DC titles, including the cover-featured tale in *Superboy* #117 (Dec. 1964) and the 80-Page Giant *Superboy* #147 (June 1968) which had one new Legion tale among the reprints. A Legion applicant with the unusual name Kid Psycho appeared in *Superboy* #125 (Dec. 1965), in a tale by Binder

and Papp. The twist in this story was that using his power would hasten his own death, so Superboy convinced the team to accept him in the Legion reserve as their “secret weapon #1,” only to be called into service as a last resort -- thereby allowing Kid Psycho to achieve his dream of being a member of the group without having to actually use his self-sacrificing power.

Even Superboy’s girl friend Lana Lang got in on the super act, frequently gaining short-lived powers. Her most fondly-recalled persona was as Insect Queen, which she first became in *Superboy* #124 (Oct. 1965), also by Binder and Papp. Using a ring with bio-genetic powers, given to her by an alien that she had saved, Lana was able to temporarily transform into any type of insect that she wanted. Binder and Papp soon produced a book-length sequel in #127 (March 1966) where Insect Queen met a character called Bee-Boy, whose top half was human and bottom half that of a bee. If Spider-Man thought he had problems, Bee-Boy’s condition was positively repulsive and Superboy vowed to look for a cure. In *Adventure* #355 (April 1967), by Binder and Curt Swan, Lana applied to join the Legion of Super-Heroes in her Insect Queen identity. While she was rejected for membership because her insect powers came from her bio-ring, she was allowed to become a reserve member of the group as thanks for saving the Legion later in this story.

Krypto had begun having his own solo stories in *Superboy*, too, produced by many of the same superb talents who were doing the more “serious” Superboy stories. Beppo the Super-Monkey made his debut in *Superboy* #76 (Oct. 1959), by Binder and Papp. Krypto and Beppo formed the Legion of Super-Pets in *Adventure* #293 (Feb. 1962), along with Comet the Super-Horse (a new character who debuted in that issue) and Streaky the Super-Cat, courtesy of the dream-team of Jerry Siegel and Curt Swan. But the Silver-Age Superboy reached even greater heights of weirdness when Krypto joined the Space Canine Patrol Agents (SCPA) in a few back-up stories in 1966 issues of *Superboy*. In #139’s lettercol, reader Irene Vartanoff jokingly predicted that “within a year Krypto will have forced Superboy off the cover and out of the stories completely... and the mag will be renamed *Krypto and the Legion of Dog Super-Heroes*.” Other readers wrote in suggesting cutesy names of possible power-pooches for the group, as well as cat names for the villains, generating the kind of reader involvement that both the Bizarro and Legion series had seen.

Prior to her membership in the Legion, a lonely Supergirl traveled back in time to meet and play with an equally lonely Superboy in *Superboy* #80 (April 1960), although his memory of her was erased at the story’s end. Supergirl returned to Smallville in *Adventure* #278 (Nov. 1960), pretending to be Pa Kent’s niece in order to prove that she was able to protect her secret identity as well as Clark had done. Superboy also had youthful encounters with other superheroes he would know later as an adult, including Green Arrow (*Adventure* #258, March 1959), Aquaman (*Superboy* #171, Jan. 1971), Batman (*World’s Finest Comics* #172, Dec. 1967 and *Superboy* #182, Feb. 1972) and a time-traveling Robin (*Adventure* #253, Oct. 1958).

SUPERBOY’S PAL, PETE ROSS

Just as Superman had Jimmy Olsen as a helpful pal (a role not emphasized in the comics until the mid-1950s), Superboy had the trustworthy and likable Pete Ross to cover his back. Pete Ross first appeared in *Superboy* #86 (Jan. 1961) in a story by Robert Bernstein and George Papp titled “The Boy Who Betrayed Clark Kent!” The gist of this initial tale is that Clark thinks his new friend Pete Ross suspects him of being Superboy, because Pete is methodically comparing their appearance and measurements, but it turns out that Pete only wants to cast Clark as Superboy in a school pageant. Ordinarily, this would have been a one-shot deal and Pete would never have been seen again; indeed, the tale in #86 is what the GCD calls a “rehash” of a similar story that had appeared in #47 (March 1956) about a different boy. But *Superboy* #90 (July 1961) presented a sequel, “Pete Ross’ Super Secret!” by Otto Binder and Papp, where Pete really did learn Superboy’s secret identity. The ironic catch was that Pete kept this knowledge to himself, and used this knowledge to discretely help Superboy out of jams when he could. In this tale, that meant donning a Superboy costume himself to fool criminals into thinking they’d been captured by Superboy, when one of Superboy’s robots was on the fritz. A

foolhardy and dangerous act – moreso than Flash Thompson’s dressing up as Spider-Man -- when one considers Superboy’s reputation as bulletproof!

The presence of Pete Ross allowed Clark to have a trusted friend, one who wasn’t out to expose him the way Lana Lang was. Pete filled the role as a stand-in for the reader, having the secret knowledge and wanting to see the hero succeed; thanks to his quiet acts of aid to Superboy, Pete could be considered a hero himself. In his friendship with Clark, the reader could see how true friends ought to treat one another, such as when Pete first met Clark by protecting him from some bullies, or the time when Pete declined to attend a party at which the unpopular Clark was unwelcome. At the time, DC regularly ran PSAs about friendship and brotherhood, encouraging readers to be tolerant of others; Pete was a character whose attitude toward Clark demonstrated those admirable traits within the story itself. (Unfortunately, apart from those PSAs, *non-white* characters wouldn’t appear in most DC comics until the 1970s.)

The duality of Clark and Pete was played up in the next few stories, as Pete became a more prominent figure in the Superboy mythos. In *Superboy #94* (Jan. 1962), Clark must hypnotize himself for 24 hours into thinking that he is an ordinary human being to prevent his super-thoughts from being detected by aliens searching the solar system to destroy him. When Pete realizes that Clark doesn’t know he is Superboy, Pete uses his own Superboy mask and outfit to cover for the real Superboy’s absence. Clark happens to witness Pete’s costume change and thinks Pete is really Superboy and tries to cover for *him* when Pete accidentally loses his mask. Pete in turn has Clark unknowingly use his real powers to enable Pete to perform what appear to be super feats. This carefully crafted story epitomizes the “mental challenges and ironic twists of fate” sensibility that I mentioned earlier.

Superboy #96 (April 1962), written by Robert Bernstein, takes it to the next level and just might be the best Pete Ross story ever, as well as one of the best non-powered Clark Kent tales. The first chapter, drawn by George Papp, has the young Luthor scheming to destroy Superboy from his jail cell during the dedication of a Superboy statue. The first half of this chapter is reminiscent of the previous Pete Ross stories, where Pete looks out for Clark, once again protecting him from the neighborhood wiseguys. When Pete is posing with Superboy in front of the statue, Lex fires a ray gun at them from afar, but seemingly to no effect. Later we learn that Pete has somehow absorbed Superboy’s powers, leaving Clark powerless. At one point Clark scratches his hand and stammers, “I feel pain, Pete...” The last 4 pages of this first chapter have Pete taking control of the situation as Clark tries to give him some direction, but we quickly see that Pete has his own ideas about how to use his new-found power. Pete dons his own Superboy costume, takes over the superhero role, and deliberately causes Clark’s secret tunnel to cave in to keep him out of trouble. Clark is afraid that Pete’s X-ray vision will reveal his secret identity so he orders his Superboy robots to stay on the moon for a month, hoping things will be back to normal by then.

But things go from bad to worse for Clark in chapter two, drawn by Al Plastino – who perfectly captures Clark’s feelings of worry and desperation, along with his determination to try and defend himself from his former best friend. Clark tries out for the school baseball team but gets badly hit on the head, sent to the nurse, and has to wear a bandage on his head for awhile. Later at home he gets out a special box marked “Superboy Survival Kit” which he uses to send out a supersonic signal to the Superboy robots on the moon, summoning them back to a prearranged meeting-place. But before Clark can get there, he looks through his binoculars and sees his robots destroying one another. Pete had used super-ventriloquism to order them to battle each other, and afterward Pete dumps their smashed pieces in a deep ditch. Back home, in desperation, Clark drinks an untested serum that he hopes will restore his powers, but it only causes him nightmares, which all involve Pete tormenting him, causing Krypto to turn against him, and losing the affections of Lana Lang to the super-powered Pete. Finally, Clark decides to use a piece of Green Kryptonite in the survival kit against Pete. Now that Clark is human, he is able to hold the green rock in his hand without any harm. But before he can use it, Pete snatches it from his grasp and tosses it out to sea. On the story’s last 2 pages, we learn the truth, that Pete’s initial flight when obtaining his powers had accidentally sent him three days into the future where he saw a headline announcing Superboy’s destruction, and so he was trying to prevent it from happening by having the

focus of any enemy attention solely on him, not Clark. However, he had not seen the entire headline, which was noting the destruction of the Superboy statue, which does occur at that moment when both it and Pete are struck again by Luthor's ray. This results in Pete losing his power in mid-flight, Clark regaining it and saving Pete in mid-air. The balance of power has been restored, although one can't help but wonder why ordinary humans like Pete don't seem to be as bothered by their lack of super-powers as Clark was for 48 hours.

SUPERBOY IN THE MARVEL AGE

The theme of alienation was used in various Superboy covers, although mostly from the later 1960s Bob Brown era, perhaps influenced by the more "realistic" anti-hero approach taking hold at Marvel. Such covers depicted Superboy (and in his own comics, Superman) as a "menace" to those around him, no longer the beloved hero. Protestors would tell Superboy to get lost and get out of town. The previously-mentioned imaginary story in *Superboy* #95 (March 1962) shows ordinary humans forming a mob to tell Superboy and his Kryptonian parents to leave Earth. A young Perry White of The Daily Planet is leading the charge against the family, telling them, "How do we know you won't use your powers to take over Earth? ...I think it's my paper's duty to warn everyone against you and get you to leave Earth!" Later a brick is thrown through the home of the Kryptonian family, and a mob outside yells, "We don't want to live next to freaks!"

The cover of *Superboy* #139 (June 1967) shows the Boy of Steel leaving Smallville as trash is thrown at him, even from his own parents. "Yesterday I was a hero," he thinks, "Today I'm a bum." The idea was repeated on the cover of *Superboy* #168 (Sept. 1970). Perhaps the ultimate alienation cover is *Superboy* #160 (Oct. 1969) which shows Superboy crouching upon the surface of the moon, looking back at the planet Earth in the distance, saying to himself, "After what I did, no punishment's bad enough! I've got to exile myself from my family, my friends, my earth FOREVER!" Such covers were intended to shock the reader into buying the comic, as true-blue friends were depicted as enemies and traitors. Even Superboy's own dog Krypto is shown turning against him on the covers of such issues as *Adventure Comics* #266 (Nov. 1959) and *Superboy* #118 (Jan. 1965).

These "shock" covers attempted to counter increasing reader boredom with the all-powerful hero, to fight the perception that nothing ever changed in DC comics (unlike in Marvel comics), that nothing could hurt DC's heroes (unlike Marvel's heroes), and that there was little point in bothering to buy DC comics anymore. By emphasizing the alienation of a teenaged Superman, DC was perhaps trying to appeal to the same readers who were buying Marvel comics. Many types of young readers can relate to the alienation that comes with having a unique ability, interest, or handicap. Intelligent kids – ones who enjoy reading, instead of finding it hard work or boring – often may feel alienated by their peers but inwardly superior to them. Bookworms who read science-fiction and comics could relate to the "Homo Superior" mutants or the nerdy Peter Parker. DC's superheroes, on the other hand, traditionally didn't moan about their lot in life like today's celebrities bemoan the fact they are rich and famous. Perhaps DC and Marvel's heroes could be compared to old Hollywood and new Hollywood. The old Hollywood stars were happy to be our immortal icons, while the celebrities that emerged in the 1960s were more "realistic" following the collapse of the studio system.

Although DC may have struggled to compete against the new "realistic" tone set by Stan Lee's Marvel comics, it's interesting to note that DC's own Superboy comics had already shown elements of the "nerd hero with problems" scenario prior to Marvel's capitalization of the idea with their most popular and revolutionary character, Spider-Man. For example, Clark Kent's relationship with his foster parents, Ma and Pa Kent foreshadows the happy relationship of Peter Parker and his Aunt May and Uncle Ben before Peter acquired his super-powers. Peter Parker's origin story brings an element of the tragic Batman and Robin origin stories into a Superboy family arrangement. The timid Peter Parker resembles the teenage Clark Kent, but lacking Clark's supreme confidence -- a teen Clark Kent who was secretly Batman instead of Superboy.

In "The One-Man Team!" (*Superboy* #88, April 1961), Clark Kent watches from the stands as Metropolis is beating Smallville in a football game. Cheerleader Lana Lang turns to the bowtie-wearing Clark Kent, asking

why he doesn't try out for the football team. When the bespectacled youth begins to stammer a reply, Lana waves him away, "Oh, yes... I forgot! You wear glasses! You can't go out for football! Forget that I ever asked!" Shortly after, underneath the bleachers, Clark changes into costume, thinking, "Little does Lana know that sports-shy Clark Kent is really her idol, Superboy!" In "The Superboy Revenge Squad!" (*Superboy* #94, Jan. 1962), Clark Kent must pretend to be terrified in gym class when he is tangled up in a rope while climbing it. As Clark pleads for help, Lana Lang remarks, "Well, if that isn't typical of timid Clark Kent! He's so nervous about falling that he has to be rescued like a frightened kitten who's climbed too high on a tree!"

This irony was also used later in Stan Lee's Spider-Man stories -- for example, the cover of Spidey's first appearance, *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (August 1962), where the hero states, "Though the world may mock Peter Parker, the timid teenager, it will soon marvel at the awesome might of Spider-Man!"

Spider-Man stories were known for their emphasis on money woes, with Aunt May being forced to sell to a pawn dealer in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 (March 1963). But the Kents were shown trying to make ends meet in a story published several years earlier. In "Incredible Superboy Auction" (*Superboy* #45, Dec. 1955), while Superboy is away, the Kents' General Store catches on fire. As he sees the flames, Pa Kent says, "Our store -- on fire! And I neglected to send in the check for insurance! We -- we must save what we can ... every cent we own is going up in flames!" The next panel shows a doctor hovering over an unconscious Ma and Pa Kent as they lay in stretchers on the street in front of their store. The doctor notes that the two have come down with smoke poisoning and will need to spend "a few days in the hospital." We later see a wheelchair-bound Pa Kent talking with a bed-ridden Ma Kent. Pa Kent says, "We -- we're penniless... everything ruined!" Superboy could solve this problem, they acknowledge, but they refuse to ask him, instead being forced to sell off family mementos for money. Ma Kent says, "We must teach him never to use his super-powers for selfish reasons!" This is the lesson that Peter Parker learned in his origin story.

One difference between the DC and Marvel approaches to realism, however, was the way in which they were employed. DC's "realistic" touches were often contrived, inserted solely to serve a specific story purpose, like a clue planted in a mystery, while Marvel's realism had a more natural flow where the purpose was less obvious. If a Marvel villain became a hero (as Hawkeye did, for example) the reason did not involve passing through a conveniently-located cloud of Red Kryptonite. The Marvel approach felt more "grown up" to readers who were growing tired of the games that were being played in the Weisinger wonderland.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

So when did the Silver Age of Superboy end? There are many "cut-off" points that one could choose, depending on one's criteria and tastes, to mark the end of one era and the beginning of another.

One could argue that *Superboy* #145 (March 1968) was either the final Silver Age issue or the first post-Silver issue, as this issue contained the story where Ma and Pa Kent's appearance was permanently made younger. As noted earlier, the imaginary stories had allowed for dramatic changes which didn't affect future stories, but in this issue Weisinger gave readers an unexpected permanent new change in the status quo, especially for a series set in an established past. A filmmaker in another dimension had been documenting Superboy's exploits from afar and presenting them as fictional entertainment to his audiences. However, viewers felt the Kents should be played by younger looking actors; not being able to recast real people, the filmmaker deposited a youth serum in the Kent well, causing them to look younger. To avoid suspicion, Superboy (after discovering the cause) used the remaining amount of serum on a selected group of elderly neighbors, so that the Kents weren't the only ones affected.

The next issue, *Superboy* #146, was the beginning of a 2-part continued story (although not concluded until #148 since #147 was a special 80-Page Giant devoted to the Legion). However, *Superboy* #148 (June 1968) could also be considered the last Silver Age issue, since it was the final new Superboy comic edited by Mort

Weisinger. Murray Boltinoff took over as editor of *Superboy* with #149 (July 1968) with a tale about Superboy and Lana meeting Bonnie and Clyde. George Papp was replaced as artist by Bob Brown, who brought a more dynamic contemporary look to the layouts, with slanted panels and an emphasis on the figure of Superboy in flight and in action. Neal Adams became the series' regular cover artist with *Superboy* #143 (Dec. 1967), whose style was also more dramatic, action-oriented, and realistic – more “modern.” Script and art credits appeared on the splash pages beginning with *Superboy* #153 (Jan. 1969), revealing scripts by Frank Robbins, pencils by Bob Brown and inks by Wally Wood. This creative team's finest moment was *Superboy* #158 (July 1969), a story called “Superboy's Darkest Secret!” where it was revealed that Jor-El and Lara had survived the explosion on Krypton but remain floating in space within an untouchable rocketship. Wally Wood, rockets and outer space – a stellar combination! Another fine artist, Murphy Anderson, followed Wood as inker on the series.

Even in this “late Silver Age” era of *Superboy* (and I would define that generally as #149-171), the storytelling style was of the single-issue “shock scenario” type that would be forgotten the following month, instead of the slowly-developing “story arc” approach that would later dominate all superhero comics regardless of publisher. *Superboy* #151 (Oct. 1968) is interesting on a few levels, not only because it's a suspenseful drama but the way in which it is such a product of its time. To begin with, we have the shocking cover that shows Superboy holding the limp body of Lana Lang in his arms and admitting to the police that he killed her. This is the sort of cover that looks like it was done first, and then a story built around it, rather than the other way around. Not to spoil anyone's surprise, but Lana is revealed by story's end to be alive after all – which demonstrates the revolutionary aspect of the death of Gwen Stacy over at Marvel a few years later, where she died and stayed dead. Another aspect which dates this story is Superboy's strong moral code, for when he swears to an officer that he will not escape from his jail cell, he subsequently has to figure out a way to rescue Lana without breaking his solemn vow. Even the most moralistic hero at Marvel, Captain America, probably would have scrapped a promise without any guilt if it meant saving someone's life, but Superboy's refusal to lie or kill were important aspects of his character back in those days. In typical Silver-Age Superboy fashion, he preserves both his word and Lana's life by tearing the prison cell from its foundations and taking it with him to the scene. It's a silly distinction, and perhaps a more meaningful ending could have been written had Superboy simply broken his promise, left the prison cell to save Lana, and then explained to the police later why he had gone back on his word due to this emergency situation. Either way, he had escaped police custody and had done so for the right reasons. By the end of the Silver Age, superheroes were moving in a more realistic direction -- more like the angry Oliver Queen than the “super-cop” Hal Jordan – as fandom favored the more morally-confused characters over the dependably wholesome kind like Superboy. Unfortunately, this story's emphasis on Superboy's rigidity about not breaking a dumb promise has the unintended effect of undermining the value of a moral stand by a hero.

In the “Smallville Mailsack” of *Superboy* #168 (Sept. 1970), a reader wrote in calling for Superman to age normally. The editor replied, “*Mort Weisinger has vacated the editorship of the Superman Family of magazines, with Julius Schwartz, Nelson Bridwell, and Ye Ed (Murray Boltinoff) assuming his former functions. Under the guidance of our Editorial Director, Carmine Infantino, changes are already taking place, which we are unable to reveal for the present but which will shortly be revealed. Admittedly, we've demonstrated in the past that Superman is susceptible to a natural aging process because he attained maturity from Superboy. But, on the other hand, we've always entertained the romantic, possibly fictional notion that Superman is immortal, a symbol of the good in all men. To alter this image by humanizing him to the nth degree surely demands nothing less than a Solomon-like decision.*”

Way back in the letterspage of *Superboy* #97 (June 1962), the editor had stated “Superboy's adventures took place before World War II.” By 1970, however, the intervening passage of time made this position less tenable. In *Superboy* #169 (Oct. 1970), one reader wrote that it was “ridiculous” for Superboy's stories to take place in the 1930s. “Even if it was 1939,” he wrote, “Superman would be 40 years old because I read in an earlier ish that Superboy is 15 years old. I bet the stories take place around 1955 or '60.” The editor apparently agreed with this argument, for the very next issue was the first to have Superboy's era relocated to 1955, as

unobtrusively shown at the end of the back-up tale “Superboy’s Biggest Blunder.” *Superboy* #171 (Jan. 1971) contained a 1-page illustrated explanation of the new policy, where Superboy’s time-zone would “tag along behind the eternally 29-year-old Superman... and ‘stay with it’ as the years roll on!” This was followed by two pages noting more changes, that “a new year brings a new beginning for Superman 1971.” These changes included a new costume for Supergirl, Clark Kent working for WGBS-TV, and Jack Kirby’s *Jimmy Olsen*. If the Silver Age hadn’t ended already, it ended here.

Over in *Adventure Comics*, which Superboy had vacated to the Legion years earlier, Supergirl took over with *Adventure* #381 (June 1969), briefly forcing the Legion over into her *Action Comics* back-up slot and then into the back of *Superboy* beginning with #172 (March 1971). This move would ultimately lead to the Legion’s adventures taking over the whole comic (although leaving Superboy’s name in the title) beginning with #197 (Sept. 1973). The “Smallville Mailsack” was replaced by the “Legion Outpost.” After almost thirty years, the run of new Superboy solo adventures had ended. There would be revivals a few years later, including a brief return to *Adventure Comics* in the late 1970s, and an early 1980s solo series drawn by Silver-Age great Kurt Schaffenberger, but the uninterrupted run of solo Superboy stories that began in 1945 had come to an end. Superboy’s time had finally run out.

LOOKING BACK

By the time I was born in late 1970, the Silver-Age parade had already passed by. My first exposure to the Silver-Age Superboy was in reprints like the *Superman from the Thirties to the Seventies* hardcover book, and a B&W paperback collecting a few random *Superboy & the Legion* tales (with their panels chopped up to make them fit on the small pages). I don’t remember how I acquired a copy of *Superboy Spectacular* #1 in the early 1980s, but that was the comic that made me a fan of the Silver-Age Superboy – and has been one of my all-time favorite comics ever since. This one-shot was released in December 1979 and was DC’s first exclusively direct-sale comicbook. It was 64 pages with no ads, like a Golden-Age comic, and reprinted Superboy tales from 1958 to 1961, along with some filler fact-pages and a brand-new story by E. Nelson Bridwell and Curt Swan where Superboy and the teenage Bruce Wayne solved a mystery together. The simple and charming innocence of these short stories, coupled with the gentle and heart-warming illustrations by George Papp and the others, were a refreshing change to the overwrought and padded-out serials that had since taken over the comics scene, even at DC. These stories were a reminder of a time when DC was not trying to be like Marvel, but had its own unique approach to superhero storytelling. Heck, they were just plain fun to read!

In the 1990s, I finally began seeking out more of these old Superboy stories, and was happy to learn that many of the original 1960s comics were quite affordable. In fact, as one dealer at a late 1990s convention observed when I purchased from him a few 1960s *Superboy* issues for two bucks per issue, the old comics cost less than new ones and were more enjoyable to read! Even while writing this article, as I perused my Superboy comics for things to write about, I often found myself sucked in to reading an issue because of the tantalizing cover scenario, turning each page to discover how the story’s impossible situation would be resolved. When it comes to sheer entertainment, these Silver-Age Superboy stories still work. And while it’s unlikely that their style will ever be recaptured today (or even attempted, for that matter), one can always revisit that wondrous era in the back issue boxes, to experience that sense of wonder anew. For this reason, one could say that the Silver Age never really did end, but lives again whenever those pages are read.