



Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster--the Creators of Superman

Brad Ricca

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In time for the 75th anniversary of the Man of Steel, comes the first comprehensive literary biography of Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, creators of the DC Comics superhero *Superman* and the inspiration for Michael Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*

Drawing on ten years of research in the trenches of Cleveland libraries, boarded-up high schools, and secret, private collections, and a love of comic books, Brad Ricca's *Super Boys* is the first ever full biography about Superman's creators. Among scores of new discoveries, the book reveals the first stories and pictures ever published by the two, where the first Superman story really came from, the real inspiration for Lois Lane, the template for Superman's costume, and much, much more. *Super Boys* also tracks the boys' unknown, often mysterious lives after they left Superman, including Siegel's secret work during World War II and never-before-seen work from Shuster.

Super Boys explains, finally, what exactly happened with the infamous check for \$130 that pulled Superman away from his creators—and gave control of the character to the publisher. Ricca also uncovers the true nature of Jerry's father's death, a crime that has always remained a mystery. *Super Boys* is the story of a long friendship between boys who grew to be men and the standard that would be impossible for both of them to live up to.

Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster--the Creators of Superman Details

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From Reader Review Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster--the Creators of Superman for online ebook

Michael says

via NYPL - A well-researched and largely well-crafted biography of two of pop culture's most important, and most tragic, figures. Ricca sometimes overplays his hand, forcing lost father narratives and the fictional high school alter-ego Kenton into places where they had no business, but the depth of detail is impressive and the writing engaged. Definitely worth a look for Superman fans who want more insight into their hero's parentage.

Dan says

I have always considered myself to be more of a Batman sort of guy than, Superman guy, but am always interested in hearing about the creation of superheroes, no matter who they might be. I am also always interested in hearing how they were created. Turns out, Siegel and Shuster were a lot like many sci-fi/fantasy (and now comic book) fans in high school. They both believed they could come up with something at least as good as was being published. I believe it is this background on both men as they grew up is what I found the most interesting. Not only were they not overnight successes, but even once they began being published, they still were very hard workers. They wrote/ drew whatever they could get work on, though always being proudest of those things they originated themselves.

While I knew quite a bit about early Superman, I still learned a lot about the men who created him. I was also surprised to find out that certain other characters were created by one or the other, which made me even more impressed.

The last section of the book concerns itself with the many lawsuits filed on behalf of the creators to gain the Superman copyright back from National/DC comics. While this is all integral to the story of Superman's existence, it was the main part that troubled me. I am a full supporter of creators owning the copyright to material they create, especially as I hope to one day be such a creator. On the other hand, there is a point in the proceedings when I started to lose my sympathy for the Siegel and Shuster estates. This is not a shortcoming in Brad Ricca's writing, but at a certain point it seems that the families are just trying to milk the publishers for all they can get. Anyway, you can read for yourself and decide.

I recommend this book for both comic book fans and anyone in a creative industry where their rights of ownership may be threatened.

Cheryl says

I can remember watching the original Superman movies with Christopher Reeves. Mr. Reeves played a good superman. I don't remember much about the comic book version of superman. I was not much of a comic book fan.

To be honest this book would not be one of my first choices to read but nonetheless, I am intrigued to learn about the men behind the superhero. I learned a lot about who Jerry and Joe are as people. It was nice to learn where they came from and how they met. Mr. Ricca does a great job of telling their stories. Joe showed amazing talent as an artist at a young age and a wonderful imagination. I give it up to people like Joe who can draw “free hand”. When it comes to drawing likes just say that I am your gal for “hangman”.

I liked reading about how Jerry came up with the idea of superman. Jerry and Joe make an excellent team as evident in their work and all that they have accomplished. Fans alike will enjoy reading this book. Super Boys is a collectable!

Carlos says

Espectacular.

Dean Simons says

I came to this book only vaguely knowing the story of the boys who lost their own creation. This book is very detailed and takes its time building an image of the boys and their young world. The latter half of the book goes at a blistering pace of incidents and detail which contrasts from slow (and rather wonkily written) start. Overall I enjoyed the book and it was very illuminating.

Maurice Tougas says

The story of the birth of Superman, as told through the story of its co-creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. I'm not a comic book fan, but the story held my interest for the most part (until it got too deep into comic book guy minutia). It's actually quite a tragic story, in that both of the creators got royally screwed by the comic book companies. Overall, a little too deep for someone not crazy about comics, but consistently interesting (and sad) nonetheless. (By the way, don't buy into the 'Superman is a Canadian' myth. Yes, Joe Shuster, the artist of the team, was Toronto born, but he moved to Cleveland with his family when he was 10. Aside from his place of birth, there is nothing to link the Superman story to anything Canadian.)

Dkolacinski says

You don't step on Superman's cape. But you do step on his creators and don't really acknowle their role in the creation and growth of the most iconic hero of the 20th century.

Laura Cobrinik says

Brad Ricca's book, "Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster--The Creators of

Superman," seems like the definitive biography of the artists who created "Superman." However, the author does say that there may have been others out there who also designed the character....There is some question as to whether "the idea was stolen" but I did learn that the artists were from Cleveland, Ohio, and eye opening fact because I had always thought that the creators of Superman and the other superheroes were from New York City.

And enjoyable book about the way artists work.

I recommend it to Art Students and to anyone who likes comics. Good for history buffs too!

Laura Cobrinik,
Boonton Township, NJ

Wayne McCoy says

Super Boys is the culmination of 10 years research by Brad Ricca. The result is an excellent biography about the creators of Superman, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. The book includes rare early artwork and stories from their days in high school. Through these, you can see the evolution of Superman.

Jerry just tried wanted to fit in. He wrote for the school newspaper under aliases. He wrote stories about the girls he liked. He wrote letters to the early science fiction magazines and he schemed to get rich writing. When he met Joe Shuster, he found someone who could illustrate his stories. The result, eventually, was Superman. It seems like the ultimate rags to riches story, and it was. Just not for Jerry and Joe. They gave away the creation through errors and spent years trying to get it back.

The book covers the hard years, with Joe working drawing less than admirable things, and Jerry working as a non-credited writer in comics. Towards the end of their lives they began to receive the recognition they so desperately wanted, but the money never rolled in like they dreamed. As the book closes, the family is still in the process of getting some of the rights back.

It's a great story about 2 guys living in Cleveland who create something so beyond them. Something that was breathed out of their fantasies and into ours. Very enjoyable and melancholy.

I received a review copy from St. Martin's Press and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you for letting me review this book.

Timothy Mayer says

It's hard to imagine a hero more American than Superman. Even his principles spell-out his country: "Truth, Justice, and the American Way". And yet The Man Of Steel's origins are foreign, even interplanetary. Everyone knows his beginnings: how his parents spirited him away to safety in a rocket from their dying world. How he was raised by the Kents, plain folks, as a farm boy, and how, upon discovering his powers, he fought evil as a superhero. By what about his creators? Who were the men who created the most popular comic book hero the world has ever known?

Brad Ricca, who teaches near Cleveland, Ohio, where Superman was conceived, answers the questions in his book, *Super Boys*. It's an incredibly detailed account of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two Jewish guys from Cleveland who dreamed up Superman. Jerry was the aspiring writer, sending his articles and letters to the science fiction publications of his day. Joe was the drawing talent, whose freehand style gave life to their dreams on whatever paper they could find. These two would launch the most successful graphic art hero in history.

But the story is also filled with tragedy. Jerry's father was robbed in his story and died from the shock, leaving the young writer without the dad he craved. Joe suffered from eye problems all his life. Both were awkward around women and craved attention. They sold the rights to Superman for \$130.00 in 1938 to slick New York publishers. They were denied any of the proceeds from the franchise for years. Even Lex Luthor couldn't have come up with a plan so fiendish.

How detailed is this biography? Ricca reproduces the 1934 mimeographed science fiction magazine the two tried to sell. If you want proof of Joe Shuster's talent, all you need to do is look at page 68: there is a drawing for their Jerry's story which defies the description. Somehow Shuster did this drawing directly on the stencil and they were able to reprint it. I've had some experience with mimeograph stencils and I can tell you this is no easy thing to do. Too much solid areas and it won't peel from the cylinder.

Much of the story was covered in the 2005's *Men of Tomorrow* by Gerald Jones, but Ricca fills the back story to create a rich tableaux of life in depression-era Cleveland. He shows what pictures inspired the two, what events in the history of the northern Ohio town are reflected in the early Superman stories. *Men of Tomorrow* was focused on how the comics were created out of several neighborhoods in New York City. *Super Boys* shows there was genius at work in the Buckeye state.

I can't praise this book enough. Ricca does have a tendency to "recreate" scenes, but they add to the narrative. He writes as to how Jerry Siegel watched George Reeves, who was slated to star in the 50's TV version of Superman, walk by him in silence. There's even several pages about Joe Shuster's fetish comic work, undertaken when he was desperate for money.

The final part of the book is bittersweet in its conclusion. Shuster and Siegel were finally, after years of living at the poverty level, able to get some cash out of the company which controls Superman. It took a letter writing campaign and help from some dedicated fans, but they were finally recognized as the creators of The Man Of Steel. The legal tries which came out of their various law suits have paved the way for other artists to regain control of their creations. Although both of the men passed away years ago, their families are still seeking restitution through the courts.

I know there's a new Superman movie out. I will eventually see it as I 'm told it's pretty good. But somebody needs to make *Super Boys* into a movie. It has all the drama and heroism of a comic book. And it 's real.

Michael Spiro says

I liked this book. Can't help but feel bad for Jerry and Joel. They got royally screwed.

Whitney says

Looking at all the reviews, I'm kinda alone in my opinion, but I really felt this book would have been better as an academic paper than a book.

Credit where credit is due: this book was very well researched. Everything was cited, there were photos aplenty, and every inch of the legal stuff was trotted out with the tone of someone who spent hours getting it all in order. It never makes the assumption that the reader probably knows something, and makes very little guesswork about the gray areas.

Thing is, this book just should have been better. It had all the components to work very nicely: tragedy, family drama, a story about underdogs, a tale of smashing success and downfall, and a subject matter that I care a lot about: Superman. I like history, I like legal drama, and I love superheroes, so this book didn't have much to do to earn an easy 4-star review from me.

Yet, none of it really came together. All of the pieces were disjointed, and it never felt like a full arc was put together. The murder, the love story of two poor Jewish immigrants, the idea of two outsiders making it in a tough business, all of that could have been used to give the story the spark it needed to push through the dry stuff. Yet, most likely because the "dry stuff" was the most well-documented, the author really ground that stuff into the dirt while breeding over the emotional aspects. How do you make Superman boring??!!

There were some decent parts-the aspects that described their formative years and the formation of the Spectre was all good, but after a while, I just felt like I was reading a long Wikipedia entry on the subject.

Richard says

Brad Ricca tells the interesting story of the creators of Superman, with lots of related information about the history of comics in general. Ricca piles on a lot of detail. At one point I thought the book could have been trimmed by 50 pages or so, but later on I learned that some of the earlier detail was relevant to the later story. I raised my opinion of the book as I worked my way to the end.

All in all, an interesting history of one of our culture's most enduring fictional characters and the men and industry that created him.

Bob says

An incredible amount of research went into this, and for that I am appreciative. This is a story that could stand on the merits of its own facts, but the author padded it with innuendo, supposition, and especially in the final chapter about the posthumous lawsuits by the Siegel and Shuster families, presented events out of order (sometimes by five years or more) in order to create a more engaging narrative. I would have preferred a chronological run-down of events.

Paul Cockeram says

There is a heartbreaking story of betrayal and loss in the saga of Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, two boys from Cleveland who became household names after creating Superman, and Ricca finds that story. Then Ricca mythologizes the myth-makers, which probably appeals to fanboys more than casual readers like me. In fact, the level of research and scholarship Ricca brings to his subject (69 pages of footnotes! a 4-page bibliography!) elevate the creation of Superman from incidents to American history. While treating the creation of a comic book with the same gravitas as, say, the composing of the Declaration of Independence, Ricca's tongue rarely slips into his cheek. He respects the story enough to analyze it in terms historical, psychological, literary, and legal. His heart is in the right place. This ends up, in other words, being a good read.

Where it dragged was the step-by-step slog through Siegel and Schuster's Cleveland childhood, in which Ricca breathlessly points out anything in the boys' early experience or high school ephemera that might connect, in any way, with Superman. Did Siegel's high school crush serve as the model for Lois Lane? Did Schuster's adoration of the period's ruggedly masculine muscle men inspire his realistic renderings of Superman? Maybe. Probably. And I'm certain someone out there cares enough to nod thoughtfully over these details, or to thrill at connecting these dots.

At other times, Ricca struggles to incorporate his research into his narrative of the boys' rise and fall and subsequent rise. And it's a damned fine narrative. Executives of the early DC Comics make spectacular villains, exploiting the boys' youth and inexperience by buying Superman for just \$130, leaving Siegel and Schuster in poverty for most of their lives while the company and its executives made fortunes. And Ricca's writing style proves inviting, poppy, fun, and widely accessible. This was perfect bedtime reading, and I'm glad to have learned more about what might turn out to be part of the American mythos.
