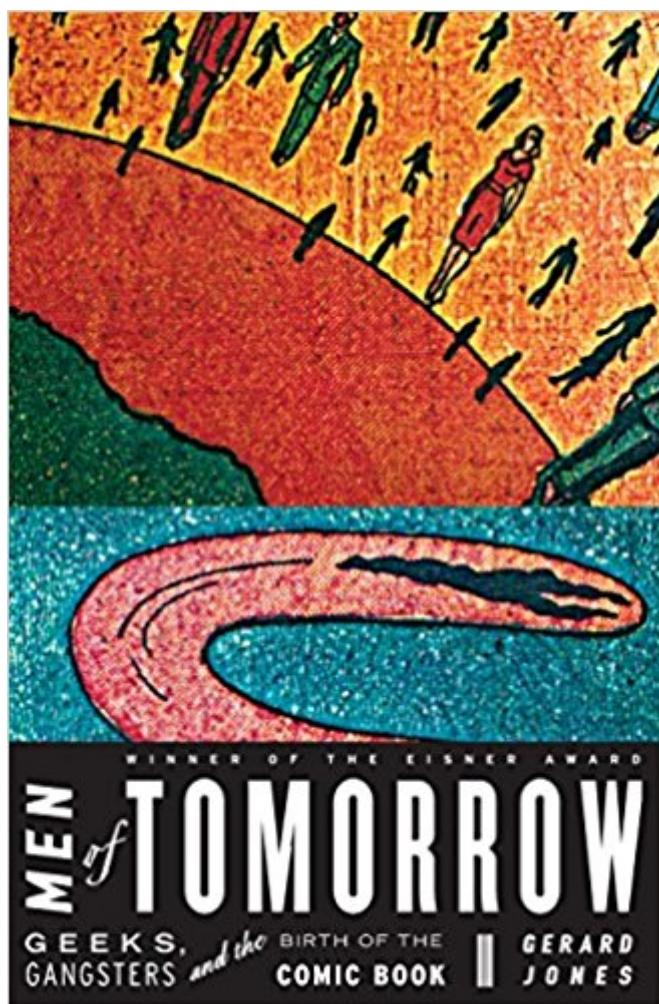


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# Men Of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, And The Birth Of The Comic Book



## Synopsis

Animated by the stories of some of the last century's most charismatic and conniving artists, writers, and businessmen, Men of Tomorrow brilliantly demonstrates how the creators of the superheroes gained their cultural power and established a crucial place in the modern imagination. "This history of the birth of superhero comics highlights three pivotal figures. The story begins early in the last century, on the Lower East Side, where Harry Donenfeld rises from the streets to become the king of the 'smooshes'-soft-core magazines with titles like French Humor and Hot Tales. Later, two high school friends in Cleveland, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, become avid fans of 'scientifiction,' the new kind of literature promoted by their favorite pulp magazines. The disparate worlds of the wise guy and the geeks collide in 1938, and the result is Action Comics #1, the debut of Superman. For Donenfeld, the comics were a way to sidestep the censors. For Shuster and Siegel, they were both a calling and an eventual source of misery: the pair waged a lifelong campaign for credit and appropriate compensation." -The New Yorker

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The comic book's early days have received heightened attention in the wake of Michael Chabon's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Kavalier and Clay*, about the cutthroat businessmen and naive artists who then populated the industry. Although Jones' history limns dozens of the young writers and artists, most from working-class Jewish neighborhoods and many still teenaged, and the bosses who exploited them, its central figures are Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who launched the superhero genre by creating Superman, only to sell the rights to the character for a pittance and spend decades in obscurity and near-poverty. Jones continues the story through the censorship that nearly destroyed the industry in the 1950s to the 1960s superhero revival that continues today. Jones' experience as a comic-book scripter, albeit decades after the period he chronicles, gives him the advantage over most previous writers on the comics milieu, and his vivid writing suits the subject. But it is his impressively thorough research that makes this one of the most valuable books on a distinctively American storytelling form. Gordon Flagg Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

with no interest in comic book heroes, i wouldn't have thought this book to have been of any interest to me but it's turned out to be very much the opposite: at heart, it's a work of serious scholarship in American history--more narrowly, Jewish American history--from the early to the mid-twentieth century. But the author is such a fine story-teller that the reader forgets he's drawing on sources. Jones pits 2 naive mid-western comic book creators against 2 slick New York comic book businessmen (you can guess which side screws the other) to illustrate not only how Superman came into being but how members of a once-cohesive ethnic community exploited one/no two of their own.

Men of Tomorrow shows the industry and the men that built it in a less than faltering light, giving source to the rumors that I had heard for many years about the comics industry back in the day. Concentrates heavily on the origins of Superman and the fates of the men who created him.

An excellent, excellent history of the men and the milieu of the Golden Age of Comics...Siegel, Shuster, Kane, Kirby, and more. Read it and you'll absorb the past.

I've been a fan of comics for 5 decades now but knew very little of how the whole business got it's start, other than a few anecdotes here and there by surviving creators. This book tells the whole story of the early Golden Age and the beginnings of the Silver Age, warts and all. I love how it even went back to the start of the sci-fi genre and tied in with comics' genesis. Written historically yet suspensefully, 'Men Of Tomorrow' is an absolute great book to buy and read, whether you're a fan of the genre or not.

I was a comic book fan from my earliest age to about 10 years ago, when the whole thing seems to have gone to the dogs. I was brought up on the Mexican editions of DC comics, and didn't become familiar with Marvel Comics until I visited the US in the second half of the 1970s and learned to love the cheeky humor and mindless action, plus the wonderful artwork of the Romitas, Buscemas and Ditkos of this world, and their little mannerisms ("true believers", "nuff said", "excelsior!", "no-prizes" and such). Although I did learn a bit about the origins and evolution of the medium, I must confess I was never too interested about the creators themselves. For me, they were subsumed within the characters and stories they told, drew and inked. I guess this may be a consequence of having learned about comics from reprints of 1960s Superman and Batman books, where the writers and artists were hidden under wraps, and strong individuality was discouraged. Although I knew that Siegel and Schuster created Superman, that Kane and Finger did the same for Batman, and that Lee and a host of other talents (like Kirby, Ditko et al.) gave forth the Silver Age, I didn't know much about the guys themselves, or the business they were in. This book has introduced me to the inner workings of the "House(s) of Ideas", both those of the creators and the businessmen. It is certainly interesting to find out how such basic concepts as secret identity, origin story, motivation, super-villains and love interests came to be, and what was the business model that would enrich a few managers at the expense of some of the creators. I was aware of the essential "American-ness" of comic books (that was, after all, part of the pleasure they gave to a foreigner in the days before color TV and cheap international travel). "The Adventures of Kavalier and Klay" showed me that this was a particular brand of "American-ness", very deeply interwoven with a particular immigrant experience. "Men of Tomorrow" fleshes out this landscape, and populates it with fascinating characters. Even if you are not a comic book fan, it would be a very enjoyable read, since it is not a book for "geeks" and fleshes out all the stories for a general reader. I give it four stars because it

could have used more pictures. Memo for the editors: people who read comics like pictures! Put some in in the next edition.

This is a hell of book. Near the end of Jones' wonderful account of the origin and history of comic books, Bob Kane, the "creator" of Batman, says, "Let me tell you some things about comics, kid." That's what Jones does here. Of course, we fans want to hear all the rotten stories of the writers and artists and how they persevered while getting royally screwed by the publishers and distributors. A lot of money was made, but guess what, the creators didn't see much. But mass culture means using technology to disseminate information, using a lot of collaborators (even the artists and writers had to farm out the work, so who's exploiting who?) and fair to say, we get that history, which includes gangsters and other shady characters, the pornographers, sadists, and amoralists who just want to make money. And bulls\*\*\* psycho censors who want to burn all the books. The Jews figure heavy in the story. A story of acceptance and assimilation and respectability, even as their race was being exterminated in Europe, and they remained helpless in the Lower East Side. America becoming a superpower after finally entering World War II, several years after the birth of the comic books. Jones has a lot of work to cut through the myths, lies, and phony ledgers. Sure, I rooted for Jerry Siegel, the creator of Superman. And he does win his recognition and some money at the end. But it was because of the fans, Jones writes, the fans, the geeks, the clique of kids of raised on comics, who kept reading and reinventing, and creating new media-TV, film, videogames, licensing, graphic novels finally the fans had a say to make things right with their gods. This book is about truth, justice, and the brutal, corrupt American way, which has always been a conflict between the haves and the have-nots. It's really the history of America. Perhaps now we're over the edge of no return in our life of consumerist pop-culture, complete political satire, media control, drugs, music, computers, phones, etc. What will the kids raised on this culture go? Looking forward to new superheroes to guide us.

For my whole life I've been a huge comic fan and hungry for any and all books I could find on the history of comics. This is among the very best I've ever read. Highly recommended.

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