

Dare to know

Superhero Fiction

Fiction that focuses on characters with superhuman abilities.

A genre in which characters have extraordinary physical or mental capabilities. The protagonist often displays superhuman strength or other special abilities, creating a juxtaposition between “normal” humans and those with “superhuman” traits. Alternately, some characters do not possess superhuman aptitudes, but combine heroic qualities with exceptional dedication, training, and skill. Regardless of any powers, superheroes use their abilities to right wrongs, protect the innocent, and combat menaces ranging from mundane crime to threats to humanity. This mission is often self-imposed due to an innate sense of responsibility or an early trauma. They typically battle evil counterparts known as supervillains, especially the one who becomes their particular archenemy. These superpowered antagonists are driven by greed, ego, mental instability, or other negative motivations to misuse their abilities. Long-running superhero series can each amass a “rouges gallery” of opponents.

Superhero comics are notable for their action and memorable characters who operate on a far grander scale than ordinary people. Indeed, in American popular culture, superheroes have become a form of mythology that conveys modern society’s moral codes in a manner that is more exciting, topical, and timely than earlier traditions. Superhero mythology, with its simple plots, complex symbolic language, and vividly colorful art, can powerfully communicate societal values; they embody humanity’s greatest dreams and deepest fears. The Golden Age of comics (1938-1956) introduced iconic, flawless heroes and codified the superhero archetype. The Silver Age (1956-ca. 1970) began the trend toward flawed, imperfect heroes while maintaining a sense of innocence. The Bronze Age (ca. 1970-1985) retained the earlier conventions, but was marked by a growing maturity in introducing more serious storylines that dealt with issues of social relevance. The “Dark Age” (1986-2000) exhibited a self-awareness of the limits of the genre, a gradual move toward an older audience, and an increased focus on sex, violence, and grittier portrayals. Writers examined the psychological dimensions of the superhero identity to a greater degree, created darker anti-heroes, or had earlier such characters rise in popularity, and commenced deconstructing the traditional characters, storylines, and tropes of the superhero genre. The “Modern Age” (2000-present) has seen a shift away from the extremes of the previous era and a limited return in tone and atmosphere to traditional Silver Age archetypes.

Novelists using characters from superhero comics have generally followed the same literary themes. Walter B. Gibson's *The Shadow* (1931), George Lowther's *The Adventures of Superman* (1942), Dale Robertson's *Son of the Phantom* (1943), Jerry Siegel's *High Camp Super-Heroes* (1966), Ed Friend's *The Green Hornet in the Infernal Light* (1966), Winston Lyon's *Batman vs. Three Villains of Doom* (1967), Otto Binder's *The Avengers Battle the Earth-Wrecker* (1967), and Ted White's *Captain America and the Great Gold Steal* (1968) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Good vs. evil
Superheroes
Superheroines
Supervillains
Masks and costumes

Secret identities and alter egos
Duality
Vigilantism
Crime fighting
Individual bravery

Benefits of Reading

Gives readers a sense of right and wrong
Provides readers with a model for coping with adversity
Allows readers to find meaning in loss

and trauma
Encourages readers to discover their personal strengths and use them for noble purposes

Modern Literary Examples

<i>Batman: No Man's Land</i> (2000) by Greg Rucka
<i>Batman: To Stalk a Specter</i> (1991) by Simon Hawke
<i>Blackhawk</i> (1982) by William Rotsler
<i>Blackjack: Villain</i> (2017) by Ben Bequer
<i>Black Panther: Who is the Black Panther?</i> (2017) by Jesse J. Holland
<i>Black Widow: Forever Red</i> (2015) by Margaret Stohl
<i>Broken Nights</i> (2016) by Matthew

Davenport
<i>Caped: The Omega Superhero Book One</i> (2021) by Darius Brasher
<i>The Case of the Claw</i> (2018) by Keith R. A. DeCandido
<i>Challengers of the Unknown</i> (1977) by Ron Goulart
<i>Confessions of a D-List Supervillain</i> (2011) by Jim Bernheimer
<i>The Death and Life of Superman</i> (1993) by Roger Stern

<i>Devil's Cape</i> (2008) by Rob Rogers
<i>Forging Hephaestus</i> (2017) by Drew Hayes
<i>Last Son of Krypton</i> (1978) by Elliot S. Maggin
<i>Loki: Where Mischief Lies</i> (2019) by Mackenzi Lee
<i>Nobody Gets the Girl</i> (2003) by James Maxey
<i>Nuklear Age</i> (2004) by Brian Clevinger
<i>Planet Hulk</i> (2017) by Greg Pak
<i>Renegades</i> (2017) by Marissa Meyer
<i>Sensation</i> (2021) by Kevin Hardman
<i>So Not a Hero</i> (2015) by S. J. Doles
<i>Soon I Will Be invincible</i> (2007) by Austin Grossman
<i>Steelheart</i> (2013) by Brandon

Sanderson
<i>The Story of the Phantom: The Ghost Who Walks</i> (1972) by Lee Falk
<i>Superfolks</i> (1977) by Robert Mayer
<i>Superheroes Anonymous</i> (2014) by Lexie Dunne
<i>Superpowers</i> (2008) by David J. Schwartz
<i>Vicious</i> (2018) by V. E. Schwab
<i>Villains Don't Date Heroes</i> (2018) by Mia Archer
<i>The Violent Century</i> (2015) by Lavie Tidhar
<i>Wearing the Cape</i> (2011) by Marion G. Harmon
<i>When Strikes the Warlord</i> (2006) by Van Allen Plexico