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“DAILY PLANET” VS. “DAILY BUGLE”:
THE CHANGING DEPICTION OF JOURNALISM IN AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS

by

Andrew Alan Smith

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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ABSTRACT

Journalists and journalism have always been popular vehicles for storytelling in comic books, as they are in other pop culture media. The more than 70 years of comic books in America have provided thousands of fictional journalists, especially in the superhero genre. Primary among these are the staffs of the *Daily Planet* at DC Comics and the *Daily Bugle* at Marvel Comics.

This content analysis – utilizing hundreds of the original texts but also historical research and a questionnaire to significant creators – shines a spotlight on a quantum shift in the depiction of journalists in comics. Until the introduction of Daily Bugle publisher/editor J. Jonah Jameson in 1963, the altruism of the *Daily Planet* was the model for journalism in comic books. Afterward, the morally compromised and ethically confused *Daily Bugle* was more often the standard-bearer. As a result, today's comics feature journalists as heroes, villains, and everything in between.

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Introduction

Journalists in comic books are like any other characters – some good, some bad, some in between. But once they were something else: They were almost universally ethical, heroic, and altruistic. They were personified by Managing Editor Perry White and the staff of the *Daily Planet* in Superman titles published by DC Comics – a newspaper so honest it would donate its profits to charity if a front-page story turned out to be false.¹

In the 1960s, a new model made its debut. Publisher/Editor J. Jonah “JJJ” Jameson of the *Daily Bugle*, who arrived in the second Spider-Man story in 1963, became the first major journalist in comics portrayed in a negative light – a journalist who twisted the news to vilify an innocent man (Peter “Spider-Man” Parker). After “JJJ,” journalists began appearing in more shades of gray. Some were even outright villains – even at the saintly *Daily Planet*.

But while these two models are the standard bearers, there is much more to the depiction of journalists in comics. During the medium’s early “Golden Age” (roughly 1938 to 1950), journalists were everywhere in comic books. Some, like Vicki Vale in DC’s Batman books, were supporting characters. Others, like Jerry “Headline” Hunter at Timely Comics, carried their own strip. The profession was also a favorite of superheroes. Not only was Superman, the first superhero, a journalist in his civilian life, but so were many of his fellow mystery men, such as Captain Marvel, Crimson Avenger, Green Hornet, Johnny Quick, and The Patriot. All of them crusaded against Bundists,

1. Otto Binder, “The Boy from Mars,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 27, March 1958, 8.

crime syndicates, spies, and other scourges of society throughout the 1940s and 1950s, both in and out of “uniform.”

But they didn’t behave as we would expect journalists in the real world to behave. They often acted as law enforcement, private detectives, or costumed crime-fighters. While they always bagged the bad guys, their methods usually exceeded the bounds of accepted journalistic practice.

Even the fabled *Daily Planet* staff was not immune to variances from standard journalism methodology – or even ethics. Jimmy Olsen frequently misrepresented himself in the 1950s and ‘60s, dressing in various disguises, most notably as a girl on at least four occasions. In the 1960s and ‘70s, Lois Lane wouldn’t let anything stop her from getting a “scoop,” including misrepresentation and burglary. And some of those scoops were hardly worth the name, as they were what we’d today call “infotainment.”

But even at their worst, the *Daily Planet* reporters were routinely presented by the writers as heroic protagonists, while today journalists in comics have a more nuanced and often less flattering presentation. The casual acceptance of journalists as moral authority figures in the early days of comics has changed dramatically, and it’s easy to identify where: *Amazing Spider-Man* 1 in 1963, which introduced the *Daily Bugle*’s publisher and editor. As the first major anti-hero journalist, Jameson was vain, cowardly, stubborn, miserly, envious, cruel, thoughtless, and overbearing. But worse, from a journalism standpoint, he was quick to twist the news to serve a personal agenda.

Still, even Jameson had more than one dimension, in that he occasionally exhibited virtues. For example, he frequently stood up to bigotry against African-Americans. He was pro-active against crime. His dedication to getting the news in a

timely and accurate manner – where it did not involve Spider-Man – was frequently on display.

So he was sometimes admirable. Mostly, though, he was very, very flawed. And after Jameson, comics produced more journalists with flaws, some even as criminals. Later years brought the Bill O'Reilly-like Jack Ryder in *The Creeper*, crime reporter/criminal mastermind Frederick Foswell in *Amazing Spider-Man*, the ethically-challenged but ambitious Kat Farrell in *Deadline*, and the alcoholic Sally Floyd in the various "Front Line" miniseries. Even the *Daily Planet* hired a few disreputable types, such as gossip columnist Cat Grant and the bullying sports broadcaster Steve Lombard, while the corporate parent was being run by a super-villain passing himself off as the CEO, Morgan Edge.

There were also good guys, though, such as the *Bugle*'s Joe "Robbie" Robertson, Jameson's wise and ethical second-in-command. There was reporter Ned Leeds, such a fine fellow that Peter "Spider-Man" Parker lamented that he couldn't bring himself to hate the reporter, despite Leeds stealing Parker's girlfriend. And there was Ben Urich, a journalist so principled that when he discovered Daredevil's secret identity he withheld it, and lied to his editor about who the Man Without Fear really was. And two miniseries, *Marvels* and *Marvels: Eye of the Camera*, starred principled, albeit troubled, freelance news photographer Phil Sheldon, who often worked for the *Bugle*.

In any case, the demarcation line between the latter journalists and their squeaky-clean forebears is the *Daily Bugle*. That shift is easy to miss, because comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels have been largely ignored until recently by the academic community. The outlines are also blurred by the sheer volume of journalist characters in

comic books. A content analysis is required to bring some of those changes in sharp relief, and the study of journalism itself will remain incomplete or at least incompletely understood without this sort of study. Further, if comic books, as one scholar says, “create a grounded realism that allows them to react to, and reflect, changes in the American socio-political landscape, culture, and climate,”² then the journalist’s fall from grace in comics may parallel the industry’s sinking popularity in reality.

Primary Sources

The primary texts for this analysis are mainstream American comic books, defined as those in the format that became more or less standard in the late 1930s, that strongly involve journalists or journalism. Availability proved not to be an issue. Most of the major comics of the 1930s and 1940s are available via reprint and download. My personal collection provided the bulk of major titles from the 1960s to present. And, while the 1950s have not been reprinted in any comprehensive way as yet, sufficient material is available through reprints and (mostly) online to provide a broad overview.

Determining which books on which to focus of the hundreds of thousands printed since 1938 was a Herculean task, but not particularly difficult for someone familiar with the medium. The subject of each chapter suggested the titles needed.

For example, Chapter Two focuses on the *Daily Planet* and its staff. While Superman and the *Planet* are ubiquitous in all the superhero books published by DC Comics, the primary stories involving those characters mostly appear in the “Superman

2. Andy Frisk, “Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and The Unmasking of Cold War America,” The Comic Book Bin, entry posted June 14, 2009., http://www.comicbookbin.com/Secret_Identity_Crisis_Comic_Books_and_The_Unmasking_of_Cold_War_America001.html (accessed July 13, 2010).

line” of books (as opposed to, say, the “Batman line,” which would include *Batman*, *Batman and Robin*, *Detective Comics*, *Red Robin*, etc.). While those titles have varied over the decades to some degree, this analysis concentrated particularly on *Action Comics*, *Superman*, *Superman Family*, *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane*, *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen*, *World’s Finest Comics* and related miniseries and one-shots. These titles, some published continually from 1938 to present, strongly demonstrate an ethical newspaper and staff, with only recent years (beginning around 1970) adding for less-than-ethical employees and behaviors.

For the *Daily Bugle* and its staff discussed in Chapter Three, the primary titles of interest are those featuring Spider-Man, including *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Marvel Team-Up*, *Sensational Spider-Man*, *Spectacular Spider-Man*, *The Pulse*, *Web of Spider-Man*, and related miniseries and one-shots. Of particular interest are the first 100 issues of *Amazing Spider-Man* and related Annuals, as it was within those issues that writer/editor Stan Lee created or co-created the major employees of the *Daily Bugle*, and established their primary characteristics and behavior parameters. It is in *Amazing Spider-Man* that J. Jonah Jameson was introduced in 1963, and where the many facets of his character – mostly negative – were first on display. It is also in the first 100 issues of that title that we saw Peter Parker learning ethics over time, Frederick Foswell lurching back and forth over the ethical (and criminal) line, and the creation of other major *Bugle* employees of varying integrity.

But *Amazing Spider-Man* is not the whole story. Long-time *Bugle* employee Ben Urich was created in *Daredevil* and appeared mostly in that title (as well as *The Pulse*), before leaving the *Bugle* for *Front Line*, a newspaper and website established in a series

of miniseries. Those miniseries also introduced readers to Sally Floyd, initially an alcoholic journalist engaging in left-wing advocacy journalism, who over time abandoned both practices. The complicated Kat Farrell was established in the miniseries *Deadline*, so that title came under review.

For the overview of comic-book journalists from 1938 to 1963 found in Chapter One, titles featuring characters of major importance or staying power rose to the top. Those included books starring, for example, Captain Marvel (*Captain Marvel Adventures, Whiz Comics, etc.*), or early Timely Comics featuring the likes of “Headline” Hunter and Phantom Reporter (*Captain America Comics, Daring Mystery Comics, etc.*). One-off characters and stories were included where interesting or important. All of these titles together paint a generally favorable view of journalism, with one or two notable exceptions.

For the overview of comic-book journalists 1963 to present found in Chapter Four, any title anywhere that featured journalism or journalists in a prominent way came under review, ranging from the duplicitous Bethany Snow in DC’s *New Teen Titans* to the heartless Trish Tilby in Marvel’s *X-Factor*. Steve Ditko’s various attempts at an Objectivist journalist/superhero stand out above the crowd. Overall these stories vary wildly in their depiction of journalists and journalism, in stark contrast to the largely consistent depiction before 1963.

Literature Review

Of critical importance in tracing these characters over time are straightforward histories of the medium and of the primary characters. Some of those that have proven

valuable are Les Daniels' *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes*, Daniels' *Superman: A Complete History*, Michael Eury's *A Krypton Companion*, Ron Goulart's *Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History*, Gerard Jones' *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*, Amy Kiste Nyberg's *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*, Jim Steranko's *The Steranko History of Comics Volume One* and *Volume Two*, and Bradford Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Michael Fleisher's *Original Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes, Volume Three – Featuring Superman* highlights significant areas for research – such as those where characters first appeared, or where important events occurred – or helpfully summarizes them.

Since both White and Olsen were originally created in the *Adventures of Superman* radio show, the original broadcasts (available on YouTube.com and via Amazon) and DC Comics' *The Superman Radio Scripts – Volume I: Superman vs. Atom Man* were necessary to provide understanding of those characters' origins. Michael Bifulco's *Superman on Television* was useful in shedding light on the presentation of the *Daily Planet* characters on the small screen, especially the more aggressive Clark Kent found there. For movies, my primary source was *Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon* by Jake Rossen.

There are dozens of books that discuss comic-book characters in more subjective terms; many are useful for those very opinions, to raise questions or put characters or events into larger contexts. Danny Fingeroth's *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society* is a thoughtful meditation

on superheroes, while collections of essays such as *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* and *The Psychology of Superheroes: An Unauthorized Explanation* offer a shotgun approach to the genre. Richard Reynolds' *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* brings up philosophical aspects of major characters that the primary texts sometimes suggest but never directly address.

Relevant academic papers are rare. The best source is The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture website (IJPC.com), sponsored by the University of Southern California Annenberg, which provides a modern list of "Comic Book Journalists Beyond Clark Kent," insight on "The Mythology of Perry White" as it pertains to the television show *Smallville*, and a look at journalists as they are presented in movies and television in Matthew Ehrlich's "Studying the Journalist in Popular Culture." Various older papers, such as "EXTRA! The Comic Book Journalist Survives the Censors in 1955" from *Journalism History*, and "Cartoon and Comics Classicism: High-Art Histories of Lowbrow Culture" in *American Literary History*, provide background and broader sociological insight, but little else.

Ehrlich's book *Journalism in the Movies* suggests putting comics with journalism themes in the context of the eras in which they were published. *Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies* provides the idea of using the Society of Professional Journalism's Code of Ethics as a measure of the behavior of fictional journalists, and Joe Saltzman's essay "Deception and Undercover Journalism: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Mr. Deeds*" helps explain Jimmy Olsen's penchant for disguise.

There is no shortage of commentary on the Internet. Of particular use are Brian Cronin's "Comic Book Urban Legends Revealed" compendium, the unofficial Superman

Homepage, the Public Domain Super Heroes website, Don Markstein's "Toonopedia," and others that – when checked against each other and more official sources – feature relevant history or even reproductions of primary texts. Other websites of note are the Society of Professional Journalists' spj.org (for its Code of Ethics), Newsarama.com (for interviews with comics professionals), and mediate.com for Robert Quigley's "Great Caesar's Ghost: 5 Great Comic Book Journalists" (a useful list). The Grand Comic Book Database (comics.org), checked against *Comics Buyer's Guide's Standard Catalog of Comics Books* and Human Computing's ComicBase 14 software for managing comic-book collections, is invaluable for determining publishers, creators, dates of publication and other specific data.

A search for creators' intent is supplemented by biographies of Steve Ditko (artist/co-creator of Spider-Man), Stan Lee (writer/co-creator of Spider-Man), and Julius Schwartz (editor of *Superman* in the 1970s). It is Lee's autobiography *Excelsior*, for example, that we learn J. Jonah Jameson was originally a throwaway character that became so useful as a foil to the protagonist that he become a permanent part of the *dramatis personae*.

Methodology

The framework of this content analysis is to determine characterization of important comic-book journalists through the stories that feature them, and compare their behavior to the industry's accepted ethical behaviors via the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, adopted in 1996 (see appendix). The texts often tell us that these characters are behaving in an ethical or unethical way, but comic-book writers

aren't experts on the field – so the SPJ Code of Ethics is a practical yardstick to compare how the characters' actions match their descriptions, so that we do not accept the latter at face value. It begins with *Action Comics* 1 (with a publishing date of June 1938) and continues to the present, with emphasis on the staffs of the *Daily Planet* and the *Daily Bugle*.

In an attempt to supplement the primary texts, I have researched the origins of the characters in the creators' words as much as possible. In some cases the information comes from the aforementioned biographies, and in others from a questionnaire sent to those Spider-Man and Superman editors and writers who were willing to participate. Those professionals consist of Gerry Conway, Elliott S. Maggin, and Roy Thomas, who responded to these questions:

- Were you instructed in how to portray your editor in a particular manner?
- How would you characterize the editor you wrote?
- Were you attempting to draw a distinction with your editor character versus what the competition was doing, or did you ignore the competition?
- Were you attempting to say anything about journalism when you were writing your stories?
- What is your opinion of journalism and journalists?

The material is structured in five chapters, with Chapter One an overview of journalists in comics from 1938 to roughly the early 1960s, excluding the *Daily Planet* staff. Chapter Two focuses on the *Daily Planet* and its four longest-running employees – Clark Kent, Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and Perry White – during the same period, especially 1958-1970, when editor Mort Weisinger kept the line of Superman books

firmly consistent and established most of the conventions we recognize today. Chapter Three examines J. Jonah Jameson, with an emphasis on 1963-1971, when a single writer/editor established the character, and other *Daily Bugle* employees in the same period. Chapter Four is an overview of the cornucopia of journalists offered in the last three or four decades. Chapter Five contains further analysis and conclusions.

Hypotheses

Since journalists and journalism have been important elements in comic books going back to 1938 and the breakthrough character Superman – and his mild-mannered alter ego – there is a huge amount of primary material to examine for the portrayal of the industry in the comic-book medium. But when separating the signal from the noise, two trends emerge: At first comics generally treated journalists as adjuncts to law enforcement – following the *Daily Planet* precedent, more or less – but in 1963 a new model emerged with J. Jonah Jameson, a character who often acted contrary to accepted ethical norms in serving as a nuisance (and sometimes more) to the protagonist of his feature, Spider-Man. An overview of the periods before and the arrival of Jameson support this idea, which gives rise to the following hypotheses:

H1: From the 1940s to 1963, the depiction of journalists in comics was as moral authority figures.

H2: From the 1963 to present, the depiction of journalists in comics was more varied: some heroic, some flawed, some morally gray and some outright villains.

Not only are these hypotheses worth exploring for their own sake, the information established may serve as a foundation and springboard for greater and more specific

research in a much-neglected field. As material from comics spreads to other media – especially movies and television – it becomes all the more important to understand the murky beginnings of the conventions and tropes of the humble comic book. Further, the changes in authority figures in comics – journalists as vultures, cops sometimes corrupt, pederast priests, ultra-violent characters that are more anti-hero than superhero -- reflect larger social trends as well.

But it all started with a much sunnier take on journalism. In the early days in comics, reporters were not only more trustworthy, they were virtually ubiquitous, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 1

Two-Fisted Journalism: 1938-1963

Journalists were everywhere in the early days of comic books, just as superheroes were. An overview of the Golden Age reveals a comic landscape littered with “two-fisted” journalists, costumed journalists, female journalists, sidekick journalists, and all combinations thereof. The following chapter looks at the more prominent examples, especially those that reflect an ethical dimension – good or bad – or give a sense of the *zeitgeist*.

The likely inspiration for all these journalists and superheroes must be given his due. That inspiration is Superman, of course, whom comics historian and artist Jim Steranko says quickly became “the most popular and powerful folk hero in American fiction.”¹ Before the Man of Steel, comic books were basically a fad, often given away free with other products as premiums, and even afterward many publishers exemplified the term “fly by night.” “We speak now of a ‘comic-book industry,’ but the word ‘industry’ scarcely does justice to the mad scramble of entrepreneurs, racketeers, salesmen, printers, and cartoonists to feed that exploding new market in the late 1930s and early ‘40s,” writes comics historian and former *Green Lantern* writer Gerard Jones. “The comic book as we know it hardly existed until the mid-‘30s. It was still pretty small potatoes until late 1938, when the soaring success of *Action Comics* and Superman

1. Jim Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics Volume One* (Reading, PA: Supergraphics, 1970), 39.

announced to the world that there were fortunes to be made by cranking out fat, cheap, colorful packages of wild adventure comics.”²

Other historians find similar superlatives to describe the Man of Steel’s sales and significance. Ron Goulart describes Superman as “the initial superhero and quite probably the most important comic-book character ever created. . . . Superman single-handedly turned the fledgling comic-book business into a major industry.”³ Bradford Wright says of Superman, “It is impossible to overstate the importance of the character.”⁴

Executives at National Comics (which was colloquially known as, and later legally became, DC Comics) knew they had something big on their hands. Steranko notes the sales numbers on *Action Comics* 1 raised eyebrows, and publisher/owner Harry Donenfeld and business manager (and later co-owner) Jack Liebowitz ordered a reader survey that revealed the reason. They then dictated that Superman appear on every cover, resulting in a series of sell-outs.⁵ When DC launched the solo *Superman* title in 1939, the character sold out again multiple times.

“If anyone in publishing missed the building comic craze in the first half of 1939, he would have been slapped in the face with it by the first issue of *Superman*,” observes Jones. “In three printings it sold 900,000 copies.”⁶ That sort of success does not go

2. Gerard Jones, “Introduction,” *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Captain America Vol. 2* (New York: Marvel Entertainment, 2008).

3. Ron Goulart, *Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History* (Portland, OR: Collectors Press, 2000), 43.

4. Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 14.

5. Steranko, *Volume One*, 39.

6. Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 155.

unnoticed. As comics blogger Brian Cronin puts it, “*Superman* was soon one of the highest-selling publications in the whole country, selling over a million copies a month, and in no time every comic-book company was rushing to put out its own superhero comic book.”⁷

This resulted in dozens, if not hundreds, of imitators. “The idea that heroes nobody had heard of a few months before could suddenly sell hundreds of thousands of copies was just too tempting to resist,” says comics historian Les Daniels, “and before long publishers large and small were flooding the newsstands with a cascade of costumed characters.”⁸

But while any *superhero* that followed *Superman* was obviously a copy – since he is acknowledged as the first superhero – it’s more difficult to describe the many comic-book *journalists* that followed as copies of *Clark Kent*, since journalists already existed, and were already popular in other media. Some creators undoubtedly lifted Superman’s secret identity for their own character without a second thought, in a simple monkey-see, monkey-do fashion. But the *zeitgeist* was likely a contributor to the many journalists also.

Steranko declares the newsroom “a perennial favorite of comic book writers, next to scientific laboratories and District Attorneys’ offices,” although he does not speculate as to why.⁹ Comics historian and moviemaker Michel Uslan describes secondary features like “Headline Hunter” as “a window to our past, reflecting attitudes, fears, slang, fads,

7. Brian Cronin, *Was Superman a Spy? And Other Comic Book Legends Revealed!* (New York: Plume, 2009), 5.

8. Les Daniels, *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World’s Favorite Comic Book Heroes* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1995), 46.

9. Jim Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics Volume Two* (Reading, PA: Supergraphics, 1970), 96.

prejudices, mores, and concerns of America on the precipice of World War II.”¹⁰ This dovetails with Ehrlich’s reminder of “journalism’s preeminence in American life,”¹¹ and University of Southern California journalism professor Joe Saltzman’s observation that there have been “more than 4,000 films and television programs that feature journalists.”¹² Jones and Ehrlich note the public’s fascination with the cocky newsman in the 1930s as a possible influence on Siegel when he chose Clark Kent’s job (see Chapter 2), which could have influenced others just as easily.

Saltzman takes another angle, making the case for the utility of journalism characters in films, an argument that works equally well for comic books: “Since journalists are always finding out something about someone, they create countless narratives with good beginnings, middles, and endings,” he writes. “The newspaper gave the moviemaker an endless flow of scenarios in an atmosphere that soon became so familiar to movie audiences that journalists could be thrown in to a film without the scriptwriter having to worry about motivation or plot.”¹³ And since journalists are professional story-tellers, it’s only natural to have them as narrators or protagonists.

In a 1945 *Adventures of Superman* radio show, a villain named Der Teufel made a similar argument in-story. Der Teufel (“The Devil” in German), who had discovered the Man of Steel’s double identity, explained to a henchman the utility of a superhero being a

10. Michael Uslan, “Introduction,” *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Captain America Vol. 3* (New York: Marvel Entertainment, 2009).

11. Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 6.

12. Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman, “Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News,” *Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*, <http://ijpc.org/uploads/files/hollywoodlooksatthenews2.pdf> (accessed July 9, 2010), 2.

13. Ghiglione, “Fact or Fiction,” 3.

journalist : “What better disguise could Superman choose? A newspaper reporter. A quiet, unassuming newspaper reporter wearing horn-rimmed glasses, and working on the *Daily Planet*, where he is in a position to discover quickly what is going on in the world. Could there be a more perfect disguise?”¹⁴

Historian Blake Bell quotes Steve Ditko, co-creator of Spider-Man, on the many journalist characters he created: “Reporters have an easier, more natural way of getting involved in all types of crime,” Ditko said. “They are not restricted with set routines or limited in their scope of activities.”¹⁵

For whatever reason Golden Age comic-book creators favored journalism as a career choice for their characters, it is inarguable there were a *lot* of them. Some were superheroes and some were not, but virtually all of them were depicted as vigilante heroes, detectives, and crime-fighters. The following examples demonstrate the prominence of journalists during the Golden Age of comics.

Superhero Journalists

The most famous journalist superhero in the early days of comic books, after Superman himself, was Fawcett’s Captain Marvel. The “Big Red Cheese” was secretly Billy Batson, a young orphan (apparently 10-12 years old in the Golden Age) who said the magic word “SHAZAM” to become an adult superhero with the powers of ancient gods and heroes. (SHAZAM was originally an initialism, standing for Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles, and Mercury, but has since become a familiar expression

14. DC Comics, ed., *The Superman Radio Scripts – Volume One: Superman vs. Atom Man* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2001), 68.

15. Blake Bell, *Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2008), 117.

of surprise, thanks primarily to the television show *Gomer Pyle, USMC*.) As comics historian R. C. Harvey explains it, “Young male readers would identify with Billy, who was the actual protagonist in the Captain Marvel stories: a smart, inquisitive, and precocious orphan boy (who works like an adult as a radio reporter), he gets himself in trouble by investigating mysteries, and then he summons a grown-up version of himself who gets him out of trouble.”¹⁶ In Captain Marvel’s first issue (*Whiz Comics* 2, March 1940), Batson made a deal with WHIZ-AM radio station owner Herman Morris to become a reporter if he brought in a story, and with Captain Marvel’s help, he did. The reporter role seemed designed simply to help Batson get into situations requiring the appearance of Captain Marvel more than any particular nod to journalism, but regardless of the thinking, in the tales that followed Batson was an aggressive, curious, and resourceful reporter who uncovered a lot of big stories, especially those involving mad scientist Dr. Thaddeus Bodog Sivana.

Captain Marvel appeared in a great many Golden Age titles until the early 1950s, including *Captain Marvel Adventures*, *Marvel Family*, and *Whiz Comics*, some of which may have outsold *Superman* and *Action* (depending on how the sketchy data is interpreted). Even though his appearances since the early 1950s have been spotty, he remains a vital part of Americana – through the word “SHAZAM” alone, if nothing else.

The third-most prominent journalist superhero didn’t start out as one. In his 1940 debut story in All-American’s *All-American Comics* 16 (July 1940), the original Green Lantern’s alter ego Alan Scott was described as a “young engineer in charge of

16. R. C. Harvey, “Foreword,” *The Shazam! Archives Vol. 2* (New York: DC Comics, 1999).

construction.”¹⁷ But mysteriously, by *All-American Comics* 20 (November 1940), he was hired for an unspecified job by a *broadcasting* company. In the following issue, a caption read “Alan Scott, young radio engineer”¹⁸ by way of introduction. In just a few issues, Scott morphed from construction engineer to radio engineer without explanation – and by *Green Lantern* 10 (Winter 1943), Scott had morphed again, to a radio *announcer*. For the next few years Scott was depicted announcing the news on various radio stations, primarily WMGC-AM and WXYZ-AM, and with *Green Lantern* 20 (June-July 1946), he became the station manager of the latter. Green Lantern continued to appear until the late 1940s in a variety of titles, including *All-American*, *Comics Cavalcade*, and *Green Lantern*, and until 1951 in *All-Star Comics*, as a radio journalist.

Another long-lasting journalist superhero was DC’s Johnny Quick, secretly newsreel reporter Johnny Chambers for Sees-All/Tells-All News. Chambers recited a secret mathematical formula – $3X2(9YX)4A$ – given to him by a childhood mentor who translated it from the tomb of an Egyptian pharaoh, in order to become a super-speedster (like The Flash at *All-American Comics*).¹⁹ Chambers was rarely seen doing much actual reporting, but he was always accompanied by his cameraman-sidekick, Tubby Watts. Chambers debuted in 1941 and ran uninterrupted as a back-up feature until the mid-1950s, whereupon he quietly disappeared from *Adventure Comics*. Johnny Quick was revived in recent years, but killed off in *Impulse* 11 (February 1996).

Another fondly remembered journalist superhero is The Ray, although more for the quality of Lou Fine’s artwork on Ray’s *Smash Comics* feature than any particular

17. Bill Finger, “The Green Lantern,” *All-American Comics* 16, July 1940, 1.

18. Bill Finger, “The Long Lost Son,” *All-American Comics* 21, December 1940, 2.

19. Mort Weisinger, “The Case of the Crying Clown,” *More Fun Comics* 71, September 1941.

story innovation. In Quality's *Smash* 14 (September 1940), reporter Happy Terrill was ordered by his editor to join a balloon ascent, whereupon a strange atmospheric accident gave him light-based super-powers. Dressing entirely in yellow and calling himself "The Ray," Terrill seemed to forget all about his real identity for a while. According to Steranko, it took until *Smash* 19 (February 1941) before The Ray "assumed his civilian identity of reporter Happy Terrill." Steranko adds that "two issues later (he) adopted his juvenile sidekick Bud, the victim of a trans-Atlantic clipper disaster."²⁰ Like most Golden Age heroes, The Ray disappeared in the late 1940s. He was revived briefly in recent years and transformed into a ghost-like character that advised his son Ray, who is a superhero but not a journalist, but has since disappeared.

Another popular journalist hero was Timely's The Destroyer. *Mystic Comics* 6 (October 1941) introduced Keen Marlow, an American reporter arrested in Nazi-occupied Europe because of his English heritage. Conveniently, one of his fellow prisoners was a dying scientist with a formula for producing super-soldiers. Marlow became The Destroyer, who wreaked havoc behind enemy lines in striped, red-and-gray longjohns and a death mask. "His costume and look was comparable to The Phantom's and was somehow quite appealing," Steranko says, "enough at least to appear in eight different titles up to the fall of 1946,"²¹ although he almost never mentioned his journalism job again. The Destroyer has appeared in modern comics occasionally, semi-retired as a superhero and completely retired as a reporter.

20. Steranko, *Volume Two*, 97.

21. Steranko, *Volume Two*, 63.

The first female journalist superhero arrived in 1941, but didn't stick around long. Reporter Joan Dale had a dream where the Statue of Liberty gave her power to transmute elements and instructed her to fight evil. Upon awakening she discovered she actually had those powers. She then adopted a patriotic outfit, and fought crime as Miss America.²² She only lasted for the first seven issues of Quality's *Military Comics* (August 1941-February 1942) before disappearing so fast that Timely felt comfortable poaching the name "Miss America" for another character the following year.

The next female journalist superhero to appear lasted a bit longer. In a backup story in *Boy Commandos 2* (Winter 1942), Libby Lawrence was in Poland with her U.S. Army father when the Nazis invaded, and was forced to swim the English Channel as part of her escape. That made her a celebrity, and within a couple of panels she began a career as a famous radio commentator and newspaper columnist, editorializing against the Nazi scourge in the still officially neutral U.S. She also began a second career as a costume-wearing crime-fighter named Liberty Belle, battling crooks, fifth columnists, and Bundists, who were the popular bad guys in the early 1940s. Originally she had no superpowers, but she did have a gimmick: "She was aided by a small trophy she'd won in college athletics – a replica of the original Liberty Bell, made of exactly the same material," according to comics historian Don Markstein. "When the bell was rung, the replica would vibrate, so her confidant Tom Revere (descendant of Paul), custodian of the bell, would ring it to alert her of threats that needed superhero action."²³ Strangely, Liberty Belle's superhero career was unimpressive in the 1940s, but was retroactively

22. "The Origin of Miss America," *Military Comics* 1, August 1941.

23. Don Markstein, "Liberty Belle," Don Markstein's Toonopedia, <http://www.toonopedia.com/libertyb.htm> (accessed July 9, 2010).

extended in the recent series *All-Star Squadron* (1981-87) to make her one of the biggest superheroes of the war. In her 1980s revival she was retroactively given super-powers back to the 1940s, a marriage to Johnny Quick during World War II, a leadership role in the wartime All-Star Squadron, a daughter (who serves on the current Justice Society roster), and a career spanning decades.

The rest of the journalist superheroes in the Golden Age are of lesser importance, but one remains famous. While the Green Hornet was primarily a radio character, there were sporadic Hornet sightings on the newsstands during the Golden Age. Between 1940 and 1949, when he was published off and on by Helnit and Harvey Comics, he was a crusader both in his superhero identity and his civilian life as publisher of *The Daily Sentinel*. “During his brief run in comic books,” Wright expounds, “the radio hero Green Hornet (alias muckraking newspaper publisher Britt Reid) exposed a crooked state senator, apprehended politicians stealing from the Veterans Relief Bureau, broke up a crooked political machine, and even appealed directly to the civic responsibility of his readers in order to combat crime and political corruption.”²⁴ Naturally, he was aided in his crusades by the accoutrements he possessed on the radio show, including martial artist/chauffeur Kato and his well-armed car, the Black Beauty.

DC Comics had its own version of the Hornet in Lee Travis, who debuted in *Detective Comics* 20 (October 1938, seven months before Batman). Travis was a crusading newspaper publisher who also fought crime as the Crimson Avenger, with his Asian-American aide, Wing. They were quite obviously a copy of Green Hornet and Kato, according to Steranko: “Like the Hornet, (Travis) was a newspaperman . . . who

24. Wright, *Nation*, 25.

picked up crime leads as they were reported.”²⁵ As the superhero trend gained predominance in the 1940s, the Crimson Avenger jumped on that bandwagon, too, “by trading his red overcoat for a pair of red tights and his cape for a pair of yellow shorts,” says Steranko. “It was difficult to tell if the change was an improvement or not.”²⁶

The Hornet also seems to have inspired another character, Lev Gleason’s The Wasp, in that the latter was both insect-themed and a journalist. “Burton Slade was a reporter at the *Daily Free Press*, who became the crime-fighter called The Wasp,” according to Public Domain Super Heroes. “He picked his named because his cape looks like a pair of insect wings.”²⁷ One wonders how good a reporter he could have been, with such fanciful powers of observation, but his few appearances give us little clue.

Another short-lived superhero is of special interest from a journalism standpoint. An oddity called the “Press Guardian,” also known as “The Falcon,” debuted in MLJ’s *Pep Comics* 1 (January 1940). The story “Klondike Café Robbed” followed the investigations of the gaudily costumed Press Guardian and *Daily Express* crime reporter Flash Calvert – who, in an unusual twist on genre conventions, were not the same guy.²⁸ The second issue revealed that the Guardian was Perry Chase, the effeminate son of the *Express*’ publisher.²⁹ In addition, the second issue dropped the Guardian’s garish “Falcon” get-up in favor of a business suit and domino mask. However, an emphasis on First Amendment issues continued. “He was just a beat-'em-up guy when you get right

25. Steranko, *Volume Two*, 73.

26. Steranko, *Volume Two*, 73.

27. “Wasp (Lev Gleason),” Public Domain Super Heroes, [http://pdsh.wikia.com/wiki/Wasp_\(Lev_Gleason\)](http://pdsh.wikia.com/wiki/Wasp_(Lev_Gleason)) (accessed July 9, 2010).

28. “Klondike Café Robbed,” *Pep Comics* 1, January 1940.

29. Abner Sundell, “Moronia Bund Threatens Editor,” *Pep Comics* 2, February 1940.

down to it,” Markstein says of the Guardian, “but his plots were always generated by the unrestricted pursuit of news.”³⁰

MLJ (which later became Archie Comics) introduced a journalist superhero in *Blue Ribbon Comics* 4 (June 1940) who is of mild interest.³¹ The first story introduced Paul Patton, staff photographer for the *Daily Globe*, who dressed as The Fox and used his athletic skills learned at Penn State University to be first on crime scenes to take pictures with a camera in his belt. He was also dating his editor, Ruth Ransom, which is just unusual enough to merit mention, in that his superior is a woman in the male-oriented ‘40s – and that dating your boss appears to have been acceptable behavior. Otherwise The Fox is fairly unremarkable, except that there is not even a nod toward the public good in his activities – it seems breaking the law to be first on crime scene was a worthy goal in and of itself.

Timely published two short-lived journalist reporters worth a mention. One is the Phantom Bullet, secretly Allan “Scoop” Lewis, a wealthy reporter referred to by his editor at the *Daily Bulletin* as a “screwball,” who could be counted on to be found in bars or pool rooms when needed. And yet, the editor told another reporter in the first story that as “(as) far as I’m concerned he’s the only reporter in the country, despite his money!”³² And when he needed to, Lewis leaped from rooftop to rooftop and went in through windows to get his story. In his initial (and only) case, he found a murdered scientist with a gun that shot a “hard ice bullet” that melted after use – a “phantom bullet.” Lewis

30. Don Markstein, “The Press Guardian (aka The Falcon),” Don Markstein’s Toonopedia <http://www.toonopedia.com/presguar.com> (accessed July 10, 2010).

31. Joe Blair, “Origin of The Fox,” *Blue Ribbon Comics* 4, June 1940.

32. Joe Simon, “Scourge of the Underworld,” *Daring Mystery Comics* 2, February 1940, 1.

thought “what an instrument of justice it could be . . . there would be no politics or red tape to stop THIS judge and jury!”³³ Plus, it should be noted, executioner -- in his first battle as the Phantom Bullet he used the gun to kill an assailant. Yet, despite this behavior – shocking to modern eyes – Lewis also lectured an oil magnate about his failure to stand up to criminal threats on the merits of good citizenship. “Don’t you realize, sir, that you encourage crime by taking a stand like this . . . ?”³⁴ However, despite being written and drawn by Captain America co-creator Joe Simon, the Phantom Bullet only appeared once – until 2009, when a miniseries established that he was killed shortly after his first adventure.³⁵

Another unusual Timely character had a similar name. The Phantom Reporter was Dick Jones, an “ex-All American fullback, (and) ex-collegiate boxing, wrestling, (and) fencing champ,” according to the narration at the beginning of his debut story. (Evidently comic-book writers in the ‘40s assumed a lot of physical education at colleges and universities.) No doubt those qualities are useful in masked crime-fighting, but so is money – which Jones also had, in his third identity as playboy “Mr. Negre.” Jones affected being shiftless in his reporter job, but still managed to succeed. “I’m going to put you on this case, Jones,” says his editor at the *Daily Express*. “You are without a doubt the lousiest reporter this sheet has ever hired . . . but for some cockeyed reason the jobs I send you on always get cleaned up in a hurry!”³⁶

33. Simon, “Scourge,” 3.

34. Simon, “Scourge,” 7.

35. Ed Brubaker, “The Marvels Project Part Two,” *The Marvels Project 2*, November 2009, 18.

36. Roe, “The Phantom Reporter,” *Daring Mystery Comics* 3, April 1940, 2.

The Phantom Reporter also only appeared once in the 1940s. “*Daring Mystery Comics* became an elephant’s graveyard for fledgling superheroes and other fantastic characters,” according to historian Will Murray. “Nothing remotely like a superstar – or even a lead feature – emerged from its colorful pages.”³⁷ But unlike the Phantom Bullet, the Phantom Reporter has been revived, along with 11 other Golden Age characters, in a current series called *The Twelve*, of which he is the narrator and reader’s point-of-view character.

Falling squarely into the red-white-and-blue category established by Captain America was another Timely journalist superhero, The Patriot, who debuted in a text story in *Human Torch* #4³⁸ but was illustrated by the next issue. Jeff Mace was a newspaperman, but we didn’t see a whole lot of the newsroom in his stories, which were generally five pages long. He got around, though, appearing in *All-Winners Comics*, *Captain America Comics*, *Human Torch*, *Sub-Mariner*, and *USA Comics*. Although a relatively unimportant back-up character in the 1940s, The Patriot has taken on more significance in modern times by being retroactively established as a fill-in Captain America in the late 1940s in *What If* 4 (1977).³⁹ According to the story, Mace retired as Captain America in the 1950s, and subsequently died of cancer. His time as a fill-in is currently being fleshed out in the miniseries *Captain America: The Patriot*.

37. Will Murray, “Introduction,” *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Daring Mystery Comics Vol. 2* (New York: Marvel Entertainment, 2010).

38. Joe Gill, “This Is the Story of One American Who Decided To Do Something About It All,” *Human Torch* #4, Spring 1941.

39. Roy Thomas, “What If the Invaders Stayed Together After World War II?” *What If* 4, August 1977.

Worth mention for comedic value alone is MLJ's oddity Red Rube, who debuted in *Zip Comics* 39 (1943). Rube is what the comics industry calls a "swipe," in Markstein's words, "the similarities to Captain Marvel could not have been more blatant."⁴⁰ The young Rube called on his ancestors (all named Reuben Reuben, as he was) with a magic phrase ("Hey, Rube!") to become an adult superhero with the "Whoosh!" of a scarlet tornado, just as young Billy Batson called on ancient gods and heroes with a magic word ("SHAZAM!") to become an adult superhero with the "Boom!" of magic lightning. Further cementing the swipe, Reuben and Batson were both boy radio reporters. Rube was written and drawn tongue-in-cheek, and disappeared with *Zip Comics* in 1944, never to return. Markstein's amusing coda: "His post-series obscurity may be one of his most distinctive features."⁴¹

Plainclothes Journalists

While the journalists in costume are far more flashy, memorable, and popular, the many in jacket or skirt played a major role in the Golden Age too.

For example, Clark Kent and Lois Lane were not the only reporters introduced in *Action Comics* 1; six pages of "Scoop Scanlon, Five-Star Reporter" joined the Superman story in that anthology's historic first issue (as well as two cowboy stories, "Zatara, Master Magician," a comedy short, "The Adventures of Marco Polo," and a combination boxer-sailor named Pep Morgan).⁴² "Scoop Scanlon was an expert in the field of

40. Don Markstein, "Red Rube," Don Markstein's Toonopedia, <http://www.toonopedia.com/redrube.htm> (accessed July 10, 2010).

41. Markstein, "Rube."

42. "The International Jewel Thief," *Action Comics* 1, June 1938.

investigative journalism,” reads the DC Database. “As such, he likewise considered himself an amateur detective.”⁴³ The first story was typical for Scoop, who broke up a gangland hit by tackling the gunmen, and when the police arrived, “grabs up a deserted tommy gun and jumps into a cop-pal’s car.”⁴⁴ With his photographer pal Rusty Davis, Scanlon ran for 13 issues of *Action* as this sort of action-oriented, two-fisted reporter for the *Bulletin*.

One unusual aspect of Scanlon is that DC somehow lost the rights to the character, who “inexplicably”⁴⁵ appeared in *Terrific Comics* 2-5 (published by Continental Comics, 1944) and *Cat-Man Comics* 27-32 (Holyoke, 1945-46), according to the Public Domain Super Heroes and Grand Comic Book Database websites. In the later publications, Scanlon and Davis worked for the *Daily World-Star*, and Scanlon picked up a rival/love interest named Molly O’Moore, who worked for the *Chronicle* of their unnamed city. Throughout his checkered career, though, he remained more brawler and detective than reporter.

Also, Lois Lane was not the only female reporter at DC Comics in the Golden Age. “Lady Danger” was introduced in 1948 as debutante Valerie Vaughn, who had been given her nickname by *The City Press* for her penchant for getting into trouble. Then she went to work for the *Press*, all of which was established in her debut in *Sensation Comics* 84.⁴⁶ “As her series opened, she’d apparently gone a while without putting her life in

43. “Scoop Scanlon (Earth-Two),” DC Database, [http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Scoop_Scanlon_\(Earth-Two\)](http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Scoop_Scanlon_(Earth-Two)) (accessed July 9, 2010).

44. Will Ely, “Scoop Scanlon, Five-Star Reporter,” *Action Comics* 1, June 1938, 3.

45. “Scoop Scanlon,” Public Domain Super Heroes, http://pdsh.wikia.com/wiki/Scoop_Scanlon (accessed July 9, 2010).

46. Robert Kanigher, “The Shakespeare Clue!” *Sensation Comics* 84, December 1948.

jeopardy, because she was complaining of boredom – having done everything, she was virtually perishing of ennui,” explains comics historian Don Markstein. “Her wealthy father found this amusing, and suggested she try a completely new experience — get a job.”⁴⁷ Lady Danger had nine more adventures in *Sensation*, usually accompanied by sidekick/love interest private detective Gary Grath.

DC also adapted the radio show *Big Town*, which centered on the reporter/editor of *The Illustrated Press* and his girl Friday. “Big Town is a bold and brassy place peopled by bigger-than-life characters,” explains the *Standard Catalog of Comic Books*. “And through it all walks ace crime reporter Steve Wilson and his beautiful assistant Lorelei (Kilbourne), uncovering the stories that make their city tick.”⁴⁸ Other newspaper characters were introduced through the title’s 50-issue run (January 1951-March 1958), including publisher J.J. McGrath and reporters Rush Martin and Bill Damon, who sometimes took the lead. But like most comic-book journalists in the Golden Age, they were all detectives as much as copy writers.

Jerry Robinson, one of the major ghost artists on Batman in the 1940s and 1950s, wrote and drew the strip “London,” which ran in Lev Gleason’s *Daredevil Comics* 2-8 (August 1941-March 1942) and is significant for its fidelity to real events. “London” starred radio war correspondent Marc Holmes, whom Robinson said was “patterned after the legendary Edward. R. Murrow.”⁴⁹ Jones says Robinson “didn’t know it, but it was the

47. Don Markstein, “Lady Danger,” Don Markstein’s Toonopedia, <http://www.toonopedia.com/ladydng.html> (accessed July 10, 2010).

48. John Jackson Miller, Maggie Thompson, Peter Bickford, and Brent Frankenhoff, *Standard Catalog of Comic Books, 4th Edition* (Iola, WI: KP Books, 2005), 224.

49. Masha Leon, “Remembering Pearl Lang,” *The Jewish Daily Forward*, entry posted March 11, 2009, <http://www.forward.com/articles/103890> (accessed July 9, 2010).

first comic book story to tackle the real events of the war.”⁵⁰ In fact, the first story was titled “London Can Take It!”⁵¹ after the 1940 documentary about the German air attacks on England’s capital city.

The biggest journalist at Timely Comics was probably Jerry “Headline” Hunter, a foreign correspondent working for the Affiliated Press, whose eponymous strip ran in eight issues of *Captain America Comics*. “Wherever we find news, excitement, mystery, and adventure – there, too, we find the newspaper reporter!” breathlessly exclaimed the narrator in Hunter’s debut story. “Always on alert for something new, ready to risk his very life for a scoop, and finding adventure in every corner of the globe – This story is respectfully dedicated to the newspapermen of all nations, who, without regard for their own personal safety or security, live each moment recklessly, so that we may have NEWS!”⁵² In that first issue, Hunter investigated Nazis in London, got captured and tied to a bomb, then escaped and captured the gang leader in a fistfight – pretty typical for a “Headline” Hunter story, whose adventures took place in different parts of unoccupied Europe, and who was actually referred to as a “two-fisted ace newspaper-man”⁵³ in *Captain America Comics* 7 (October 1941).

All journalists were heroes in Hunter stories. In “One Man Invasion,” English publisher Lord Danvers was credited with being “a big influence in keeping up morale.” In answer to a Hunter interview question about the role of his newspapers in the war,

50. Jones, *Geeks*, 188.

51. Jerry Robinson, “London Can Take It!” *Daredevil Comics* 2, August 1941, 1.

52. Stan Lee, “‘Headline’ Hunter – Foreign Correspondent,” *Captain America Comics* 5, August 1941, 1.

53. “Contents,” *Captain America Comics* 7, October 1941, inside front cover.

Danvers said, “My papers keep public opinion aroused and informed! In that way morale is high, and Nazi propaganda cannot deceive the English people!”⁵⁴ Evidently the Germans believed this, too, because they attempted to kidnap Danvers. After the intrepid reporter successfully intervened, the publisher said, “Good work, Hunter! If they had taken me to Germany my papers couldn’t print the truth about the Nazis!”⁵⁵ Evidently fictional publishers believe as the real ones do, that their newspapers cannot function without them.

While Captain Marvel’s debut in *Whiz Comics 2* (1940) gets all the attention for that book, Robert “Scoop” Smith occupied eight pages in the back. Described as a “crack newshawk,”⁵⁶ Smith took assignments from *The News* editor Bruce Lane and was accompanied by his stuttering shutterbug Blimp Black. In his first story, Smith recovered stolen radium from a criminal gang via fisticuffs, while police only “finish the job.”⁵⁷ This was typical for his run in *Whiz*.

While some comic-book reporters were civilians and some were superheroes, Quality Comics tried to have it both ways with “Chic Carter, Ace Reporter.” Debuting in *Smash Comics 1* (1939),⁵⁸ Carter engaged in the usual two-fisted reporter shenanigans for 23 adventures – then donned leotards. “When he was framed for murder, he became the costumed crusader known as The Sword to prove his innocence,” explains the Comic

54. “One Man Invasion,” *Captain America Comics* 13, April 1942, 1.

55. “Invasion,” 5.

56. Bill Parker, “Scoop Smith,” *Whiz Comics* 2, February 1940, 1.

57. Parker, “Scoop,” 7.

58. Vernon Henkel, “The Murder of Max Gorman,” *Smash Comics* 1, August 1939.

Book Database about the story in *Smash* 24 (1941).⁵⁹ “Armed only with a rapier, the Sword was unhampered by the limitations of the law and could fight crime much faster than Chic Carter could expose it as a reporter.”⁶⁰ Carter’s adventures continued in *Police Comics* 1-18 (August 1941-April 1943) and *National Comics* 33-47 (July 1943-April 1945) as a reporter for the *Daily Star*, but he only became The Sword occasionally – usually he was just “Chic Carter, Ace Reporter.”

USA Comics 3 tried to launch “Powers of the Press,” starring “Tom Powers, ace reporter of the *Free Press*, (who) has been an outstanding character in newspaper circles around the city of Jimtown,” according to the narrator. “He believes staunchly in the freedom of the press, and has proven to be fearless, dauntless, and courageous in carrying out his assignments.” Powers was accompanied by photographer pal Candid Kenny Roberts, and answered to Cupid “Kewpi” Cueball, who posed as a “hard-hearted city editor but actually he is kind and friendly under his stern exterior.”⁶¹ A formulaic strip, “Powers” only appeared the one time and demonstrated that simply starring a reporter did not a successful strip make.

Some other early headliners add little to the discussion, other than their numbers. “Johnny Jason, Teen Reporter” appeared in four comics at Dell in the early 1960s, two in *Four Color* and two under his own name. “Gabby Scoops” had sixteen adventures in the back of *Crackajack Funnies* 25-40 (July 1940-October 1941, Whitman), and “Gabby Flynn” had six adventures at Centaur, in *Keen Detective Funnies* 6-7 and 9-10 (June-

59. “The Sword,” *Smash Comics* 24, July 1941.

60. “Chic Carter,” The Comic Book Database, <http://www.comicbookdb.com/character.php?ID=2765> (accessed July 10, 2010).

61. Ed Winiarski, “Powers of the Press,” *USA Comics* 3, January 1942, 1.

October 1939), *Fantoman 2* (August 1940), and *Amazing Adventure Funnies 2* (September 1940). “Flash” Grogan, a newspaper photographer played for laughs, made at least one appearance at Nedor, in *Real Funnies 2* (March 1943).

Aside from headliners, many journalists appeared in the Golden Age as sidekicks. Of special note in this category are Jerry Dash of “Secret Stamp” and Deadline Dawson of “Terry Vance, the School Boy Sleuth,” two features at Timely Comics. In both cases, the protagonist was a teenaged hero who had an older “reporter friend” on call to bail him out of trouble. Both Dash and Dawson acted as the cavalry, sometimes bringing the police but just as often performing the rescue themselves in time-honored, two-fisted fashion.

Other second-banana journalists, who are not as significant, include photographer Snap Smith, who palled around with aviator Eagle Evans in Quality’s *Plastic Man*, *Police Comics*, and *Bomber Comics*; and Jerry “Reel” McCoy in Centaur’s “Speed Centaur” strip. If there were others – and it seems likely there were – they are buried too deeply or are too minor to merit mention in current history books.

A great many non-headlining journalists were women, doubling as both sidekick and love interest. One of the best-known (thanks to the 1989 *Batman* movie) is DC’s Vicki Vale, who bore a close resemblance to Lois Lane in that “she labors continuously to verify her suspicion that Bruce Wayne and Batman are one and the same man.”⁶² Michael Uslan, comics historian and producer of the Batman movies, says Vale’s resemblance to Lois Lane was no coincidence. In the introduction to a 2010 collection of Batman reprints from the 1950s, he says Vale’s introduction was part of “DC’s continued

62. Michael Fleisher, *The Original Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes, Volume One – Featuring Batman*, (New York: DC Comics, 2007), 365.

plan to recast Batman's life along the same lines as Superman's." He describes Vale as "the inquisitive, impetuous 'girl news-photographer' who snoops her way into trouble while looking to become our hero's girlfriend. Nope, it isn't Lois Lane, but it might as well be – it's Vicki Vale, Batman's red-headed version of Lois."⁶³

Vale was a news photographer, working for newspapers and magazines, and – with the exception of her determination to expose Batman's secret – was generally described in positive terms, if not heroic ones. "Vicki will climb the highest mountain . . . swim the deepest seas . . . just to get a picture!"⁶⁴ said the narrator in her debut issue. In the same issue, on a date with Wayne at an equestrian event, Vale leaped over a railing onto the dirt track in full evening dress and heels to "click with some pix!" Wayne was surprised to discover "the female camera fiend has forgotten about me already!"⁶⁵ Vale continued to appear regularly as love interest for both Batman and Wayne until 1963; her appearances since have been sporadic.

Lana Lang was another DC character that closely matched the Lois Lane archetype; in fact, for many years Lang and Lane were rivals both professionally and romantically. Lang was introduced as a love interest (and secret-identity snoop) for teenage Clark Kent at Smallville High in *Superboy* 10 (1950), following the pattern set by Lane with the adult Kent in Metropolis in the 1940s.⁶⁶ And, while Lang was present in most *Superboy* stories, she didn't become a journalist until she was an adult. In "The

63. Michael Uslan, "Introduction," *DC Comics Classics Library: The Batman Annuals, Volume Two* (New York: DC Comics, 2010), 10.

64. "The Scoop of the Century!" *Batman* 49, October-November, 1948, 1.

65. "Scoop," 6.

66. Bill Finger, "The Girl in Superboy's Life!" *Superboy* 10, September-October 1950.

Girls in Superman's Life" (1952) she came to Metropolis, roomed with Lane, and wrote a series of stories called "I Remember Superboy" for the *Daily Planet*.⁶⁷ By the end of the story she became a broadcast reporter for the Federal Syndicate, by 1961 worked for WMET-TV,⁶⁸ and by 1963 she was a "TV celebrity" for a broadcast network.⁶⁹ Later still she worked at WGBS-TV, where she was Kent's co-anchor during the time he worked in television (*Superman* 317, November 1977 – see Chapter 2). Throughout this time she was depicted as an intrepid journalist, much like Lane (with the same catty faults), and Lane's rival for Superman's affections as well. But when the Superman mythos was rebooted in 1986, Lang's journalism career was erased as if it never happened.

A third DC character with a journalist for a sweetheart is the second character named The Flash, Barry Allen, who debuted with girlfriend Iris West in 1956.⁷⁰ West was a reporter for Central City's *Picture News*, but unlike Lane and Lang, was not a pest regarding The Flash's secret identity – in fact, she was Allen's loyal and admirable girlfriend, although she did nag him about his chronic tardiness (played for irony, given that Flash was billed as "The Fastest Man Alive"). She was also presented as an excellent reporter, such as when she ferreted out super-villain Captain Cold's motivations in "The Man Who Mastered Absolute Zero!" and passed on lunch with Allen to cover the super-villain's escape from jail. "I mustn't miss this opportunity," she exclaimed, as she bolted out the door in the best Lois Lane/Vicki Vale tradition.⁷¹ (She has since retired.)

67. Edmond Hamilton, "The Girls in Superman's Life," *Superman* 78, September-October 1952.

68. Jerry Siegel, "Superman's Rival, Mental Man!" *Action Comics* 272, January 1961.

69. Robert Bernstein, "Beauty and the Super-Beast," *Superman* 165, November 1963, 6.

70. Robert Kanigher, "Mystery of the Human Thunderbolt," *Showcase* 4, November 1956.

71. John Broome, "The Man Who Mastered Absolute Zero!" *Flash* 134, February 1963, 8.

Other early journalism girlfriends who were not as prominent include Eileen Conroy, who dated FCC worker Jerry Carstairs (secretly The Thunderer in Timely's *Daring Mystery Comics*); Thelma Gordon, who appeared with The Comet and Hangman in MLJ's *Pep Comics*; Zona Handerson, who hung around the title character of Centaur's *Amazing Man Comics*; and Joan Mason, of Fox's *Blue Beetle*. Some female journalists in early comics took the reporter-sidekick role up a notch, such as Belle Wayne, a newspaper reporter who joined The Owl as Owl Girl in Whitman's *Crackajack Funnies* 32 (1941);⁷² and Martha Roberts, a newspaper reporter who joined Doll Man as Doll Girl in Quality's *Doll Man* 37 (1951).⁷³

During the 1940s and 1950s, anthology formats were the norm, so hundreds of stories were published with no recurring characters – especially in the adventure, horror, and crime genres where reporters could pop up anywhere. Two of these deserve mention for their startling and powerful content. Both were published in *Shock SuspenStories* by EC Comics, a publisher which was famous – some would say infamous – for shocking (and best-selling) stories in the early 1950s.

1952's "Under Cover" opened to a scene in some Southern woods of hooded men preparing to whip a woman. It was evident from the dialogue that the men were thinly disguised Ku Klux Klansmen, who were punishing the woman for associating with African-Americans. "We're gonna **teach** you not to fool around with **them!**" says one hooded man. "For **consorting** with . . . with that **trash element** in our town, **the Black**

72. "Caught in the Meshes of the . . ." *Crackajack Funnies* 32, February 1941.

73. "Battles the Skull," *Doll Man* 37, December 1951.

Vigilante Society sentences you to *one-hundred lashes*,” says another. “*This will teach you to stay with your own . . . kind!*” says a third.⁷⁴

Watching from cover was a reporter, Sam Masters, who was revolted by the scene. “The *dirty . . . filthy . . . rotten . . . Oh lord!* Why do they *do* this? Why did I have to *see* it? Will I ever *sleep* again?” As the woman was beaten to death, Masters remembered in flashback how he argued with his editor to be where he is. “Look, Ed! They’ve *kidnapped* and *flogged innocent people . . . guilty of nothing more than practicing democracy!* The *F.B.I.* is *interested!* . . . I’m *going* there for a *story*, (Ed)! I’m going to *expose* this *rotten mess!* Now, do I *get* your *okay . . . or don’t* I?” His editor was skeptical – and worried. “And *you’re* going to help the F.B.I. *catch* ‘em? Little *detective! Junior G-Man!*” he scoffed. “Okay! *Okay! Be a hero! See* where it *gets* you! Just *one thing*, Sam! Be *careful*, huh? Don’t get yourself *killed!*”⁷⁵

Masters witnessed the leader with his hood off (“I *know* you *now*, you dirty @#?x!! If it’s the *last thing I do*, I’ll see that you *burn* for this!”⁷⁶). When he returned to town, he was beaten by the “Black Vigilantes” but gave up nothing. But he did tell men in the hospital all he knew, after they identified themselves as F.B.I. agents. However, they were Black Vigilante members in disguise, who executed him. Their speech and thought balloons indicated that they believed they’d be safe, with the only witness dead. To which the narrator responded, “Yes . . . *safe!* Safe behind *masks of prejudice*, these hooded peddlers of *racial, religious, and political hatred* operate today! Mind you, they

74. Al Feldstein and Bill Gaines, “Under Cover,” *Shock Suspense Stories* 6, December 1952-January 1953, 1-2.

75. Feldstein, “Cover,” 3.

76. Feldstein, “Cover,” 4.

are shrewd and ruthless men such as those in our story! How long can we stay ‘cool’ and indifferent to this threat to our democratic way of life? It is time to unveil these usurpers of our constitutionally guaranteed freedoms!”⁷⁷

The story is interesting in the number of ways it deviates from what had become genre norms. For one, the reporter – while heroic – was not “two-fisted,” and was beaten handily when physically confronted. Second, he was killed, which in real life is often the result of heroism, but almost never happens in the comics. Third, the story dealt with a hot-button issue, in this case lynching (with “flogging” as a metaphor), instead of generic criminals. However, the main genre convention – the heroic reporter – remained in place.

Even that changes with the story “Deadline!” a year later. In that eight-pager, a washed-up reporter named Lawrence Greig – cashiered due to drunkenness – appealed for a last chance from a former editor. He had met a woman, he said, and needed money and a fresh start to pursue her. While skeptical and hard-nosed, the editor finally relented. “You come in with a *scoop* . . . a *front-page headline* . . . and you’re *in! Fair enough?*”⁷⁸

And the desperate Greig does find a terrific story. In a diner where he stops for coffee, the proprietor confesses he has just strangled his wife for being unfaithful. Jubilant, the reporter goes to phone his page one story in . . . only to discover the woman is not quite dead. “Your *story*, Larry. It’s *going out the window!*” reads the caption, indicating the reporter’s thought process. “She’s *not dead! He didn’t kill her! Do something, Larry! Do something!*” And he does – he finishes the job the proprietor

77. Feldstein, “Cover,” 7.

78. Al Feldstein and Bill Gaines, “Deadline!” *Shock SuspenStories* 12, December 1953-January 1954, 3.

started, strangling the woman to death. Only then does Greig realize that the woman is the girlfriend he was trying to sober up to court. “Annie stares up with blind bulging eyes,” reads the caption. “You back away . . . gasping. Your stomach tightens . . . knots. Your mouth is suddenly dry. . . .” As the story ends, the reporter gasps “I . . . choke . . . *I . . . I need a drink!*”⁷⁹

This is one of the few high-profile stories before 1963 where the reporter was not the good guy. Although the reader may understand Greig’s desperation, the crime he commits is unforgivable. However, it should also be noted that the story still managed to romanticize the newspaper industry, at least in this opening caption: “You stand and you listen to the din of chattering typewriters and voices screaming into telephones and the thunder of the presses above. You listen to the frantic uproar of the humanity and the machinery that constitute a busy newspaper office. The sound is music to your ears, Lawrence Greig. The smell of ink and sweat and stale cigarette smoke is perfume.”⁸⁰

Later, EC published *EXTRA!*, a title which ran for five issues and was meant to accommodate the draconian strictures of the 1954 Comics Code. *EXTRA!* fell back on the “two-fisted reporter” conventions with several ongoing characters, eschewing the experimentation of *Shock Suspense Stories*. And the romanticism was still there, as well. “The thrilling world of newsdom has always been one of great emotional tensions and excitement to those engaged in the gathering and preparing of news for the daily consumption of newspaper readers,” reads the Introduction on the inside front cover of *EXTRA!* 1. “They wage a constant battle against the clock and their competitors to bring

79. Feldstein, “Deadline!” 8.

80. Feldstein, “Deadline!” 1.

the latest, right-up-to-the-minute stories into your hands; and their work has been so consistent, with so little fanfare concerning the important role they play, it is taken for granted. But behind every story you read in your paper there is another . . . the story of how that story was found, and of the people who found it.” *EXTRA!* starred “special correspondent Keith Michaels and his secretary Vicky” and “rough-and-ready cameraman Slick Rampart,” who reported to editor Pat MacDonald of the World Press news service between investigations fraught with espionage, fistfights, and gunplay in exotic settings.⁸¹

EXTRA! was not alone. When crime comics were popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a great many of them starred journalists, or involved them. One such title was *Authentic Police Cases*, which St. John published from August 1948 to March 1955. There was nothing “authentic” about these stories, of course, but they starred various journalists in continuing series and launched each story with the title in the form of a headline on a newspaper.

Authentic Police Cases 4 is a good example. In the first story, headlined “Newsman Balks Scheme to Kill Key Witness,” the narrator brags about “the *Tribune*’s crime reporter, Lawson Hunt,”⁸² as two thugs break into Hunt’s home – where he has a sophisticated crime lab behind a hidden door. A burglar alarm goes off, which Hunt receives in the district attorney’s office, where he is hobnobbing with top law enforcement. As he leaves, he lets the D.A. know that he’s going to capture a hood on his own: “(Daisy) Chayne is hep to my jive, Tom! **I’m going to work on him alone!**” Then

81. The Editors, “Introduction,” *EXTRA!* 1, March-April 1955, inside front cover.

82. “Newsman Balks Scheme to Kill Key Witness!” *Authentic Police Cases* 4, August 1948, 1.

he tracks a gang, gets captured, escapes, and single-handedly prevents an assassination of a key witness.

In the same issue, the story “Gem Cache Uncovered Before Mansion Burns” begins with a description of the heroic protagonist: “Crime reporter Rocky Stone of the *Star-Ledger* depends on his wits and fists rather than the telephone and typewriter to gather front page stories!”⁸³ The story seems written for a private detective series: Stone had an office separate from the newspaper, he had a sidekick apparently in his employ, and he decided whether to take a “case” by flipping a coin. He also carried a gun, and when someone loitered outside his office, he fired wildly out the window.

In “Crime Reporter Nabs Stage Beauty’s Killer!” reporter Jinx Jordan and assistant Larry competed with reporter Ginny on the murder of Honey Komes, made to look like suicide. Jordan talked like Sam Spade, and acted with the same breezy self-confidence. However, though it was barely acknowledged, it was actually Ginny who solved the crime. As was customary in these stories, the police were little more than window dressing.

Another interesting example was Trojan’s *Crime Smashers*, which featured “Ray Hale, News Ace.” In the fourth issue, Hale only seemed to remember he was a reporter at the end of the story, when he rushed to get his story in. Prior to that, he was more of a private eye or knee-breaker: He abducted a suspect, tied him up, threatened to break his hands, defeated three armed smugglers with his fists, and generally behaved like a vigilante, restrained by neither police nor journalism ethics. Amazingly, Hale’s

83. “Gem Cache Uncovered Before Mansion Burns!” *Authentic Police Cases* 4, August 1948, 1.

kidnapping, unlawful restraint, assault, evidence tampering, and other crimes were condoned, or at least tolerated, by law enforcement.

This overview of early journalists in comic books is remarkable in two ways. One is the sheer length of the list; early comic-book creators obviously favored “reporter” as an occupation for their heroes, whether in masks or not. Perhaps this was in imitation of Clark Kent, perhaps journalists were so common in media it was an obvious choice, or perhaps it was simply a convenient springboard for stories. Whatever the reason, there sure were a lot of them – and we have not begun to explore the *Daily Planet* yet.

The other interesting aspect is how these reporters – almost to a man or woman – acted as adjuncts to law enforcement, although their actions were often unethical or illegal. They waded into fistfights with criminals, tampered with evidence, and committed assault; some went armed and used weapons carelessly. And yet, they were all celebrated as heroes and generally welcomed – usually openly admired – by police. With one notable exception in *Shock SuspenStories*, most early comic-book stories clearly presented journalists as the good guys, even if those characters’ actions were questionable.

These tales were pure escapist fiction aimed at children, and these characters behaved in ways only a child could accept as normal for journalism (or any occupation). But the takeaway is that they *were* considered heroes, regardless of their actions – as were their contemporaries at the *Daily Planet*, as we shall see.

Chapter 2

Truth, Justice, and the American Way: The *Daily Planet* 1938-present

When writer Jerry Siegel introduced reporters Clark Kent and Lois Lane in *Action Comics* 1 (June 1938), he established two characters who exemplified the journalist-as-hero archetype for at least the next seven decades. By the end of 1940 editor Perry White and cub reporter Jimmy Olsen were added, fulfilling the same function, as did the *Daily Planet* as a whole. The following examples demonstrate the overall depiction of the *Planet* and its staff, which – while occasionally straying into the unethical (and occasionally the unlawful) – exemplified the “never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way” just as much as Superman.

Two eras of importance should be established for quick reference before delving into the long history of the Superman books. One is the aegis of editor Mort Weisinger, who was the unofficial Superman editor from 1952 to 1958 (launching and supervising both *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* and *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane*), while the official Superman editor was in California advising on the *Adventures of Superman* TV show. From 1958 to 1970 he was officially in charge of the Superman line of books,¹ when many of the most important elements of the Superman mythos were introduced (primarily by writer Otto Binder), such as Bizarro, Brainiac, the Fortress of Solitude, the bottle city of Kandor, Supergirl, and more. But the “Weisinger era” was also when many of the characters, especially Lane and Olsen, had their most memorable character development. It is a testament to the staying power of the stories of the Weisinger era – which coincides with a period comic-book fans refer to as the “Silver Age” – that most

1. Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 102-103.

people still associate personality traits with Lane and Olsen that were jettisoned decades ago.

The second era of interest is the enormous sea change that took place in DC's superhero comic books in 1986. Through the use of a twelve-issue series called *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (April 1985-March 1986), the company attempted to "reboot" its major superhero characters, in order to dispense with decades of sometimes crippling back story. The Superman titles were restarted from scratch, with all titles going on hiatus for three months while a six-issue, twice-monthly miniseries called *The Man of Steel* set up a new status quo, beginning with Superman's initial arrival in Metropolis as a modern event. *The Man of Steel* revamped all the members of the Superman cast, and many elements – especially some of the unprofessional or immature aspects of Lane and Olsen – were treated as if they had never happened. After *Crisis*, the *Daily Planet* and her "Big Four" were more heroic – and more human – than ever before.

The Daily Planet: A Great Metropolitan Newspaper

The *Daily Planet* is one of the earliest newspapers depicted in comic books, and almost certainly the best known. The *Planet* and its staff have appeared not only in comic books for the last seventy years, but have moved with the Man of Steel into other media, such as comic strips, radio, television, movie serials, cartoons, movies, a Broadway play, and novels, plus an avalanche of licensed products, such as toys, underwear, T-shirts, lunchboxes, games, action figures, and bedding. *Editor & Publisher's* Randy Dotinga describes the *Planet* as "the most famous newspaper in comic-book history."²

2. Randy Dotinga, "Even Superman Couldn't Stop the Web," *Editor & Publisher*, October 2, 1999, 18.

Strangely, the *Planet* did not debut with Kent and Lane in Superman's first adventure in *Action Comics* 1. Instead, Kent reported to an unnamed editor at the Metropolis *Daily Star*,³ believed to be based on the *Daily Star* in Toronto, the city where Superman co-creator and artist Joe Shuster grew up.⁴ By 1940 references to the *Star* had quietly become references to the *Daily Planet*.⁵

Superman branched out into radio in 1940, and it is there the famous "It's a bird!" introduction began, which moved with Superman into TV in 1952. That prologue injected the phrase "great metropolitan newspaper" into the popular lexicon to describe the *Daily Planet*.⁶

While it sounds like hyperbole, "great metropolitan newspaper" is exactly the role the *Daily Planet* fulfills in the comics. It was described in *Superman* 73 (1951) as "the biggest paper in Metropolis,"⁷ and therefore probably the country. The unofficial Superman Homepage website describes the newspaper as "a national periodical, rivaling the likes of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*."⁸ Dotinga quotes Mike Carlin, an executive editor at DC Comics in 1999, as saying "the *Daily Planet* is probably closer to *The New York Times* or the *New York Daily News*. It has a bit more of that regular-Joe

3. Jerry Siegel, "Superman: Champion of the Oppressed," *Action Comics* 1, June 1938, 5.

4. Daniels, *Complete*, 27.

5. Jerry Siegel, "Europe at War, Part 2," *Action Comics* 23, April 1940, 13.

6. DC Comics, ed., *The Superman Radio Scripts – Volume One: Superman vs. Atom Man* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2001), iii.

7. Bill Finger, "Perry White vs. Clark Kent!" *Superman* 73, November 1951, 1.

8. Steven Younis, "Who's Who in Superman: Daily Planet," Superman Homepage, <http://www.supermanhomepage.com/comics/who/who-intro.php?topic=daily-planet> (accessed June 26, 2010).

feel like the *Daily News*, but it's as respected as the *Times* is in the real world.”⁹ Elliott Maggin, one of the primary Superman writers of the 1970s and ‘80s, and a one-time journalism student, says, “I always tried to make the *Daily Planet* into *The New York Times*, but the *Planet* was always more of a family-sized operation. More like the *Los Angeles Times* when the Chandlers were in charge.”

Certain aspects have been relatively constant throughout the *Planet*’s history. For example, the *Planet* has always stood in the way of Lex Luthor’s many plans, and is still the one institution in Metropolis whose opposition Luthor has been unable to crush, either as a mad scientist, or (after 1986) as a ruthless businessman. In *The Man of Steel 4*, for example, Luthor thundered “I **run** this town, Superman! Metropolis **belongs** to me. The people are **mine**, to nurture, or destroy, as I see **fit**.”¹⁰ But by the end of the issue Superman, with help from the *Planet* staff, had Luthor jailed (briefly). Luthor has attempted various schemes in the years since to shut down the *Planet*, including buying it outright, firing everyone except Lane and three other reporters,¹¹ and trying to turn it into an online propaganda arm for his various business ventures and a whitewash for his criminal enterprises. But that plan failed, and Luthor sold it back to White for a dollar, as part of another Machiavellian scheme.¹² (Later still, Bruce “Batman” Wayne bought the *Planet* from White,¹³ a situation that still pertains.) None of Luthor’s other efforts to muzzle the *Planet* have borne fruit.

9. Dotinga, “Web,” 18.

10. John Byrne, “Enemy Mine ...,” *The Man of Steel 4*, November 1, 1986, 22.

11. Louise Simonson, “A City Goes Dark!” *Superman: The Man of Tomorrow* 12, Winter 1999.

12. Jeph Loeb, “We’re Back!” *Superman* 151, second series, December 1999.

13. Jeph Loeb, “Hush Part 4: The City,” *Batman* 611, March 2003, 7.

In the recent *Superman: Secret Origin*, a new retelling of the early days of the 1986 version of the series, Lane said of Luthor “The *Daily Planet* is the only paper in Metropolis that had the guts to take on that self-righteous megalomaniac”¹⁴ and a framed newspaper page could be seen on the wall with the headline “The truth about Lex Luthor: An editorial by Perry White.” This story established Luthor as having almost driven the *Planet* out of business, before the arrival of Superman, whose exclusive interviews and pictures with Lane and Olsen drove circulation up 700 percent and revitalized the *Planet* – and its ability to stand up to Luthor.¹⁵

With that one exception, the *Planet*’s integrity has always been depicted in glowing terms. *Superman* 41 (1946), asserted the *Planet* had “an unparalleled reputation for fairness and accuracy.”¹⁶ The newspaper had been shown to “zealously . . . protect its reputation for accuracy.”¹⁷ The Superman Homepage opines “the core of the *Daily Planet*’s operations is THE journal of record it consistently publishes. In an age of seemingly biased newspapers . . . and even those news outlets whose owners are clearly interested in corporate spin, Perry White has succeeded in keeping his newspaper on course: providing up-to-date news, in an honest manner . . . devoid of spin.”¹⁸

The *Planet* has always been depicted as an outstanding corporate citizen, and dedicated to exposés of criminal activities and confidence scams. And the *Planet* often

14. Geoff Johns, “Secret Origin Book Three: Mild-Mannered Reporter,” *Superman: Secret Origin* 3, January 2010, 11.

15. Geoff Johns, “Secret Origin Book Six: The End,” *Superman: Secret Origin* 6, April 2010.

16. Michael Fleisher, *The Original Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes, Volume Three – Featuring Superman* (New York: DC Comics, 2007), 49.

17. Fleisher, *Superman*, 50.

18. Younis, “Who’s Who.”

works hand in glove with the police, like when the newspaper ran the series “I remember Luthor” solely on the (correct) assumption that it would draw the egotistical villain out of hiding.¹⁹ During the Weisinger era it routinely published hoaxes to fool criminals into revealing their hideout or where they have hidden their loot. Most of these characteristics can also be attributed to Perry White, and are discussed below.

So the *Planet* is virtually a poster child for the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics. It seeks truth and reports it. It minimizes harm, acts independently, and is accountable. It shows compassion. It holds to rigorous standards for fairness and accuracy. The one item in the SPJ Code the *Planet* might fail is “be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power responsible,”²⁰ which would certainly include the powerful Superman. The question arises due to the *Planet*’s open and obvious connection to the Man of Steel, including acting as his mailbox in the 1960s.²¹ There is no prohibition to being close to a source, but the *Planet*’s cozy relationship with the Metropolis Marvel could make some journalists uncomfortable – certainly the *Planet*’s competitors – especially given the innumerable stories he gave to the *Planet* as exclusives. In fact, in 1962 Perry White gave Superman a plaque that read “In gratitude to **Superman**, for helping the **Planet** get many great scoops!”²² In the post-1986 version of events, as noted above, it is Superman’s decision to give the *Planet* exclusive coverage that saves the paper from bankruptcy.

19. Cary Bates, “The Most Dangerous Door in the World!” *Superman* 213, November 1969.

20. Society of Professional Journalists, “SPJ Code of Ethics,” <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp> (accessed June 26, 2010).

21. Otto Binder, “The Menace of Superman’s Fan Mail!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 35, March 1959.

22. Jerry Siegel, “Krypton’s First Superman!” *Superman* 154, July 1962, 2.

Fortunately, there are instances in the texts where the *Planet* does hold Superman responsible, such as in 1962's "Superman Goes Wild!" in which the Superman Revenge Squad used a hypnotic ray to force Superman into committing criminal acts. White was determined to publish the story, even though his top reporters begged off writing it. "It's our duty to report all the news . . . good or bad," he sputtered, "even if it involves something unflattering to **Superman!**"²³

Post-1986 examples are even easier to find. In a recent issue of *Supergirl*, the *Planet* allowed gossip columnist Cat Grant to run a scathing hatchet job on the Maid of Steel,²⁴ one of several recent instances where the *Planet* put distance between itself and Superman.

The Grant column is representative of one of the two salient changes in the *Daily Planet* after the 1986 reboot, arguably reflecting the changes that have occurred to newspapers outside the pages of comic books.

One is that the newspaper's philosophy seems to have changed a bit around the edges. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, the post-reboot *Planet* has on staff some unsavory characters, such as the aforementioned Grant, which may indicate a lowering of standards, or a heightened need for splashy content to attract readers and advertisers. For example, Grant's grotesquely slanted opinion piece on Supergirl occupied the entire front page, over Kent's objections: "Chief, couldn't you run it somewhere else?" he asked White. "I mean, wouldn't this article be more suited to the opinion page?"²⁵ Not only was

23. Robert Bernstein, "Superman Goes Wild!" *Action Comics* 295, December 1962, 4.

24. Sterling Gates, "Why the World Doesn't Need a Supergirl," *Supergirl* 34, December 2008.

25. Gates, "Supergirl," 2.

the position of the article a violation of the news-opinion divide, but it also demonstrated that the *Planet* is less strongly beholden to Superman and his family than it once was.

The other change since 1986 is size. In the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, the *Planet* was established as a huge operation, one that owned a chain of newspapers, a radio station, television studios, a mobile television unit, and – at least in the 1960s – its own helicopter, the “Flying Newsroom.”²⁶ It was acquired by the Galaxy Broadcasting System (GBS) in 1971,²⁷ which extended its reach through broadcast media. But after 1986, the *Planet* appears to be a newspaper whose resources are on a *New York Times* or *USA Today* level – typical for a national newspaper, but not spectacular, and certainly without such toys as the Flying Newsroom. And *Superman: Secret Origin* established that prior to the advent of Superman, Luthor had pushed the newspaper to the edge of bankruptcy and intimidated the publisher, who in turn had muzzled Perry White.²⁸ That situation has been rectified, but it is clear today’s *Planet* has nowhere near the resources it had in the past.

Despite those recent dents in its armor, the *Daily Planet* has always been depicted as “a great metropolitan newspaper,” and remains so to this day. And if a great metropolitan newspaper is judged by its staff, the *Planet* has much of which to be proud – most of the time.

Clark Kent: Mild-Mannered Reporter

The model for Clark Kent – at least physically – was Walter Dennis, a science fiction fan and newspaperman with whom Siegel corresponded in 1930, according to

26. Fleisher, *Superman*, 50.

27. Dennis O’Neil, “Superman Breaks Loose!” *Superman* 233, January 1971, 5.

28. Johns, “Mild-Mannered,” 11.

both historian Les Daniels²⁹ and the late editor Julius Schwartz.³⁰ Schwartz further asserted that Siegel named the character after actors Clark Gable and Kent Taylor (the latter not very popular, but related to Siegel's wife).³¹

As to the origin of Clark Kent's persona, it is the obverse of his alter ego. "Siegel and Shuster made Superman everything they weren't: massive, confident, strong, handsome; a being with perfect reflexes and super vision," says comics historian and artist Jim Steranko. "They were, in their own way, striking back at a world of bullies that had threatened, bruised, and beaten them."³² Author and humorist Arie Kaplan agrees: Superman "actualized the wish-fulfillment fantasies of its creators, two Jewish, Depression-era kids craving a muscle-bound redeemer to liberate them from the social and economic impoverishment of their lives."³³ Historian Michael Fleisher says "the Man of Steel endowed his Clark Kent persona with an array of qualities and traits which are diametrically opposed to the ones he displays as a super-hero."³⁴

Kent was the reality for Siegel and Shuster. "They patterned him after themselves, almost masochistically, making him timid, myopic, working class, and socially maladroit. And provided him with good qualities, like intelligence, integrity, and industry." Daniels argues that those qualities humanized the god-like Superman for readers, making

29. Daniels, *Complete*, 19.

30. Julius Schwartz and Brian M. Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics* (New York: HarperEntertainment, 2000), 141.

31. Schwartz, *Worlds*, 142.

32. Jim Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics Volume One* (Reading, PA: Supergraphics, 1970), 39.

33. Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2008), 13.

34. Fleisher, *Superman*, 319.

“omnipotence lovable.” Further, he says, it is the “almost universal fantasy: of containing hidden qualities that would someday command everyone’s admiration.”³⁵ Comics historian and former comics editor Danny Fingeroth agrees about this interpretation of the double identity, saying “perhaps . . . it is to allow us to believe that, deep down, we are or could be so much more than we appear.”³⁶ Daniels again: “Jerry Siegel has stated repeatedly that the inspiration for Superman’s dual identity grew out of his own frustration as a high school kid who wasn’t ‘glamorous’ and felt uneasy around girls.”³⁷

Comics writer and historian Gerard Jones suggests another possibility for the origin of Kent’s persona: the 1934 movie *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, starring Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon. It was “one of Jerry’s favorite novels of dual identity,” Jones writes. “Howard’s sniveling submission to Oberon’s disdain (all in the interest of preserving his identity as the Pimpernel, of course) proved to be the perfect model for Clark Kent’s twisted relationship with Lois Lane – and Oberon’s high-cheeked loveliness does seem to peer out from Joe’s early drawings of his girl reporter.”³⁸

Some historians argue that there is more to the Clark Kent persona, possibly elements that Siegel and Shuster did not intend. Gary Engle of Cleveland State University sees Kal-El’s escape to the United States and the character’s bland-at-work/Kryptonian-at-home dichotomy as the ultimate immigration experience – and therefore an archetypal

35. Daniels, *Complete*, 20.

36. Danny Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 50.

37. Les Daniels, *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World’s Favorite Comic Book Heroes* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1995), 24.

38. Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 116.

representation of America.³⁹ Kaplan reiterates the “ultimate immigrant” concept, but also sees “Jewish signifiers,” likening the rocket escape from Krypton to the *kindertransports* that saved many Jewish children from the Holocaust. He notes, as does Engle,⁴⁰ that Kent’s Kryptonian name “Kal-El” could be interpreted to mean “All that God is” in Hebrew. He mentions, as does Daniels, the Biblical parallels to Jesus (“sent from above to redeem the world”⁴¹) and to Moses (in the bulrushes). He mentions Superman’s parallel to the Jewish myth of The Golem, which Michael Chabon also interprets for his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, which is clearly inspired by the lives and careers of early Jewish comic-book creators, especially those of Siegel and Shuster. And he notes that “Clark Kent’s signature attributes – bespectacled, bookish, mild-mannered – could be a burlesque of Jewish stereotypes” (although he allows that “they were probably just a reflection of how Siegel and Shuster felt about themselves”).⁴²

In contradistinction, psychologist Robin S. Rosenberg sees nothing in Clark Kent that is not Midwestern, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. In her 2008 essay “Superman’s Personality,” her psychoanalysis finds Kent’s foster parents and their Kansas values as the determinant of his psyche.⁴³

39. Gary Engle, “What Makes Superman So Darned American?,” *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 85.

40. Engle, “American,” 86.

41. Daniels, *Complete*, 19.

42. Kaplan, *Krakow*, 14.

43. Robin S. Rosenberg, “Superman’s Personality,” *The Psychology of Superheroes: An Unauthorized Exploration* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2008), 44.

As to why Kent became a journalist, Jones attributes it to the popularity of that profession in the 1930s. “(Siegel) spoke often of wanting to be a reporter when he grew up, as a lot of kids did then, for that was the high point of America’s romance with the big-city newsman,” he writes. “Jerry’s new Hollywood heroes were the fast-talking, fedora-cocking newshounds who could bring down any crook or millionaire or beautiful dame with their wits.”⁴⁴ According to movie historian Matthew Ehrlich, the years after the release of *The Front Page* (1931) and *It Happened One Night* (1934) were ones in which “many journalists entered the business after they saw movies such as those and decided it looked like fun.”⁴⁵ Daniels also sees no mystery in Kent’s career choice, given Siegel’s extracurricular activity at *The Torch* at Glendale High School in Cleveland. “With his background working on the high school newspaper, it seemed natural for Siegel to make Clark Kent a reporter.”⁴⁶ (And Daniels explains the Clark-Lois dynamic as one that mirrored the teenaged Siegel’s forlorn worship from afar of the pretty, popular Lois Amster at Glenville High.)

As to the in-story reasons, Kent decided in 1948 to become a newsman at the graves of his parents, saying “a job as a reporter on a big newspaper will keep me in touch with those who may need my help! I’ll wear glasses, pretend to be timid. . . .”⁴⁷ However, there are at least two other stories describing Kent’s advent at the *Daily Planet*: “Clark Kent’s Career!” *Action Comics* 144 (May 1950); and “How Perry White Hired

44. Jones, *Geeks*, 63-64.

45. Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 38.

46. Daniels, *Complete*, 19.

47. Bill Finger, “The Origin of Superman,” *Superman* 53, July-August 1948, 10.

Clark Kent!” *Superman* 133 (November 1959). Both violated the timeline established in *Action Comics* 1 and the more generally accepted 1948 story, and are considered apocryphal, even “spurious.”⁴⁸

In the 1986 revamp, Kent got hired by beating Lois Lane to the exclusive story on Superman.⁴⁹ A similar story of Kent getting the scoop on Superman’s first appearance in Metropolis took place in the 2003 retelling *Superman: Birthright*.⁵⁰ But as those two stories superseded the ones that came before, they met the same fate with 2009’s six-issue *Superman: Secret Origin*. That series omitted the “Superman scoop” aspect of Kent’s hiring altogether, one must assume deliberately, in what DC Universe Executive Editor Dan DiDio described as “the definitive origins of Superman.”⁵¹ Given the track record above, though, *Secret Origin* is no more likely to stand forever than its predecessors. Still, it cleaned up the nagging ethical question about how Kent got hired at the *Daily Planet* – if it was with a scoop about his alter ego, it would be unfair to Lois, and unethical in the extreme. With that erased, Kent is much more admirable.

In other media, the beginnings of Clark Kent’s career are equally malleable. For example, the *Adventures of Superman* radio show (1940-51) invented its own version of Superman’s origin, with the Man of Steel joining the *Planet* to learn about Earthlings: “The infant Kal-El ... grew to adulthood during his voyage and emerged on Earth as a full-grown man. Upon landing, he was advised by the first people he encountered to

48. Fleisher, *Superman*, 384.

49. John Byrne, “The Story of the Century,” *Man of Steel* 2, October 1986, 22.

50. Mark Waid, *Superman: Birthright* 1-12, September 2003-September 2004.

51. Matt Brady, “Dan DiDio: 20 Answers, 1 Question,” Newsarama, <http://www.newsarama.com/comics/110826-Didio3.html> (accessed August 11, 2009).

adopt the identity 'Clark Kent.' The strange visitor from another planet agreed, and, with his new Earth name to accompany him, he applied for a job as a newspaper reporter so that he could study his new people and its planet."⁵² This is not a well-known version and, according to Cronin, "did not catch on with the public."⁵³

The *Adventures of Superman* television show (1952-58) returned the origin to its comic-book storyline. "The premiere episode of the series retells the origin of Superman based upon the story as it appeared in the comic book edition of *Superman 53*, and it details his arrival on Earth as an infant from the planet Krypton. . . . So he may be where he will learn immediately of any emergency requiring his help, he seeks employment at a great metropolitan newspaper, the *Daily Planet*."⁵⁴

In *Superman: The Movie* (1978) White gave yet another reason (to Lane) why the boy from Smallville has his job: "Clark Kent may seem like just a mild-mannered reporter, but listen, not only does he know how to treat his editor-in-chief with the proper respect, not only does he have a snappy, punchy prose style, but he is, in my 40 years in this business, the fastest typist I've ever seen."⁵⁵

Finally, in the current television series *Smallville*, Kent became a cub reporter in the first episode of the eighth season ("Odyssey," first airing Sept. 18, 2008) with virtually no explanation at all.

52. DC Comics, *Radio*, 109.

53. Brian Cronin, *Was Superman a Spy? And Other Comic Book Legends Revealed!* (New York: Plume, 2009), 16.

54. Michael Bifulco, *Superman on Television: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Michael Bifulco, 1998), 10.

55. "Memorable Quotes from Superman," IMDb: The Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078346/quotes> (accessed August 11, 2009).

Not only is Kent a newspaper reporter, for a while he also worked in broadcast news. When Schwartz replaced Weisinger as editor of the Superman line of books in the early 1970s, he decided it was time for Kent to expand his repertoire. “Young people didn’t relate to newspaper reporters,” Schwartz says of his opinion at the time. “They got their news from the television, so therefore it was only natural that Clark Kent should take a job as a television reporter.”⁵⁶ Schwartz had Kent travelling in a news van airing or taping remote broadcasts, where he could go to commercial or back to the studio if an emergency arose. Not only was Superman more mobile, but Kent would have a fresh story every time the Man of Steel finished his business.

That came to end in the late 1970s when *Superman: The Movie* was in production, and the producers read the script and were “horrified” to see Kent as a broadcaster. “Since when was Clark Kent a television reporter? That simply wouldn’t do!” Schwartz reported. “They backed up their opinion with a man-on-the-street poll that asked people to identify who Clark Kent was; almost everyone polled answered: a reporter for the *Daily Planet*. So much for his sojourn as a television reporter.”⁵⁷ The directive to put Kent back in the *Planet* newsroom affected not just the movie, but the comics, too.

But however he got the job, and no matter how meekly he is portrayed, Kent’s work is invariably portrayed as heroic. In “Clark Kent – Convict” (1953) Superman said: “Many times in his newspaper articles, Clark Kent has helped to expose crime and corruption. ... !”⁵⁸ And a few issues later (*Superman* 98, July 1955), Superman said: “To *Daily Planet* readers the name of Clark Kent signed over a story has always meant

56. Schwartz, *Worlds*, 139.

57. Schwartz, *Worlds*, 139.

58. “Clark Kent – Convict,” *Superman* 83, July-August 1953.

integrity and honesty! His newspaper reporting on crime has won him countless awards!”⁵⁹ These two remarks characterize the depiction of Clark’s profession for more than seventy years.

And he was written as good at it. On the *Adventures of Superman* radio show in 1945, Jimmy Olsen said of Kent, “He’s the best reporter on the paper – the best in the country.”⁶⁰ More than seventy years of stories have unfailingly supported that idea.

Plus, the character himself is proud of the profession. “Over and above its usefulness to him in his career as Superman,” Fleisher says, “it is clear that Clark Kent values his career in journalism purely for its own sake.”⁶¹ For example, Kent gave this speech to a newsboy and would-be reporter in 1945:

Just remember, a good reporter gets the news . . . and gets it first! But there’s more to being a reporter than that! He lives by the deadline! The thunder of the presses is the pounding of his heart! And most important – all his personal feelings remain in the background! It’s his story that counts! Always remember that!⁶²

However meek he might be in other venues, Kent was quite heroic in the 1950s television show, apparently due to budget constraints more than editorial choice. The *Adventures of Superman* simply didn’t have the money for Super-effects, so Super-feats by the title hero were usually reserved for the climax. “The series . . . relied on Clark’s newspaper sleuthing to make up for the lack of comics-style spectacle, so (actor Steve)

59. Fleisher, *Superman*, 388.

60. DC Comics, *Radio*, 51.

61. Fleisher, *Superman*, 384.

62. Alvin Schwartz, “The Junior Reporters!” *World’s Finest Comics* 18, Summer 1945, 3.

Reeve's version of the character had to be more capable than previous portrayals. Few men could intimidate the *Planet's* ace reporter."⁶³

English professor Philip Skerry elaborated on this depiction in a 1988 essay – and expressed approval. He notes that Kent, as portrayed by ex-boxer Reeves, “was no Caspar Milquetoast” and was as tough as his cinematic peers. This blended the two sides of the Kryptonian so that “Superman seems to be a natural extension of Clark’s courage, not a Walter Mitty-type fantasy projection.”⁶⁴ Skerry speculated that a tougher, more confident Kent was necessary due to the intimacy of television but became a virtue for all the necessity: “Reeves’s Clark was a more interesting character than the other Clarks, more fully developed, less klutzy – a hero in his own right.”⁶⁵

So Kent is obviously meant to be a heroic journalist, and meets most of the criteria in the Code of Ethics, as you’d expect from a man whose motto is “truth, justice, and the American way.” He preaches enthusiasm, objectivity, and integrity. He is accurate and fair. He is compassionate. But is he completely ethical?

Kent didn’t join the service in World War II, which could take some sheen off his heroism. But, as comics historian Ron Goulart says in the Foreword to *Superman Archives Volume Seven*, “for reasons of home front morale”⁶⁶ DC wanted to avoid having an invulnerable man skipping through European and Pacific battles that were killing real servicemen. Further, “it would be ridiculous for DC to show Superman stopping

63. Jake Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2008), 30.

64. Philip Skerry and Chris Lambert, “From Panel to Panavision,” *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 70.

65. Dennis Dooley, “The Man of Tomorrow and the Boys of Yesterday,” *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* (Cleveland: Octavia Press, 1987), 71.

66. Ron Goulart, “Foreword,” *Superman Archives Volume Seven* (New York: DC Comics, 2006), 6.

hostilities that were bound to continue,” explains Daniels. “Reality stymied the Man of Steel as no other opponent could.”⁶⁷

As an in-story explanation, the *Superman* newspaper comic strip on February 16-18, 1942, depicted Clark Kent failing his physical when enlisting, because his X-ray vision accidentally saw through a wall during the eye exam. Having missed every letter on the chart, Kent was deemed “blind as a bat” and listed 4F.⁶⁸ This scene never appeared in wartime comic books, but was alluded to in the story “I Sustain the Wings” in 1943, where Kent went undercover at the real Army Air Forces Technical Training Command at Yale University. A footnote read “Millions of readers will recall that Clark Kent tried to enlist but was rejected due to faulty vision. . . . Since then, he has learned that Superman could be more valuable on the home front operating as a free agent.”⁶⁹

This overseas ban was reinforced thirty-eight years later, when writer Roy Thomas established that during the war Adolf Hitler possessed the Spear of Destiny (the spear of Longinus that allegedly pierced Jesus’ side during the crucifixion), and Hideki Tojo held the Holy Grail.⁷⁰ These two mystical objects could mind-control any magic-based or magic-vulnerable members (like Superman) of the wartime All-Star Squadron team if they entered Axis-held territory. “The reason for the use of the two talismans in different hemispheres was to provide a rationale for why the most powerful All-Stars

67. Daniels, *Sixty*, 65.

68. Brian Cronin, “Comic Book Urban Legends Revealed #49,” *Comics Should Be Good*, <http://goodcomics.comicbookresources.com/2006/05/04/comic-book-urban-legends-revealed-49/> (accessed July 1, 2010).

69. Mort Weisinger, “I Sustain the Wings,” *Superman* 25, November-December 1943, 3.

70. Roy Thomas, “Day of the Dragon King!” *All-Star Squadron* 4, December 1981.

(The Spectre, Superman, *et al.*) didn't simply invade Germany and Japan and end the war soon after Pearl Harbor," Thomas says.⁷¹

But the ethical elephant in the room is that Clark Kent routinely reports on himself as Superman, without disclosing to the *Planet* readers or his editor that he is Superman. He began lying to his editor in his very first adventure, when the unnamed editor sent him out to report on "a fellow with gigantic strength." Kent replied: "Don't worry, chief, if I can't find out anything about this Superman, no one can!"⁷²

This ongoing omission of the truth (emphasized by the private joke, underlined in the original) violates a slew of caveats from the SPJ Code of Ethics, as do his occasional re-enactments and other subterfuges to cover for not being in two places at the same time. This behavior violates Code items such as these:⁷³

- "Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites, and quotations do not misrepresent." (It is a misrepresentation every time reporter Kent interviews or quotes newsmaker Superman.)
- "Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it." (Superman does, in fact, routinely re-enact events for Clark Kent to "cover" or photograph.)
- "Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public." (As

71. Roy Thomas, "The Spears and Grailstones of Outrageous Fortune," *The All-Star Companion Volume Two* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2006), 113.

72. Siegel, "Champion," 5.

73. SPJ, "Code."

mentioned below, Superman regards his Kent identity as an undercover role and a secret weapon against crime.)

- “Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources’ reliability.” (Clearly, Kent does not identify himself as the source when he attributes to Superman.)
- “Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.” (Reporting on one’s own activities, and secretly at that, is the definition of a conflict of interest.)
- “Disclose unavoidable conflicts.” (If nothing else, he should tell his editor that he and his frequent interview subject are the same, but he does not.)

Bill Knight, a professor of journalism at Western Illinois University, asked *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reporter and comic-book writer (*Phantom Jack*) Michael San Giacomo about the ethics of this arrangement for “Comic Book Journalists Beyond Clark Kent.” He quoted San Giacomo as saying “I’ve always been troubled by Clark Kent’s journalistic ethics. How can you write a fair story when your alter ego is the subject? Though I suspect he tries to be fair, I would worry that he deliberately skews the story to under-emphasize his own heroics. That is as much a problem as being a glory hound.”⁷⁴

If the texts deal with this breach of ethics at all, it is to demonstrate how important the secret identity is – to imply that real-world practicality trumps journalism ethics. The primary reason stated for the secret identity is to keep Superman’s loved ones from being murdered for revenge, or their safety being used for blackmail against him. “Adopting the white-bread image of a wimp is first and foremost a moral act for the Man of Steel,”

74. Bill Knight, “Comic Book Journalists Beyond Clark Kent,” *The IJPC Journal* 1 (Fall 2009), 138-146. <http://ijpc.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal> (accessed July 4, 2010).

declares Engle. “He does it to protect his parents from nefarious sorts who might use them to gain an edge over the powerful alien.”⁷⁵

Both of these scenarios have been alluded to or depicted in the texts. In 1961’s “The Story of Superman’s Life,” a teenage Boy of Steel told his foster parents: “In revenge against me, criminals might threaten **you**, Mom and Dad, if they found out I was your son! So I’ll keep my **secret identity** as Clark Kent!”⁷⁶ In a 1963 story titled “Why Superman Needs a Secret Identity!” a gunman murders Ma and Pa Kent in a world where Superboy lived with them openly.⁷⁷ Pa Kent warned against criminals trying to use Clark’s powers for evil in 1952’s “The Artificial Superman.”⁷⁸

And there are other reasons. In other vignettes in “Why Superman Needs a Secret Identity!” living openly allowed Lex Luthor and other criminals to ambush Superman; living at the Fortress of Solitude became depressing; and attempting to create a civilian identity other than Clark Kent proved too daunting.⁷⁹ Also, Pa Kent warned as early as 1939, “Now listen to me, Clark! This great strength of yours – you’ve got to hide it from people or they’ll be scared of you!”⁸⁰

“Why Superman Needs a Secret Identity!” also established that Superman thinks of his secret identity as “my greatest weapon!”⁸¹ This theme recurred often. In 1943’s “The Man They Wouldn’t Believe!” the narrator said “disguised as Clark Kent, the **Man**

75. Engle, “American,” 85.

76. Otto Binder, “The Story of Superman’s Life,” *Superman* 146, July 1961, 9

77. Leo Dorfman, “Why Superman Needs a Secret Identity,” *Action Comics* 305, October 1963, 4.

78. Edmond Hamilton, “The Artificial Superman,” *World’s Finest Comics* 52, March-April 1952.

79. Dorfman, “Identity,” 1-14.

80. Jerry Siegel, “Superman: Champion of the Oppressed” (expanded), *Superman* 1, Summer 1939, 1.

81. Dorfman, “Identity,” 14.

of Tomorrow finds it possible, secretly, to ferret out crimes that need solving and injustices that cry out to be righted.”⁸² The idea was re-visited in 1960’s “The Truth Mirror!” when Superman realizes that if his identity is revealed, “my undercover role as Clark Kent will be ruined. I’ll no longer be able to investigate criminals as ‘meek’ Clark Kent so that they can later be captured by **Superman!**”⁸³

In 1959’s “When There Was No Clark Kent!” an accident convinced the world Superman’s civilian identity had been killed, so he gave up on the persona and roomed with Olsen in his full costumed glory. Again, the story demonstrated why a secret identity is necessary. Criminals, favor seekers, gawkers, autograph hounds, etc., converged on Olsen’s apartment and formed a 24/7 mob scene, forcing the Metropolis Marvel to invent a story “revealing” that Kent was still alive.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, in the 1986 interpretation of Kent’s debut at the *Daily Planet*, while he unethically used his “scoop” on Superman to get a job with the newspaper, he did turn down the Metropolis Newspaper Guild’s “Special Award of Excellence.” “It – didn’t seem fair to accept it,” Kent said, which he and the reader certainly know to be true. “After all, turning in that story got me my job at the *Planet*, and that seemed reward enough.”⁸⁵ As noted above, that first scoop – achieved unethically – seems to have been scrubbed from the origin.

While the details change over time, the same broad-stroke picture always emerges of Clark Kent, mild-mannered but dedicated journalist. His main ethical failing – not

82. Jerry Siegel, “The Man They Wouldn’t Believe!” *Action Comics* 61, June 1943, 1.

83. Jerry Siegel, “The Truth Mirror!” *Action Comics* 269, October 1960, 9.

84. Jerry Coleman, “When There Was No Clark Kent!” *Superman* 127, February 1959.

85. Byrne, “Enemy,” 9.

disclosing his Superman identity to either his editor or his readers – is justified in the texts as recognizing a higher ethical calling: saving lives. If we accept that logic, then Clark Kent remains to this day an admirable and ethical journalist.

Lois Lane: Ace Newshawk

From her 1938 start in *Action Comics* 1, Lois Lane was not an unfamiliar archetype to readers. “Lois’ 1940s persona of tough crusading reporter was in the mold of Hollywood dames like Rosalind Russell,” explains comics historian Mike Madrid.⁸⁶ “The Lois Lane of the ‘40s owed much to the tough-talking heroines of that decade’s screwball comedies.”⁸⁷ Daniels offers a different angle. “Lois was created by young males for young males, and she reflects something of a boy’s illusions and delusions about women.” He also describes her as “perhaps the most controversial character in comics” and “likely the best known woman.”⁸⁸

A 1955 story describes Lois Lane’s “‘lifelong ambition’ to become ‘the best reporter in Metropolis.’”⁸⁹ It is evident from the texts that she did so, and that is her primary characteristic.

It began inauspiciously. In her first appearance in the first Superman story there was an allusion to her writing a “sob sister” type of column.⁹⁰ In *Action* 5 she was denied

86 Mike Madrid, *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines* (USA: Exterminating Angel Press, 2009), 65.

87. Madrid, *Supergirls*, 67.

88. Daniels, *Sixty*, 24.

89. Fleisher, *Superman*, 146.

90. Siegel, “Champion” (expanded), 6.

an assignment by the editor because “It’s too important! – This is no job for a girl!”⁹¹ In the next issue she was demoted by the editor: “It’s back to the lovelorn column for you! It’s safer anyway!”⁹² Even as late as 1942, Lane alludes to “my lovelorn column,” even though she had been sent out with Kent on a breaking story, which was routine at that point.⁹³ By 1963, Lane writing a Dear Abby type of column was played for laughs, when the ace reporter filled in (incompetently) for “Dr. Cupid,” who had broken her leg.⁹⁴

However long she labored on the “sob sister” beat, Lane very quickly became Kent’s rival and equal on the paper. By 1940 she was a war correspondent.⁹⁵ By 1943 she and Kent were “famed reporters,”⁹⁶ and by 1946 they were the “two best-known reporters” in Metropolis.⁹⁷ By 1961 she was “considered the top female reporter in the country!”⁹⁸ and the “greatest girl reporter in history!”⁹⁹

But she wasn’t all sweetness and light, at least before 1986. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Lane was virtually unscrupulous when it came to outperforming Clark Kent. In “The Big Scoop,” she sent Kent on a wild-goose chase about non-existent septuplets so she could steal his assignment to cover a devastating flood.¹⁰⁰ In the next

91. Jerry Siegel, “The Big Scoop,” *Action Comics* 5, October 1938, 2.

92. Jerry Siegel, “The Man Who Sold Superman,” *Action Comics* 6, November 1938, 1.

93. Jerry Siegel, *Action Comics* 44, January 1942, 1.

94. Murray Boltinoff, “Dear Dr. Cupid!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 45, November 1963.

95. Jerry Siegel, *Action Comics* 23, April 1940.

96. Jerry Siegel, “The Face of Adonis!” *Action Comics* 58, March 1943, 5.

97. Don Cameron, “The Colossus of Metropolis!” *World’s Finest Comics* 23, July-August 1946, 2.

98. Henry Boltinoff, “The School for Scoops!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 29, November, 1961, 5.

99. Boltinoff, “Scoops,” 9.

100. Siegel, “Scoop,” 2.

issue she flirts with Kent to talk him into taking her with him to his interview, then drugs his drink in order to handle the story solo.¹⁰¹ In “The Lightning Master,” she intercepts a phone call for Kent and steals his tip, because “an important story is popping!”¹⁰² This rivalry cools down after 1940, according to Fleisher, as Kent and Lane “develop a friendly working relationship and frequently cover stories together.”¹⁰³

Lane’s personality changed a bit in the Eisenhower years. “The Lois of the ‘50s was defined by the medium of the new era – television,” writes Madrid. “The TV Lois Lane was played as an adoring damsel in distress, often trussed up in a chair or tied to railroad tracks. But if the Lois Lane of the comic books resembled anyone from the early days of television, it would be Lucille Ball. . . . Just as Lucy dreamed of breaking into show business, the 1950s Lois was single-minded in her quest to become Mrs. Superman.”¹⁰⁴

Steranko offers another explanation about the change in tone in the Superman titles in the late 1940s and ‘50s. Once World War II is over, he writes, the readership was weary of large good-against-evil conflicts. DC’s solution, he asserts, was contrast – facing Superman off against comical tricksters instead of rival strongmen, and complicating his life with comedic domestic entanglements. “Like the returning GIs, Superman was absorbed into the daily routine of civilian life but emerged with a new dimension to his character . . . a sense of humor.”¹⁰⁵

101. Siegel, “Sold,” 7.

102. Jerry Siegel, “The Lightning Master,” *Superman* 13, January-February 1942, 3.

103. Fleisher, *Superman*, 147.

104. Madrid, *Supergirls*, 67.

105. Steranko, *Volume One*, 41.

But the 1950s were an aberration for the *Planet's* ace female reporter. For most of her fictional existence, Lane was more Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday* than Lucy Ricardo in *I Love Lucy*.

Lane's personality was over the top in the Weisinger era. For the duration of the Silver Age, especially in *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* (1958-74), she was depicted as courageous, loyal, clever, and sometimes maternal. She was also catty, intensely jealous, impulsive, hyper-competitive, and willing to misrepresent herself to get dubious stories.

All of these qualities in combination tended to get Lane in trouble quite often, from her inception through the Weisinger era. Madrid sums it up with "Lois' tireless effort to get her next headline, along with her impulsive personality, often put her in danger."¹⁰⁶ As early as 1942, Superman thinks, "I can't sleep – worrying about Lois. . . . she has a better aptitude for getting into trouble than anyone I've ever known."¹⁰⁷ The next two decades of stories prove Superman's anxiety both justified and prescient.

A typical example of both her courage and recklessness during the Weisinger era can be found in "Lois Lane's Super-Séance." She spotted a crook and exclaimed, "Look, Clark! There goes 'Mike the Moose!' He's 'Jinx' Hoxey's right-hand man! The police suspect Jinx and Mike in last week's \$200,000 bank stickup! Let's follow him!" Meek Clark pointed out the obvious: "B-but Lois . . . we're not the police!"¹⁰⁸ Lane insisted, as she often did, and then the pair got into trouble that could only be resolved by the intervention of the Man of Steel.

106. Madrid, *Supergirls*, 65

107. Jerry Siegel, "The Case of the Flying Castle," *World's Finest Comics* 5, Spring 42, 12.

108. "Lois Lane's Super-Séance!" *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* 10, July 1959, 1.

Lane demonstrated softer qualities as well; one religion writer went so far as to describe her as “motherly.”¹⁰⁹ In “The Super-Surprise!” Lois showed forgiveness by speaking in favor of a bank robber at a parole-board hearing. She argued “his long unemployment and his family’s dire need tempted Ed (Connors) to break the law! I’ve arranged a job for this unfortunate man. . . . I’m sure he has learned his lesson and will be a good citizen.”¹¹⁰ Ed Connors got his parole. In “Lois Lane – Volunteer Nurse!” she began a part-time second job helping out at hospitals that continued into the 1970s.¹¹¹

Her cleverness in pursuit of a story was legendary. Once, when temporarily blinded, she used her seeing-eye dog to induce a pet-loving governor to confide his position on a tax bill.¹¹² In another adventure she combined business with pleasure; she fooled watching aliens by publicly kissing Batman, Green Arrow, and Aquaman in order to get irradiated lipstick furtively to Superman.¹¹³ The number of times she went undercover, as she did in “Alias Lois Lane!”¹¹⁴ or tricked a criminal into trusting her, as she did in “The Man Who Sold Superman,”¹¹⁵ are too numerous to count.

Her loyalty was beyond question. For example, when her sister Lucy won a *Daily Planet* contest, Lane thought “Everyone will yell ‘fix!’ and the *Planet* will be

109. John T. Galloway Jr., *The Gospel According to Superman* (Philadelphia and New York: A. J. Holman Co., 1973), 53.

110. “The Super-Surprise!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 24, April 1961, 1.

111. Leo Dorfman, “Lois Lane – Volunteer Nurse!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 43, August 1963.

112. Jerry Coleman, “The Sightless Lois Lane!” *Showcase* 10, September-October 1957.

113. Henry Boltinoff, “The Irresistible Lois Lane!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 29, November 1961.

114. “Alias Lois Lane!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 13, November 1959.

115. Siegel, “Sold.”

ruined . . . unless I find a legitimate excuse to quit my job!” Which she did, sacrificing Superman as well to hated rival Lana Lang, until the mix-up was ironed out.¹¹⁶ In “Hush Money, Sweet Lois – Or Else!” Lane submitted to blackmail, lied to her friends, and even agreed to marry her blackmailer in order to prevent what she thought was damaging information about Superman to be revealed (it turned out not to be true).¹¹⁷

And she was certainly an ace reporter. One illuminating text is 1961’s “The School for Scoops!” in which she taught a seminar on reporting techniques. “As everyone knows,” the narrator intoned in the first panel, “Lois Lane is the number one female reporter in the United States!”¹¹⁸ Even Jimmy Olsen signed up: “Don’t be modest, Lois! You know you’re an ace reporter!”¹¹⁹ Another attendee, also a reporter, said “she knows her business! Lois Lane has scored more scoops and won more newspaper prizes than any reporter in the U.S. except Clark Kent!”¹²⁰

In the course of the seminar, Lane demonstrated how to find a location when blindfolded coming and going (memorize dog-collar numbers and electric-meter numbers when the blindfold’s off). She also showed how to dial the police when tied up with a bomb (hold a pencil in your teeth). She explained how to get evidence that had been torn up and thrown away (pretend to be a vacuum salesman and scoop up the bits as a

116. Murray Boltinoff, “Superman’s Surprise Choice!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 44, October 1963, 7.

117. Otto Binder, “Hush Money, Sweet Lois – Or Else!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 71, January 1967.

118. Boltinoff, “Scoops,” 1

119. Boltinoff, “Scoops,” 1.

120. Boltinoff, “Scoops,” 3.

“demonstration”). She also captured some crooks attending in disguise in order to kill her, when they failed to recognize “QWERTY” as the order of typewriter keys.

“My theory is that newspaper reporting is very close to detective work!” she said. “A good reporter should be able to unravel clues and invent gimmicks!”¹²¹ Apparently it also involves thinking on your feet when you’re the target of an assassination.

In addition to journalism skills, Lane has an ethical attitude. In “Lois Lane – Convict!” she pretended to take bribes to trick criminal mastermind Baldy Pate into revealing his hideout. Citizens and co-workers displayed shock, and the inconsolable White – ignorant of the hoax – refused to believe it. “The paper’s standing behind you!” he said. “We know you never did this thing you’re accused of!”¹²² After all was revealed, Lane’s reputation was restored, and Pate was in prison, the point was reinforced that Lois Lane acting unethically was virtually unthinkable. At the end, even an innocent joke by Kent was met with the half-serious “I’m sorry, Clark – I never accept a bribe!”¹²³

In another story, where Lois was convinced she was being transformed into a witch, she used her “magic” to get a scoop – and felt terrible about beating every reporter in town. “I’m not proud of myself!” she thought. “It was unfair to use sorcery for my own petty advantage! Am I – I turning **evil**, like all witches in history?”¹²⁴ As it turned out, the transformation was a hoax by Superman, but her anxiety about ethics was telling.

121. Boltinoff, “Scoops,” 4.

122. Bill Finger, “Lois Lane – Convict!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 6, January 1959, 4.

123. Finger, “Lane – Convict”, 8.

124. Otto Binder, “The Witch of Metropolis!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 1, March-April 1958, 5.

Lane often disguised herself to trick criminals, which is allowed under the SPJ Code of Ethics if there is no other way to get information necessary to the public. In “Lois Lane’s Wedding Day!” Lane and Kent posed as lovers to investigate a matchmaking service believed to be a scam.¹²⁵ In “Lois Lane’s Secret Identity!” Lane dressed as a blonde socialite to catch the “Society Bandit” that was preying on heiresses.¹²⁶ In “The Fingergirl of Death!” she disguised herself as mob moll “Silky” Blaine in order to get the goods on Roger “Rajah” Drake, described by the police as “gangland’s top fence.”¹²⁷ In “The Widow in Black!” she traveled to Miami as wealthy widow Mrs. Lois Klobb to track down the “Playboy Poisoner.”¹²⁸ She donned no less than three disguises in a single 1966 story while investigating S.K.U.L. (Superman Killers Underground League): She played a bellhop to get into a suspect’s apartment, became “Mademoiselle Magic” as a stage act to investigate a nightclub, and wore the hood and robes of a S.K.U.L. agent to infiltrate a meeting.¹²⁹

Lane also often aided the police directly. In two stories in just one 1962 issue, she participated in a line-up to help a victim identify a crook and was called to testify against a scam artist.¹³⁰

125. Henry Boltinoff, “Lois Lane’s Wedding Day!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 37, November 1962.

126. Henry Boltinoff, “Lois Lane’s Secret Identity!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 29, November 1961.

127. Otto Binder, “The Fingergirl of Death!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 55, February 1965, 2.

128. Henry Boltinoff, “The Widow in Black!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 32, April 1962.

129. Leo Dorfman, “The Satanic Schemes of S.K.U.L.!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 63, February 1966.

130. “The Candid Camera Kid” and “Lois Lane, Slave Girl!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 33, May 1962.

And if that didn't make the point to readers about Lane's character, they were informed by other characters about Lane's great qualities. In "The Leopard Girl of the Jungle!" Superman called her "good-hearted" for helping her romantic rival, Lana Lang.¹³¹ In the abovementioned parole case, Kent said "The way you went to bat for him, once you were convinced he'd been rehabilitated in prison, is pretty wonderful, too, Lois!"¹³² Superman, who was usually annoyed with her, admitted she's "got plenty of spunk!"¹³³ In "The Irresistible Lois Lane!" Batman called her "ingenious."¹³⁴ On the radio show, Olsen referred to her as "our star reporter,"¹³⁵ and even the bad guy admitted she's "a very clever young woman."¹³⁶

Still, the Weisinger era showcased negative qualities as well. In "Alias Lois Lane!" a cheap hood said of Lois, "everyone knows she's a jealous cat!"¹³⁷ – and he was right. (In one 1963 issue of *Lois Lane* alone, the intrepid reporter had two public scratching, clawing, hair-pulling cat-fights with Lana Lang over Superman's attention.¹³⁸)

Even as early as 1948 she was described as "reckless" and "stubborn."¹³⁹ In 1959's "Lois Lane's Super-Séance!" Superman thought of her as an "impetuous

131. "The Leopard Girl of the Jungle!" *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* 11, August 1959, 8.

132. "Super-Surprise," 2.

133. Siegel, "Believe," 4.

134. Boltinoff, "Irresistible," 8.

135. DC Comics, *Radio*, 51.

136. DC Comics, *Radio*, 58.

137. "Alias," 6.

138. Henry Boltinoff, "The Murder of Lana Lang!" and "Superman's Surprise Choice!" *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* 44, October 1963.

139. "The Super Sideshow," *Action Comics* 122, July 1948, 1.

scatterbrain,”¹⁴⁰ a fairly common observation in the *Lois Lane* title, where Superman usually seems more inclined to irritation than romance with the perpetually scheming Lane. In “The Girl in Superman’s Past,” Lane and Lana Lang conspired to put Superman in a spot where both were in jeopardy and he has to demonstrate favoritism to save them¹⁴¹ – a cheap and dangerous trick the two girls played often in the 1960s. And Lane’s contemptuous treatment of Clark Kent was, in both Golden and Silver ages, appalling. “Lois was too school-girly romantic to see beyond Kent’s blue suit, red tie . . . and spectacles,” chides Steranko.¹⁴²

Plus, in the Weisinger era Lane was prone to chasing celebrity stories, usually by disguising herself – which the SPJ Code would not forgive. It says “avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public.”¹⁴³ Celebrity news is not “vital” by any definition, and in these types of stories we rarely see Lane attempt traditional methods – she goes straight for the peroxide.

For example, in the “Bombshell of the Boulevards,” she disguised herself as blonde French actress Lois LaFlamme to trick the Rutavian ambassador into answering questions. Even Superman was appalled. “I’ll have to teach her a lesson for using such tactics,” he thought (and did).¹⁴⁴ In “Alias Lois Lane!” she disguised herself as “Sadie Blodgett, the Blonde Bombshell from Hairdye, U.S.A.” to find a TV Western star who

140. “Super-Séance,” 2.

141. Jerry Coleman, “The Girl in Superman’s Past,” *Showcase* 9, July-August, 1957.

142. Steranko, *Volume One*, 40.

143. SPJ, “Code .”

144. Leo Dorfman, “The Bombshell of the Boulevards!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 1, March-April 1958, 5.

was honeymooning incognito. Her own words branded her as a paparazzo: “If I can get the first, exclusive pictures of the newlyweds” – who had gone to great lengths to achieve privacy – “I’ve got a scoop!”¹⁴⁵ In “Lois Lane’s Other Life!” she was assigned to interview a movie star who disliked her for the last article she wrote, so she not only dyed her hair, but used false credentials.¹⁴⁶ This would be a firing offense at most newspapers.

Lane also used a number of other underhanded tactics which are hard for modern journalists to justify, and were probably frowned upon in the 1960s as well. In “The Amazing Superman Junior!” she faked sunstroke in order to be taken into an experimental rocket – the only shade around – so she could snoop.¹⁴⁷ In “The Jilting of Superman!” Lane tried to make Superman jealous by accepting a favor from an actor to whom she had given good publicity,¹⁴⁸ a direct violation of the SPJ Code edict to “refuse gifts, favors . . . if they compromise journalistic integrity.”¹⁴⁹ In “Lois Lane’s Darkest Secret!” she misrepresented herself as a customer at a beauty parlor to follow a Hollywood starlet.¹⁵⁰ In “The Madwoman of Metropolis!” she disguised her voice to sound like Kent, answered his phone, and stole a tip from one of his sources.¹⁵¹

In some instances, she clearly broke the law in pursuit of a byline. In “The Snoopiest Girl in History!” Lane used a ladder to climb into a second-story window of a

145. “Alias,” 6.

146. “Lois Lane’s Other Life!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 37, August 1962.

147. Jerry Coleman, “The Amazing Superman Junior!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 6, January 1959.

148. Otto Binder, “The Jilting of Superman!” *Showcase* 10, September-October 1957.

149. SPJ, “Code.”

150. “Lois Lane’s Darkest Secret!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 25, May 1961.

151. Leo Dorfman, “The Madwoman of Metropolis!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 26, July 1961.

private residence. “Nobody’s been able to get a story on Professor Evans’ experiment in sending matter through time . . . but this open window in his laboratory will help me get it!”¹⁵² Even after Superman caught her, admonished her, and ejected her, she broke in a second time – by boxing herself in a crate and mailing herself to the professor’s house.

Another unsettling aspect of Lane’s career from the 1940s to 1970 was her pursuit of Superman’s secret identity. It was in 1942’s “Man or Superman?” that Lane first seriously suspected Kent of being the Man of Steel.¹⁵³ Her suspicions – and her attempts to prove them right – occupied uncountable stories from the early 1940s through the 1960s. It’s odd that she’d want to uncover Superman’s greatest secret, given that she professed to love him. Especially after a 1959 story established that if she did reveal the secret, she would be “The Most Hated Woman in Metropolis!”¹⁵⁴ Perhaps, as suggested by 1952’s “The Girls in Superman’s Life,” she’d keep the secret to herself.¹⁵⁵

There is also a question about Lane’s competence raised by Jimmy Olsen in Lane’s first solo story. “Gosh, Miss Lane,” Olsen said, “you’re an elegant reporter, but you gotta admit you wouldn’t get most of your big scoops if it wasn’t for **Superman**.” Lane responded, “I **do** get **some** stories on my own,” and proceeded to do just that, albeit in slapstick fashion in an adventure played for laughs.¹⁵⁶ The “Lois Lane, Girl Reporter” series continued off and on for the next few years, following this pattern.

152. Edmond Hamilton, “The Snoopiest Girl In History!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 56, April 1965.

153. Jerry Siegel, “Man or Superman?” *Superman* 17, July-August 1942.

154. “The Most Hated Woman in Metropolis!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 9, May 1959.

155. Edmond Hamilton, “The Girls in Superman’s Life!” *Superman* 78, September-October 1952.

156. Don Cameron, “Lois Lane, Girl Reporter,” *Superman* 28, May-June 1944.

In 1960 the issue was addressed again, in “How Lois Lane Got Her Job.” Once again Jimmy Olsen played devil’s advocate: “Lois, it seems you owe your career to **Superman!** All your big scoops are about him!” But Perry White countered “Not so, Jimmy! When Lois first asked me for a job, I told her I would hire her if she brought me three scoops in three days! She did it . . . **without Superman’s** help!”¹⁵⁷ Ironically, Superman was involved in all three scoops, as the readers learned in flashback, but neither he nor Lane were aware of the other. That made for a funny Superman story, but it didn’t do much for Lane’s reputation with the readers.

That story idea apparently proved popular either with readers or editors, because it was repeated five years later in a university setting with “Lois Lane’s College Scoops!” At a reunion at Lane’s alma mater Raleigh College, a classmate mentioned the Superman connection. “Everyone knows **Superman’s** always there to help you get your story,” she charged. Lois responded, “It so happens I’ve gotten **many** scoops on my own!”¹⁵⁸ Lane proceeded to tell of three scoops she got in college, and once again the readers learned in flashback that Superman was involved, with neither he nor Lane aware of his accidental help. Once again it made for a nice story, but didn’t address the problem of Lane’s apparent journalistic dependence on the Last Son of Krypton in the 1960s.

Still, it is evident whatever Lane’s failings, Weisinger and his writers believed they were presenting a positive image. “Lois Lane was redeemed by many positive qualities,” writes Daniels, “including courage, independence, and ambition.”¹⁵⁹

157. Otto Binder, “How Lois Lane Got Her Job,” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 17, May 1960, 2.

158. Leo Dorfman, “Lois Lane’s College Scoops,” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 55, February 1965,

159. Daniels, *Complete*, 19.

Lane's positive attributes became even more pronounced in the 1970s, after Weisinger retired and the *Lois Lane* title (and the subsequent *Superman Family*, of which it became a component) moved to other editors and writers. In this time frame, before the 1986 revamp, Lane's obsession with Superman's identity evaporated, the cattiness and jealousy of the past were cast aside, and her ethics and social awareness improved. "I'm a **journalist**," she avowed in 1972. "Everything I write reaches **millions** of people!" she said in one speech. "I have a responsibility to those people! There's far **too much** injustice all around us to be ignored any longer."¹⁶⁰ In one tone-deaf but memorable issue, she transformed herself into an African-American woman to see what prejudice felt like first-hand.¹⁶¹

Then came the 1986 *Man of Steel*, where Lane was updated to a thoroughly modern and admirable woman, as well as an even more aggressive and competent reporter. "The new Lois was possibly even more assertive than before," writes Daniels, "and so skilled in unarmed combat that Superman sometimes seemed redundant, but she wasn't the pest of bygone days, and Clark was more smitten than ever."¹⁶²

Lane's quest to discover Superman's identity, mostly written out in the 1970s, was completely buried with the revamp. The idea that it was common knowledge that Superman even *had* another identity was discarded in *The Man of Steel*, making the issue moot. "Keeping the secret identity a secret . . . changed the role of Lois Lane," writes Daniels, "who would no longer spend so much time trying to figure out who Superman

160. Cary Bates, "Everything You Wanted To Know About Lois Lane* . . . *But Were Afraid To Ask!" *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* 121, March 1972, 12.

161. Robert Kanigher, "I Am Curious (Black)!" *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* 106, November 1970.

162. Daniels, *Sixty*, 193.

really was.”¹⁶³ While the concept of Superman having a secret identity gradually resurfaced in the books, Lane never pursued the idea again, which was permanently laid to rest with the 1996 marriage of Lane and Kent.¹⁶⁴

With 2009’s *Superman: Secret Origin*, Lane was established as having the highest ethics, the best reporting instincts, and the best writing skills on the *Planet* staff. In the third issue she argued with White over a story he was spiking because of the heat he would get from City Hall. In a scene almost straight out of a journalism textbook, Lane shouted “It’s not wrong if it’s the **truth!**”¹⁶⁵

Later, she revealed that her penchant for disguise had not been written out, although now it clears the SPJ’s ethics bar. To attend a Lex Luthor press conference to which the *Planet* has pointedly not been invited, Lane donned a wig and used Kent as a distraction. “Lex Luthor is unveiling another government-contracted weapon disguised as a technological achievement today,” she explained to Kent as she sneaked in to get the story. “Every reporter there is going to regurgitate whatever he dishes out. Except **me.**”¹⁶⁶ This is the very definition of the Code’s exception to the caveat about going undercover, because – as she alludes – the public would not get vital truth any other way.

As recently as 2010 Lane met – and passed – another difficult ethical challenge. When her father was responsible for a genocide of Kandorians, and only the immediate principals in the story knew it, Superman asked her, “What are you going to write, Lois?”

163. Daniels, *Sixty*, 192.

164. Dan Jurgens, David Michelinie, Karl Kesel, Louise Simonson, and Roger Stern, “The Wedding Album,” *Superman: The Wedding Album*, December 1996.

165. Johns, “Mild-Mannered,” 10-11.

166. Johns, “Mild-Mannered,” 17.

About your father?” She responded: “The **same** thing I always write: the **truth**.”¹⁶⁷

That’s almost a quote from the SPJ’s Code of Ethics, page one, line one: “Seek truth and report it.”¹⁶⁸

The current Lois Lane, then, is the one promised in those early 1940s stories, before the silliness and negative portrayals of the 1950s and ‘60s. She is an ethical and competent newshawk; a devoted, reliable mate to her husband; and an admirable and loyal friend to the Man of Steel.

Jimmy Olsen: Cub Reporter

Jimmy Olsen has been many things in the Superman stories over the years: office boy, cub reporter, photographer, “Mr. Action,” superhero, broadcaster, an honorary member of the Legion of Super-Heroes – not to mention undergoing enough physical transformations to give Dr. Jekyll pause. But through it all, he has always been Superman’s pal.

James Bartholomew Olsen was introduced to America on April 15, 1940, in the twenty-eighth episode of the *Adventures of Superman* radio show. He was initially a copy boy, described as “sixteen, thin, (and) freckle-faced,”¹⁶⁹ was soon promoted to cub reporter, and, according to *The Superman Radio Scripts*, “as intended, the character successfully provided the show with youthful energy.”¹⁷⁰ Daniels describes the copy boy

167. James Robinson and Sterling Gates, “The Battle for Survival,” *Superman: War of the Supermen* 4, July 2010, 23.

168. SPJ, “Code.”

169. Daniels, *Sixty*, 66.

170. DC Comics, *Radio*, 18.

as “ebullient,” and says he was “clearly intended to give young listeners a point of identification.”¹⁷¹

Olsen made the transition to comics in 1941, as simply “Jimmy the copy boy,” who wanted “to become a real reporter – like Clark Kent,”¹⁷² and ended up taking a Lois Lane-like chance by stowing away in a car trunk to get a story. (He got it, and his first byline.) Jimmy’s surname was used for the first time in the comics in a 1942 story,¹⁷³ and he was finally accorded cub reporter status in early 1954,¹⁷⁴ mere months before the debut of his own title, *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen*.

Daniels describes that “improbable title” as the “rare comic book starring a sidekick who wasn’t even a costumed hero,” and attributes its existence to the popularity of actor Jack Larson’s performances as Olsen on the *Adventures of Superman* TV show.¹⁷⁵ But despite Larson, radio’s Jackie Kelk before him, and the myriad Olsen appearances from 1941 to 1954 (usually as a pre-teen), it was the comic book *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* that establishes the character’s most familiar persona.

Once again Mort Weisinger proved important, as it was his hand that launched *Jimmy Olsen* and guided the book for most of its existence. Until Weisinger’s retirement in 1970, *Jimmy Olsen* was a light, upbeat book, and the title character was a bit of a buffoon. This is unsurprising, given the model of Larson’s “exuberant” Olsen on TV,

171. Daniels, *Sixty*, 54.

172. Jerry Siegel, “The Archer,” *Superman* 13, November-December 1941, 2.

173. Jerry Siegel, “The Cop Who Was Ruined,” *Superman* 15, March-April 1942, 10.

174. Bill Woolfolk, “Jimmy Olsen . . . Editor,” *Superman* 86, January 1954.

175. Daniels, *Sixty*, 118.

whom Daniels describes as providing “a certain amount of comedy relief.”¹⁷⁶ The Superman Homepage provides an in-story reason: “Jimmy seems to be a very competent reporter, however his ambition, pride, and foolhardiness frequently sabotaged his best efforts.”¹⁷⁷

Olsen’s series began in a light-hearted vein. *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 1 “introduced Jimmy as a master of disguise, ‘The Boy of 100 Faces,’ but however much ingenuity the lad supplied, he usually ended up in a mess that only Superman could straighten out,” Daniels explains.¹⁷⁸ These messes included a penchant for bizarre transformations; Olsen found himself turned into a werewolf twice, a porcupine boy, a stretchable superhero (Elastic Lad), a future boy with a gigantic head, and even a giant, turtle-like monster, among other oddities of the Silver Age.

One adjective Daniels uses to describe the 1954-70 Olsen is “eager.”¹⁷⁹ Religion writer Tom Galloway calls him “impetuous, naïve, (and) blundering,”¹⁸⁰ Denny O’Neil, who wrote *Superman* in the early 1970s, refers to Olsen in an essay as “perennially eager, perennially boyish, and not overly bright.”¹⁸¹ Other attributes ascribed to Jimmy include “observant” (by Kent, when Olsen notices circus roustabouts look more

176. Daniels, *Complete*, 94.

177. Steven Younis, “Who’s Who in Superman: Jimmy Olsen,” Superman Homepage, <http://www.supermanhomepage.com/comics/who/who-intro.php?topic=olsen-jimmy> (accessed July 4, 2010).

178. Daniels, *Complete*, 99-100.

179. Daniels, *Sixty*, 109.

180. Galloway, *Gospel*, 53.

181. Dennis O’Neil, “The Man of Steel and Me,” *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* (Cleveland: Octavia Press, 1987), 51.

like crooks¹⁸²), “irrepressible” (by the narrator, in a story in which Olsen woos society girl Betty Roxmore, and fights gangsters on her behalf¹⁸³), “conceited” (by Lane, when a magic mirror shows his true self with a huge head¹⁸⁴), and “impulsive (and) happy-go-lucky” (by the narrator, when Olsen clumsily activates a machine that gives him temporary super-powers¹⁸⁵).

The stories published in *Jimmy Olsen* until 1970 indicated that he was all of these things. He was also extremely good natured. Even though White was constantly criticizing Olsen for one failing or another, the cub reporter thought in the fifth issue, “Gee I’ve got a swell boss!”¹⁸⁶ This theme was repeated in a later issue when White admonished Olsen for calling him “Chief.” “Jeepers! He always bawls me out for that!” thought Olsen. “Oh, well, he’s still the best boss I’ve ever had!”¹⁸⁷

And Olsen was loyal to that boss. In “Perry White, Cub Reporter!” Olsen used an “editor for a day” gimmick to work White hard physically through a long, grueling, 12-hour day – even though the following day White would be in charge again, and probably fire him. But Olsen did it to help White lose enough weight to pass his life insurance medical exam, at the request of Mrs. White. Even though it could have cost him his job, and even though he would get no credit, Olsen tried to help his boss.¹⁸⁸

182. Jerry Siegel, “The Man of Steel vs. the Man of Metal,” *World’s Finest Comics* 6, Summer 1942, 4.

183. Don Cameron, “Valentine Villainy,” *Action Comics* 71, April 1944, 1.

184. Siegel, “Truth Mirror,” 6.

185. Leo Dorfman, “When Jimmy Olsen Stole Krypto From Superman,” *Superman* 177, May 1965, 1.

186. Otto Binder, “The Boy Olympics,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 5, May-June 1955, 8.

187. Otto Binder, “The Super-Brain of Jimmy Olsen,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 22, August 1957, 3.

188. Robert Bernstein, “Perry White, Cub Reporter!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 42, January 1960.

Jimmy was demonstrably well-liked by his colleagues in the 1950s and '60s. In the first story of the first issue, Lane was maternal toward him: "Be careful, Jimmy! Crooks play for keeps!"¹⁸⁹ At the end of that story, White said "I'm proud of you, my boy!"¹⁹⁰ But it was White's actions that counted more than his words, especially since he often criticized Olsen for spelling or content errors ("Jimmy Olsen, Prince of Clowns"¹⁹¹ and others), but still kept re-hiring Olsen when the cub reporter serially resigned during one madcap adventure or get-rich-quick scheme after another ("Jimmy Olsen, Crooner"¹⁹² and others).

Kent was especially fond of Olsen. "A good kid, but reckless at times!" he thought of Olsen in "Boy of 100 Faces,"¹⁹³ and called him a "brave fellow" in the sixth issue, when Olsen pretended to be "Baby-Face Barton" and infiltrated a gang to protect Superman from a potential plot.¹⁹⁴ Two years later Kent thought "Jimmy has a good word for everyone! He's got a heart of gold!"¹⁹⁵

As the title of his book indicates, Olsen was Superman's best friend, although he was unaware of the Kryptonian's dual identity. Superman went so far as to give Olsen an ultrasonic signal watch that only the Man of Tomorrow could hear, to summon help should Olsen be in trouble. The watch debuted without explanation in Olsen's first

189. Otto Binder, "The Boy of 100 Faces," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 1, September-October 1954, 2.

190. Binder, "100 Faces," 8.

191. Otto Binder, "Jimmy Olsen, Prince of Clowns," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 12, April 1956.

192. Otto Binder, "Jimmy Olsen, Crooner," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 8, October 1955.

193. Binder, "100 Faces," 2.

194. Otto Binder, "100 Pieces of Kryptonite," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 6, July-August 1955, 3.

195. Binder, "Super-Brain," 2.

issue,¹⁹⁶ but its origin was retroactively given five years later in “How Jimmy Olsen First Met Superman!”¹⁹⁷ a story in which a time- and space-traveling Olsen arrived on Krypton when Superman was a child, and babysat him. Superman’s Super-memory retained that information, so he knew Olsen was of good character, and that they would be friends. As to why Lois Lane does not have a similar timepiece, Superman gave her one in “Lois Lane’s Signal Watch,” but tricked her into returning it when she used it to summon him for jammed zippers and broken heels.¹⁹⁸

Superman also thought enough of Olsen that when he took trips into the bottle city of Kandor, where the Last Son of Krypton has no super-powers, he took the cub reporter with him, and the duo became the Batman and Robin analogs “Nightwing and Flamebird.”¹⁹⁹ Superman and Olsen also teamed up with the real Dynamic Duo on occasion (especially in *World’s Finest Comics*), and Batman rewarded Olsen’s courage and loyalty by revealing his secret identity as Bruce Wayne.²⁰⁰ And when Olsen accidentally achieved temporary stretching powers, the Legion of Super-Heroes – a teenage super-team from one thousand years in the future – inducted him as the honorary member Elastic Lad.²⁰¹

196. Binder, “100 Faces,” 6.

197. Otto Binder, “How Jimmy Olsen First Met Superman!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 36, April 1959, 8.

198. “Lois Lane’s Signal Watch,” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 16, April 1960.

199. Edmond Hamilton, “Superman in Kandor!” *Superman* 158, January 1963.

200. Edmond Hamilton, “The 1,000 Tricks of Clayface and Brainiac!” *World’s Finest Comics* 144, September 1954, 5.

201. Jerry Siegel, “The World of Doomed Olsens!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 72, October 1963.

So, while not always the most mature or efficient reporter, Olsen was well-liked. And he was generally successful; his escapades usually ended with Olsen (and Superman) catching crooks. Two separate gangs were captured in two stories in *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen 2*, which set the pattern for the bulk of the title's run.

And he was ingenious, using various disguises to trap crooks or do good deeds. In his first issue alone, he dressed as an ice-cream vendor to investigate the "Vickers jewel robbery,"²⁰² as lumberjack "Jimmy Wayne" to expose an insurance fraud,²⁰³ and as Superman to fulfill a promise the Man of Steel made to some "skid row" men to help them stay employed.²⁰⁴ Saltzman calls it "masquerading" when reporters "pose as someone else,"²⁰⁵ and it is legitimate under the SPJ Code if it is necessary.

Olsen's penchant for disguise came into play dozens of times in the 1950s and '60s, usually within ethical boundaries. For example, in "King of Magic," Superman masqueraded as a stage magician and Olsen pretended to be both a bellhop and a magician's assistant in order for the duo to expose a swindler.²⁰⁶ In "The Betrayal of Superman," Olsen debuted "Sir James Cedric," an English detective, to help an injured private investigator complete his assignment.²⁰⁷ In "Jimmy Olsen's Forgotten Adventure," he took a job as Dick Hunter, elevator boy, to investigate an "unknown

202. Binder, "100 Faces," 1-3.

203. Otto Binder, "Case of the Lumberjack Jinx," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen 1*, September-October 1954, 2.

204. Otto Binder, "The Man of Steel's Substitute," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen 1*, September-October 1954, 3.

205. Joe Saltzman, "Deception and Undercover Journalism: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Mr. Deeds*," *Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies* (Lanham, MD: 2008), 59.

206. Otto Binder, "King of Magic," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen 6*, July-August 1955.

207. Otto Binder, "The Betrayal of Superman," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen 8*, October 1955.

crime racket in the Briggs Building!”²⁰⁸ In “Jimmy Olsen, Prince of Clowns,” the cub reporter’s harlequin get-up reunited an estranged father-son clown team.²⁰⁹ In “Phantom Fingers Olsen!” Jimmy pretended to be the world’s greatest thief to infiltrate and capture a gang of shoplifters.²¹⁰ In “Jimmy Olsen, Juvenile Delinquent,” he went undercover with the “Kings,” a high school gang, in order to expose them and break them up – even though Perry White’s son was a member.²¹¹ Most of these masquerades involved considerable danger, but served the public good and generally ended successfully.

Perhaps the strangest disguise appeared in “Miss Jimmy Olsen!” wherein Jimmy dressed up as “Julie Ogden” to join the chorus line of Big Monte McGraw’s latest musical comedy, *Metropolis Follies*. McGraw was a crook as well as a producer, and Olsen was there to find out where he has hidden some stolen jewels. But the Ogden disguise, in addition to being somewhat hard to believe, took a turn into the bizarre when Big Monte took a shine to the new “girl.” This made an enemy of McGraw’s old girlfriend, Maisie, with whom “Julie” was rooming. Plus it was something of a problem when Big Monte took “Julie” out on a date, and expected a goodnight kiss – which “she” evaded by substituting Maisie’s pet chimp in the dark as McGraw’s object of desire. (Evidently Big Monte not only had trouble distinguishing girls from boys, but also girls

208. Otto Binder, “Jimmy Olsen’s Forgotten Adventure,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 10, February 1956, 1.

209. Binder, “Prince of Clowns,” 8.

210. “Phantom Fingers Olsen!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 43, March 1960.

211. Robert Bernstein, “Jimmy Olsen, Juvenile Delinquent,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 40, October 1959.

from simians.) For the record, “Julie” and Superman found the jewels, presumably before Big Monte demanded more romantic interludes.²¹²

However, Saltzman points out that going undercover always involves deception, and “deceptive behavior is in direct conflict with the journalist’s obligation to be accurate and fair, to try to tell the truth as the facts dictate.”²¹³ And the SPJ Code of Ethics also warns against it, unless there is no other way. The above examples, by and large, meet that standard. But often in his book, Olsen used disguises for dubious purposes or in ways that were simply unethical.

One of them happens to be another occasion where Olsen cross-dressed. In “Leslie Lowe, Girl Reporter!” Olsen quit his job at the *Planet*, and to make White appreciate him more, applied for his old job as a female reporter – whom he planned to make incompetent. But “Leslie Lowe” was a big hit in the newsroom, even getting chocolates on his desk from the boss. Eventually Olsen exploded and revealed the deception, only to receive a horse laugh – everyone knew it was him from the start, because he had forgotten to take off his identifying signal watch. White, Lane, and the rest of the staff had played along to teach him a lesson, including Superman, who used his super-powers surreptitiously to make Lowe a success.²¹⁴ Disguising yourself as the opposite sex to fool your boss is, unsurprisingly, not spelled out specifically as a violation in the SPJ Code of Ethics. But it surely violates behavior parameters for any kind of employment.

212. Robert Bernstein, “Miss Jimmy Olsen!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 44, April 1960.

213. Saltzman, “Deception,” 59.

214. Leo Dorfman, “Leslie Lowe, Girl Reporter,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 67, March 1963.

Olsen dressed as a girl at least twice more. Once for good reason: He was on the lam from gangsters and used the *Some Like It Hot* solution.²¹⁵ Another time he dressed as “Jackie Oliver” and joined his own fan club, and awarded the member who guessed his trick the club presidency.²¹⁶ Given that *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* was aimed at younger readers, one shouldn’t read too much into these events, except to marvel that this odd idea was repeated three times.

“Leslie Lowe” was not the only time in the Silver Age when Olsen lied to his boss – or passed himself as his own successor. In “The Boy Who Hoaxed Superman,” Olsen pretended to be put in suspended animation for one thousand years, using a dummy in an ice block. He then applied for his old job as Gilbert Knox, a boy with “photographic memory” of all of Jimmy Olsen’s stories. As with Leslie Lowe, Superman secretly arranged for Knox to be a huge success. Frustrated, Olsen “escaped” the “suspended animation” and got his old job back when Gilbert “quit,” but had to listen to White brag about how sensational the new kid was.²¹⁷

On one occasion, Olsen’s lie to his boss was a tremendous violation of journalism ethics, which ended up being the point of the story. In “The Boy from Mars,” Olsen noticed that some of the biggest one-day sales of the *Planet* showcased sensational stories that later turned out to be untrue. “They all proved to be hoaxes,” White said in dismissal. “False rumors, that’s all.” But Olsen thought “still, they sold papers before they were exposed! The trusting public will swallow any wild story, it seems! Oh, boy . . . that gives

215. Leo Dorfman, “The Day They Unmasked Mr. Action!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 159, August 1973.

216. Otto Binder, “Jimmy Olsen’s Female Fan!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 84, April 1965.

217. Otto Binder, “The Boy Who Hoaxed Superman,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 31, September 1958.

me an idea!”²¹⁸ Olsen disguised himself as a “boy from Mars” and tricked White into thinking the editor was getting an exclusive interview with an alien being. The next day’s *Planet* was a sell-out. “How gullible people are!” gloated Olsen. “When you can’t find real news, manufacture a hoax! Ha, ha!”²¹⁹ But Superman got to the bottom of it, and taught Olsen a lesson by having him arrested for the disappearance and possible murder of . . . Jimmy Olsen. Olsen gave up the charade and took a tongue-lashing from both Superman and his editor. “Pulling a hoax to increase circulation was wrong!” the ashamed Olsen admitted. “I learned my lesson! Perry will print my apology and give the profits to charity!”²²⁰

Olsen occasionally committed other ethical and legal violations in the Weisinger era, not all of which were the moral of the story, suggesting the writers and editors themselves were unaware such behavior was not admirable, or simply didn’t care in their urgency to advance the story. In “The Amazing Spectacles of Doctor X,” Olsen broke into Doctor X’s hideout by climbing over the transom. That’s breaking and entering whether you’re a reporter or not, which wasn’t addressed in the story. In “The Super-Lad of Space!” Olsen climbed into the cockpit of a government spaceship without permission to take pictures, which was probably treason on top of burglary.²²¹

And from 1954 to 1970 Olsen was apparently no whiz when it came to the basic tools of journalism, outside of the detective angle. “**Great Caesar’s ghost!**” fumed White in “Jimmy Olsen, Prince of Clowns.” “You misspelled a dozen names in your last story,

218. Otto Binder, “The Boy from Mars,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 27, March 1958, 2.

219. Binder, “Mars,” 4.

220. Binder, “Mars,” 8.

221. Otto Binder, “The Super-Lad of Space!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 39, September 1959.

Jimmy! As a reporter, you're a **first-rate clown!**"²²² And in "The Hunted Messenger," White growled "Jimmy! You know how I despise inaccuracy in our news! There's no excuse for carelessly misspelling names!"²²³ The criticism continued in *Jimmy Olsen* 34: "I can't print this story, Jimmy! It's terrible! The writing is flat and dead! And it doesn't cover the main points of interest!"²²⁴ In "The Mystery of the Canine Champ" Olsen spelled "bank robber" in a headline as "rank bobber," so White demoted him to "Pet Editor" as a punishment – which, to his credit, Olsen turned into a Page One story.²²⁵

Journalism ethics informed another story, which also accrues to Olsen's credit. In "The Underworld Journal," Olsen supposedly inherited a rival newspaper, the *Clarion*, a story which was actually a hoax designed to catch yet another gang of outlaws. As part of the hoax, Olsen ran the *Clarion* in a way that Lane (who wasn't in on the trick) described as running a newspaper "without any honest principles!" This was demonstrated by Olsen currying favor with shady elements, and twisting the news to make Superman look bad. When Lane admonished Olsen about not telling the truth, he said, "Who cares? It's better for circulation! But I tell the truth – though I admit it's not the whole truth! I'm running a newspaper, not a nursery school!"²²⁶ Olsen's deliberate misbehavior and Lane's response indicate both were steeped in proper journalism ethics, and suggested they normally subscribed to them.

222. Binder, "Prince of Clowns," 8.

223. Otto Binder, "The Hunted Messenger," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 4, March-April 1955, 8.

224. Alvin Schwartz, "The Underworld Journal," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 34, January 1959, 1.

225. Otto Binder, "The Mystery of the Canine Champ," *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 15, September 1956.

226. Schwartz, "Journal," 5.

Another example of Olsen exhibiting ethics came in “The Disappearance of Superman,” when criminals trapped the Man of Steel in kryptonite, and Olsen saved him. But the cub reporter decided not to reveal the truth, despite White taunting him about not getting the story. Olsen had evidently learned the “Minimize Harm”²²⁷ section of the SPJ’s Code of Ethics. In this case, Olsen said “I think it’s wiser to let the crooks think you escaped from the trap yourself! That may discourage them from using kryptonite against you in the future!” Superman replied, “You’re a real pal, Jimmy, sacrificing not only a big story but personal glory!” He was also acting like a responsible journalist.

These hints of something better in Olsen came to fruition after 1970. Somewhere in the twenty-year run of *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen*, the “cub” designation quietly went away. And after Weisinger’s retirement, Olsen abruptly grew up to around age twenty-one, and became a more serious and competent character. This occurred when his book was taken over by legendary writer/artist Jack Kirby, who teamed Olsen with clones of the 1940s kid group “The Newsboy Legion” and sent them on a fifteen-issue, multi-dimensional adventure into a sub-group of DC comics called “The Fourth World.”²²⁸ During that time Olsen displayed leadership, competency, and independence, and never once needed Superman’s help, disguised himself, or changed into anything odd.

In 1973 Kirby left the book, but Olsen remained a more serious character. He took the name “Mr. Action” – described as “the newshawk who will take any risk, dare any danger to get the story behind the story”²²⁹ – and answered to Galaxy

227. SPJ, “Code.”

228. Jack Kirby, “The Newsboy Legion!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 133, October 1970.

229. Leo Dorfman, “A Coffin for Mr. Action,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 155, January 1973, 1.

Communications CEO Morgan Edge. Jimmy “Mr. Action” Olsen still got bylines in the *Daily Planet*, but seemed to work for WBGs-TV as much as the newspaper (both of which were owned at this time by Galaxy). In this series of stories, Superman’s participation was minimized, while Olsen was depicted as a “bare-knuckled reporter.”²³⁰ In 1974 *Supergirl, Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane*, and *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* were combined into an anthology title *Superman Family*, and “Mr. Action” continued until that book’s cancellation in 1982.

During the “Mr. Action” run, *Superman: The Movie* (1978) added “photographer” to Olsen’s list of *Daily Planet* jobs, which has become part of his comic-book résumé as well. The 1986 reboot of the Superman titles did for Olsen what it did for Lane, in that it dispensed with the sillier aspects of the Weisinger era, such as the goofy disguises, the weird transformations, and the buffoonery. In his current incarnation, Olsen is once again a teenager, once again a cub reporter/photographer, and once again in the process of becoming Superman’s pal – including earning the signal watch a second time. But this time he’s “a real reporter – like Clark Kent,” just as he said he wanted to be, back in his first appearance.²³¹

Perry White: Hard-Boiled Editor

Despite being the third major ongoing character to appear in Superman stories, the vast majority of Perry White’s appearances are walk-ons where he hands out an assignment, says something gruff, and disappears for the rest of the story. Sometimes

230. Leo Dorfman, “The Jaws of the Jaguar,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 158, June 1973, 1.

231. Siegel, “Archer,” 2.

those assignments bordered on the nonsensical, obviously designed simply to get the story rolling as quickly as possible. As Fleisher’s encyclopedia says, “in spite of the fact that Perry White appears in the chronicles more often than any other character besides Superman and Lois Lane, the overwhelming majority of his appearances are inconsequential.”²³² We know he’s a respected, hard-bitten newspaperman with a heart of gold, but beyond that, information about *Daily Planet* Managing Editor Perry White is sparse, contradictory, or must be inferred.

Perry White first appeared when Clark Kent applied for a *Daily Planet* job in the second episode of the *Adventures of Superman* radio show in 1940. In the comics, Kent’s editor was George Taylor, first named in 1939.²³³ “Mr. White” first appeared in the comics later that year (*Superman* 7, November-December 1940) and his first name was referenced for the first time in 1941.²³⁴ And “because Perry White was created for the (radio) show, Julian Noa, the actor who portrayed him, was able to develop the character independent of a pre-existing comic book history,” asserts *The Superman Radio Scripts*. “It was Noa’s portrayal of the hot-headed White that became the character’s standard for his personality in comic books.”²³⁵

The radio White is described as “gruff” and “plainspoken.”²³⁶ But he was also something of a paper tiger, and Lane had his number in the 1945 radio epic “Superman vs. the Atom Man.” When White (briefly) fired Kent, Lane told Olsen, “by this time, Jim,

232. Fleisher, *Superman*, 493.

233. Jerry Siegel, “Superman Champions Universal Peace,” *Superman* 2, Fall 1939, 22.

234. Jerry Siegel, “The Talent Agency Fraud,” *Superman* 10, May-June 1941, 2.

235. DC Comics, *Radio*, 96.

236. DC Comics, *Radio*, 96.

you should know better than to take the little Napoleon at his word. Both Clark and I have been fired at least 15 times in the last year.” And later: “The minute Perry’s blood pressure goes down his good humor goes up.”²³⁷

This picture doesn’t quite match the Perry White of the 1950s *Adventures of Superman* television show. Actor John Hamilton’s White is described by Daniels as “irascible” and as “comedy relief.”²³⁸ Galloway says “White can be counted on to be gruff, dogmatic, and at least half a pace out of step with whatever happens to be going on around him.”²³⁹

However, neither of these depictions were consistent with the comic-book White, who has always been taken seriously as a tough and competent editor. The depiction of White’s temperament has been remarkably consistent through 70 years of stories, even through the 1986 revamp. “My characterization of Perry was a cross between Fred Friendly (of CBS) and Julie Schwartz. With a cigar,” says Maggin, who wrote dozens of stories for *Action* and *Superman*. But he considered White a serious newsman, who “always looked at things through narrow eyes. I tried to portray him that way.”

But while White’s personality has been more or less the same, the comics have been contradictory about his past. “The Three Tough Teen-Agers!” (*Superman* 151, February 1962) depicted White as a boy in Metropolis’ poorest area, later amended to the “Suicide Slum” of DC’s Newsboy Legion stories of the 1940s. But “Luthor – Superhero!” and “Lex Luthor, Daily Planet Editor!” (*Superman* 168, April 1964) showed

237. DC Comics, *Radio*, 51-52.

238. Daniels, *Complete*, 94.

239. Galloway, *Gospel*, 53.

him growing up with his grandfather, steamboat captain Josiah White, in San Francisco. “Superman Meets Al Capone!” (*Superman* 142, January 1961) gave readers a Perry White who was a shoeshine boy in 1920s Chicago. The only thing the three have in common is a harsh childhood.

Very little has been revealed about the adult White outside the office. “It’s hard to think of hard-boiled Perry having a home life, but I guess he does!”²⁴⁰ thought Superman in 1951’s “The Private Life of Perry White!” This story provided a doting white-haired wife, and a son named Will who was following in his father’s footsteps as a journalist. Perry Jr. was added in 1956²⁴¹ and son Hank in 1959.²⁴² Twenty-five years after her introduction, Mrs. White was finally given the first name Alice.²⁴³ After the 1986 revamp, White remained married to Alice but had only one son, Jerry, who died heroically in the three-part “Soul Search.”²⁴⁴

One aspect of Perry White that has been consistent since his inception is his loathing for Lex Luthor. In the 1941 story “The Light,” Superman revealed the master villain calling himself “The Light” to be the bald mad scientist. “So Luthor was at the bottom of this mess!” exclaimed White. “I might have suspected it!”²⁴⁵ For the next few decades, while Luthor was in his super-villain incarnation, the *Daily Planet* was an

240. Edmond Hamilton, “The Private Life of Perry White!” *Superman* 72, September-October 1951.

241. Alvin Schwartz, “Perry White, Jr., Demon Reporter,” *Superman* 108, September 1956.

242. Bernstein, “Delinquent.”

243. E. Nelson Bridwell, “Perry White’s Family,” *Superman Family* 175, February-March 1976.

244. Roger Stern, “Soul Search, Part One of Three: Going to Blaze’s,” *Action Comics* 656, August 1990; Jerry Ordway, “Soul Search, Part Two of Three: Lives in the Balance,” *Superman* (second series) 47, September 1990; and Dan Jurgens, “Soul Search, Part Three of Three: White Hot Death!” *Adventures of Superman* 470, September 1990.

245. Jerry Siegel, “The Light,” *Superman* 13, Nov-Dec 41, 8.

implacable foe in dozens of stories, as it was of all law-breakers – but especially Luthor, the arch-enemy of their patron Superman. Early in the 1986 revamp readers learned the enmity would continue when Luthor sarcastically suggested to Lane that his “old friend” White should have come to a party. “Oh, come on, Lex,” Lane responded. “Perry doesn’t much care for the idea of living in the same **solar system** with you. You know that. . . . He’d **never** come to one of your parties. Not even in his official capacity as **managing editor** of the *Daily Planet*.”²⁴⁶ In the four-issue, 1988 *World of Metropolis* miniseries we learned White’s distaste was for good reason. That story established that White and Luthor were estranged childhood friends, and that Luthor once bought the *Planet* and tried to turn it into a TV station. Worse, Luthor had seduced White’s fiancée Alice Spencer while White was believed dead, and was the biological father of White’s dead son Jerry.²⁴⁷ In the recent *Superman: Secret Origin*, it was established that before Superman arrived on the scene, Luthor had nearly driven the *Planet* into bankruptcy and forced White to, as Lane put it, “keep backing down on everything”²⁴⁸ – until Superman’s arrival changed the balance of power.

But in all versions the *Planet*’s managing editor has a big heart, which is especially pronounced when it comes to underprivileged kids. In 1942’s “The World’s Meanest Man,” White sent Kent and Lane into the country with a passel of slum kids so the children could enjoy grass and fresh air. Then he called the pair into his office and said, “I’ve a plan in mind – through a campaign in the *Planet*, I’d like to raise an amount sufficient to build a resort for underprivileged youngsters out in the country! Children of

246. Byrne, “Enemy,” 9.

247. John Byrne, “A Reporter’s Story,” *World of Metropolis* 1, August 1988.

248. Johns, “Mild-Mannered,” 11.

the poor could spend their vacations there without charge. What do you think of my plan?” Lois responded: “White, I never realized what a big heart you have!” And Kent laughed, “for a hard-boiled editor, you’ve sure got a sentimental streak!” Embarrassed, White growled “Cut out the palaver and get busy, you two! Pound out some articles announcing the *Planet’s* plan!”²⁴⁹

Another story, “The King of Marbles,” further demonstrated White’s soft spot for inner-city kids. When a major marble company wanted the Planet to help sponsor a marbles tournament, White agreed, saying “any healthy competitive event like this for youngsters is important sports news! We’ll play it up just like major league baseball!”²⁵⁰

A 1952 story referred to the *Planet* “donating ‘a good percentage’ of its profits to charity,”²⁵¹ and an early *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* depicted efforts to raise money for a new orphanage.²⁵² A 1945 tale established the Planet’s Metropolis Aid Fund,²⁵³ which may or may not be the same thing as the later Daily Planet Charity Fund²⁵⁴ or the Daily Planet Fresh Air Fund,²⁵⁵ all of which have been demonstrated to be standing efforts to raise money for charity, especially for poor or underprivileged children. In “Lois Lane’s X-Ray Vision!” White helped out the Help the Blind Charity Drive by

249. Jerry Siegel, “The World’s Meanest Man,” *Superman* 16, May-June 1942, 5.

250. Otto Binder, “The King of Marbles,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 7, September 1955, 1.

251. Fleisher, *Superman*, 50.

252. Otto Binder, “The Million Dollar Mistake!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 39, September 1959, 1.

253. Alvin Schwartz, “The Genie of the Lamp!” *Superman* 35, July-August 1945.

254. Fleisher, *Superman*, 50.

255. “Superman’s Mystery Song!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 9, May 1959, 5.

ordering Lane to serve as a model for their campaign.²⁵⁶ As noted in “The Man Who Swindled Superman!” (1951),²⁵⁷ the *Planet* donates a percentage of its profits to charity. It is always Managing Editor Perry White who introduces these charitable efforts in the stories, most of which involve underprivileged children, and he is generally depicted as their champion.

In another story, “The Truth Mirror!” a magic reflection revealed White’s true character. “Perry White acts like a hard-boiled editor,” thought Lane, “but the mirror is symbolically revealing that he has a ‘heart of gold.’”²⁵⁸ In “The Boy Olympics,” White secretly helped Cal Dawson, who owned a competing newspaper, the *City Sentinel*, stay in business. “Healthy competition is the lifeblood of America – and brotherhood its heart! I’m **glad** to see you remain in business, Cal!”²⁵⁹

Another quality White demonstrates is loyalty. As note, when Lane pretended to take bribes to catch a criminal in “Lois Lane – Convict!” White refused to believe it was true. “Don’t worry, Lois – the paper’s standing behind you!” he thundered. “We know you never did this thing you’re accused of! We’ll get you the best lawyer in Metropolis!”²⁶⁰ Later, when he was forced to run a Page One story with the headline “Lois Lane confesses guilt,” he broke down at his desk. “**Superman**, that was the hardest story I’ve ever had to print!”²⁶¹ In an earlier story, when the criminal Mister Sinister

256. Otto Binder, “Lois Lane’s X-Ray Vision!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 22, November 1961.

257. “The Man Who Swindled Superman!” *World’s Finest Comics* 52, June-July 1951.

258. Siegel, “Truth Mirror,” 6.

259. Binder, “Olympics,” 8.

260. Finger, “Lane – Convict,” 4.

261. Finger, “Lane – Convict,” 6.

kidnapped Lane, another reporter, and a photographer, and threatened to kill them if the *Planet* didn't spike a story, White was in a quandary. "Duty to his paper is Perry White's first and last concern," intoned the narrator, "and yet his best friends are the men and women who work for him." White was beside himself. "If one iota of harm comes to any of them, I'll tear this town apart!"²⁶²

In "The Private Life of Perry White!" he revealed to his wife how he really felt about his two top reporters, which – it was implied – he'd never say to their faces. "Lois is sure a fine reporter! . . . And so is Clark Kent – but he's timid and I bark at him to make him realize his full abilities! . . . He and Lois Lane are tops!"²⁶³

In all of his various back stories, White has consistently wanted to be a newsman. "Why, you're Cyrus Martin, publisher of the *Chicago Journal!*" shoeshine boy Perry White said to a customer in "Superman Meets Al Capone!" "Please, sir . . . I want to become a cub reporter! Give me a chance on your newspaper!"²⁶⁴

And it is clear from the stories that he has succeeded. In his youth, his crime reporting won him the Pulitzer Prize.²⁶⁵ Even criminals recognize his ability. "Only 10 years ago you were the country's top reporter!" exclaimed underworld kingpin Dirk Denver to an amnesiac White. Then, to his gang he explained: "Look at White's record! He was the greatest newshound of his day! He broke the Smuggling Syndicate case and the Counterfeiter's Club! . . . He still has the instincts of a crack reporter!"²⁶⁶ And White

262. Jerry Siegel, "Case of the Runaway Skyscrapers," *Superman* 16, May-June 1942, 7.

263. Hamilton, "Private Life," 5-6.

264. Otto Binder, "Superman Meets Al Capone!" *Superman* 142, January 1961, 3.

265. Hamilton, "Private Life," 12.

266. Leo Dorfman, "The Man Who Betrayed Superman's Identity!" *Action Comics* 297, February 1963, 4-5.

proved it, by ferreting out Superman's secret identity even while suffering from amnesia (until his memory was restored, and he forgot it).

When circumstances put the middle-aged White back on a reporter's beat in *Jimmy Olsen* 42, he never gave up despite 12 hours of grueling effort. "A real newspaperman never quits a job," he said. And, "newspapermen will endure **anything** to get a story!"²⁶⁷ Even the legendary detective Batman respects White's investigative skill: "Perry White is too good a reporter not to have uncovered Clark's secret," Bruce Wayne thought in 2003. "And yet, he acts otherwise."²⁶⁸

Reporting aside, it is as managing editor of the *Daily Planet* that White is best known, and in his fictional world he is considered "the best editor in the business."²⁶⁹ He is so respected that he was appointed by the governor of his unnamed state to fill a temporary Senate seat in 1966.²⁷⁰

White is frequently praised in the stories. "You've seen Perry White as the two-fisted, crusading editor of the *Daily Planet*, handing out tough assignments to Lois Lane and Clark Kent!" said the narrator in *Superman* 72.²⁷¹ The next issue emphasized the same point when the narrator began the story with, "You've seen the team of Perry White, dynamic editor, and Clark Kent, ace reporter, in action! Working together, their

267. Robert Bernstein, "Perry White, Cub Reporter!" *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* 42, January 1960, 4.

268. Loeb, "Hush," 13.

269. Finger, "White vs. Kent," 6.

270. Leo Dorfman, "Lois Lane's Anti-Superman Campaign!" *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* 62, January 1966.

271. Hamilton, "Private Life," 1-2.

brand of slam-bang, no-holds-barred journalism has made the *Daily Planet* the biggest newspaper in Metropolis!”²⁷²

He is both tough and principled. In Fleisher’s words, he is “an implacable foe of censorship and defender of press freedom”²⁷³ right from his start in the 1940s. When the aforementioned Mister Sinister threatened reprisals if a certain editorial ran, White said “Mister Sinister doesn’t frighten me! Rush (the editorial) down to the presses! . . . I’ll show that supernatural hoodlum he can’t dictate the policy of my paper!”²⁷⁴ And when Rolf Zimba, who represented the protection racket called the “Gold Badge Organization,” demanded that White allow the group to censor the newspaper, White punched him in the jaw and threw him out of his office.²⁷⁵

That characterization continued in the Silver Age. “Everybody knows that Perry White is the toughest editor in the newspaper game,” said the narrator in 1963’s “The Man Who Betrayed Superman’s Identity!”²⁷⁶ And in a 1951 story, when a group of criminals warned White to back off, he said “Threaten **me**, will they? Those vandal-racketeers don’t know much about editors!”²⁷⁷ Then, after Superman volunteered to bodyguard him, he said “I’m not afraid of rats like that! But all right, if you keep out of my way!”²⁷⁸ In “The Amazing Confession of Super-Perry White!” he said of a Planet

272. Finger, “White vs. Kent,” 1.

273. Fleisher, *Superman*, 491.

274. Siegel, “Skyscrapers,” 4.

275. Jerry Siegel, “Zimba’s Gold Badge Terrorists,” *Superman* 11, July-August 1941, 3.

276. Dorfman, “Betrayed,” 1.

277. Hamilton, “Private Life,” 2.

278. Hamilton, “Private Life,” 3.

exposé he was writing, “the unknown swindlers behind those fraudulent stocks warned me to stop the series, but I just laughed at their threats!”²⁷⁹

He is considered equally hard-nosed, but fair, with his employees. “The entire staff of the *Daily Planet* knows that Perry White is a good editor – but often a tough one,” said one story.²⁸⁰ In another, Lane commented “White . . . eats reporters for breakfast!”²⁸¹ “Can’t you lame-brains write about anything but beauty contests and dog shows?” White railed at his staff in a 1963 story. “We haven’t had a scoop in weeks! . . . In my day, a reporter **made** news! Now let’s get on the ball! I want scoops! Scoops! Scoops! Understand?”²⁸² He put his muscle where his mouth is, by taking a two-week vacation to go find a scoop himself.

He has been seen frequently guiding, correcting, and sometimes punishing Olsen for content errors, misspellings, and other mistakes. He could be hard, as when he told Olsen, “write up this story for our morning edition even if it takes half the night!”²⁸³ But he gives Olsen a lot of latitude to learn, as in the cub reporter’s first issue, when White said “You can’t crack that unsolved crime by yourself, Jimmy! Well . . . all right, go to it, and learn the hard way!”²⁸⁴

279. Leo Dorfman, “The Amazing Confession of Super-Perry White!” *Action Comics* 302, July 1963, 2.

280. Hamilton, “Private Life,” 2.

281. Bernstein, “Cub Reporter,” 1.

282. Dorman, “Betrayed,” 2.

283. Otto Binder, “The Man Who Collected Excitement,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 3, November-December 1955, 8.

284. Binder, “100 Faces,” 2.

White is choosy with applicants, and only accepts the best. When a graduate from a school of journalism applied in a 1951 story, he said “The *Planet* doesn’t want ‘journalists,’ young man – it wants reporters! . . . I’ll give you a chance. . . . If you can prove you’re a real reporter in 24 hours, I’ll hire you! If you can’t, get out!”²⁸⁵ This is particularly harsh, as the applicant was later revealed to be White’s own son. In a 1960 story, White admonished an applicant, “Sorry, Miss Kenyon! These college newspaper articles are amateurish! A *Planet* reporter deals with big news! Prison breaks, floods, murders! . . . I only hire people with professional experience! Now, please excuse me! I’m a busy man! Miss Lane will show you out!” Lane thought, “Perry’s hard-boiled attitude reminds me of the time I first applied for a job!”²⁸⁶

White is depicted as extremely principled. He demonstrated adherence to the Code of Ethics line “show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage”²⁸⁷ when he spiked a certain story: “Lois Lane brought in a scoop,” he told his wife, “but it could have wrecked a man’s career by reviving an old scandal, so I killed it!”²⁸⁸ Seven years later, he decided not to run a story about Superman being sidelined by a magical spell that turned him into a half-lion: “It’s the headline of the century,” he told Superman. “But it will demoralize the world if we publish it. So we’ll keep it top secret until you become normal again!”²⁸⁹ Once again, White was demonstrating adherence to the ethical code, the part that requires journalists to be aware that some reporting can

285. Hamilton, “Private Life,” 3.

286. Otto Binder, “The Star Reporter of Metropolis!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 18, July 1960, 2-3.

287. SPJ. “Code.”

288. Hamilton, “Private Life,” 5.

289. Otto Binder, “The Lady and the Lion,” *Action Comics* 243, August 1958, 5.

“cause harm or discomfort.”²⁹⁰ Further, as noted above, Batman – “the world’s greatest detective” – believes White knows that Kent is Superman (a secret he has already figured out at least once, in an amnesiac state), and as it is information harmful not only to Kent but to the world (as it would cripple Superman’s effectiveness), he chooses to keep it to himself – if, indeed, he knows it.

In another story, White showed that he is aware of conflicts of interest, and adheres to the Code in dealing with them. When Olsen discovered White’s son was involved in a street gang, he offered to destroy his notes. White quickly corrected him. “You will **not**! Above everything else, we’re newspapermen! We’ll print this story regardless of who gets hurt, including **me**! The exposé will be announced in tonight’s edition! Now go back and finish the job!”²⁹¹

White is not only loyal, he is known to earn loyalty and respect. In 1944’s “Freedom of the Press,” Kent described White in a feature about the 100th anniversary of the *Daily Planet* as “Perry White, managing editor extraordinary, who started as a newsboy! He eats, breathes, and sleeps news!”²⁹² In a later story, when White (briefly) became editor of the *Metropolis Dispatch*, Lane quit her job at the *Planet* and said to him, “I’ll work for 10 dollars a week . . . for nothing, if necessary. Just let me work for the best editor in the business!”²⁹³ In 1963’s *Jimmy Olsen* 42, Superman gave him a plaque inscribed, “To Perry White, the world’s finest newspaper editor – with admiration,

290. SPJ, “Code.”

291. Robert Bernstein, “Jimmy Olsen, Juvenile Delinquent!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 40, October 1959, 7.

292. “Freedom of the Press,” *World’s Finest Comics* 13, Spring 1944, 4.

293. Finger, “White vs. Kent,” 6.

Superman.”²⁹⁴ And Olsen is especially fond of White, despite all the frequent lectures. “Gee, I’ve got a swell boss,”²⁹⁵ he said in *Jimmy Olsen* 5, among others.

White is shown in a great many stories to dislike superstitions. In “Lois Lane’s Kiss of Death,” he thought “Hmmm . . . Friday the 13th is coming up. We could use a story debunking superstitions!”²⁹⁶ In “Lois Lane’s Super-Séance” he called spiritual mediums “drivel” and “bosh.”²⁹⁷

White is disgusted by con games, and frequently assigns his reporters to expose them. “Swindlers have fleeced hundreds of spinsters and widows through these pen-pal ads,” he thundered in *Lois Lane* 52. “Lois, I’m assigning you to investigate the whole vicious racket for the *Planet!*”²⁹⁸ In *Action* 302 he took to the typewriter himself to expose a stock scam: “Your stories warning people against buying those worthless stocks is going over big, Perry,” Kent observed.²⁹⁹

And in a combination of his dislike for both superstitions and confidence games, White often orders his reporters expose fake magicians, fortune tellers, freak shows, and all manner of hocus-pocus in dozens of stories. For example, Olsen exposed fake sideshow exhibits in the story “Jimmy Olsen, Supergirl’s Pal.”³⁰⁰ Lane revealed the

294. Bernstein, “Cub Reporter,” 1.

295. Binder, “Olympics,” 8.

296. Robert Bernstein, “Lois Lane’s Kiss of Death,” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 7, February 1959, 1.

297. “Super-Séance,” 6.

298. Henry Boltinoff, “Lois Lane’s Pen-Pal Romance!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 52, October 1964, 2.

299. Dorfman, “Confession,” 2.

300. Otto Binder, “Jimmy Olsen, Supergirl’s Pal,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 40, October 1959.

tricks of a phony magician in “The Shocking Secret of Lois Lane!”³⁰¹ Kent exposed the owner of a gym who promises a “magic elixir” that can turn men into supermen; the owner is sent to prison.³⁰² An outraged Perry White assigned Lane to break up a matchmaker scam in 1964’s “Lois Lane’s Pen-Pal Romance.”³⁰³

But White is not depicted as perfect. He is often referred to as “grouchy”³⁰⁴ (*Jimmy Olsen* 42, and others). And he is often cheap. When an applicant surprised him with a “great potential,” he hired her – “at minimum pay, of course!”³⁰⁵

Perhaps the most complete depiction of White’s faults came in the story “Superman’s Enemy!” which involved a space jewel that could reverse people’s personalities. When White was exposed to the gem, he became effusive and a spendthrift. “He’s giving praise freely,” observed Superman, “which he seldom does to reporters!” And “reporters had to fight before for raises! Now Perry has turned **generous!**”³⁰⁶

Sometimes White sends his reporters out on silly stories. In “The Mystery of Skull Island!” Kent and Lane were sent undercover as a butler and a maid, respectively, to “get the inside scoop”³⁰⁷ on a movie actor and his heiress wife returning from their honeymoon. It’s a good thing they happened to uncover a murder, or it would have been a huge investment of *Planet* resources for a minor feature. In “The Irresistible Lois

301. “The Shocking Secret of Lois Lane!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 13, November 1959.

302. Robert Bernstein, “The Man Who Trained Supermen!” *Superman* 151, February 1962.

303. Boltinoff, “Pen-Pal,” 1.

304. Bernstein, “Cub Reporter,” 3.

305. Binder, “Star Reporter,” 4.

306. Otto Binder, “Superman’s Enemy!” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 35, March 1959, 6-7.

307. Henry Boltinoff, “The Mystery of Skull Island!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 16, March 1960, 1.

Lane!” the ace newshawk suggested a feature “Heroes I’ve Kissed” and proceeded to go out and kiss three more. This was all part of an elaborate “Plan L” to secretly save Superman’s life, but White didn’t know that when he said “Not a bad idea! Go to work on them . . . uh . . . I mean **it!**”³⁰⁸ And he approved an idea by amateur freelancer Lana Lang to write a saccharine feature called “I remember Superboy,” and added the unnecessary “remember to spice up your article with fascinating anecdotes about **Superboy** and yourself!” Presumably all of these assignments, and dozens of similar ones, were there simply to advance the plot.

White is also not above publishing false stories, or “hoaxes” as they are routinely called in the stories, or otherwise lying. Usually these involved fooling criminals into making some fatal mistake, but sometimes they were just goofy. For example, in “The Day There Was No Jimmy Olsen” (*Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 25, December 1957) the entire *Planet* staff pretended the cub reporter never existed, and Superman arranged so that the details of Olsen’s life (apartment, driver’s license, etc.) were missing or changed. This was supposedly to determine if Olsen was smart enough for a foreign assignment – if he could see through the hoax – but it was a pretty strange job evaluation. In “Jimmy Olsen’s Two Super-Pals,” Superman pretended to be Olsen’s genie to trap some crooks, and White – who was in on the scheme – published false stories in the *Daily Planet* about it. Of course, the final headline was “Superman’s genie hoax convicts criminals,”³⁰⁹ so perhaps there was no permanent damage to the *Planet’s* credibility.

308. Boltinoff, “Irresistible,” 2.

309. Otto Binder, “Jimmy Olsen’s Two Super-Pals,” *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 23, September 1957, 8.

After the 1986 revamp, White – like the other *Planet* staffers – was presented more realistically. It is unlikely that we will see him assign Lane to kiss superheroes, or pretend not to know who Jimmy Olsen is again. Unfortunately, that means he is more susceptible to the realities facing all newspapers, which means allowing an opinion piece like Cat Grant’s “Why the world does not need a Supergirl” to appear on the front page of the *Planet* – because, he explained, “Cat preemptively wined and dined the publishers last week.”³¹⁰ Or being boxed into a corner by those publishers, who were afraid of Luthor, in the early days before Superman’s arrival in *Superman: Secret Origin*.

But even there, at his lowest point -- helpless to check Luthor, unable to hire the best reporters, facing bankruptcy – he was still depicted as a terrific editor. “A **great** reporter isn’t **cynical**, Lois,” he told Lane in 2010. “A great reporter’s **objective**.”³¹¹

Those are words a good editor ought to know by heart. But it’s doubtful the editor in the next chapter is familiar with them.

310. Gates, “World,” 2.

311. Johns, “Mild-Mannered,” 11.

Chapter Three

Spider-Man: Threat or Menace?

The year 1963 brought to comic another journalist superhero: high school student Peter Parker, who began selling news photos in *Amazing Spider-Man 2* to Publisher/Editor J. Jonah Jameson of the *Daily Bugle* newspaper and *Now* magazine. But while a superhero posing as a journalist had plenty of precedents, Jameson was something new: a major journalist who was not remotely a hero. From his debut in *Amazing Spider-Man 1* (March 1963), Jameson began twisting the news to make Spider-Man look criminal or suspicious. So negative was his approach that fans began to joke about a potential *Bugle* headline in typically slanted J. Jonah Jameson style, “Spider-Man: Threat or Menace”? It remained a running gag for years, but the headline eventually appeared in both the comics¹ and in *Spider-Man* the movie.

“Jonah is pompous, narrow-minded, bigoted, and egotistical – and those are his good qualities,” jokes Stan Lee, who co-created Jameson (with artist Steve Ditko) and wrote the character for 100 consecutive issues of *Amazing Spider-Man* and six annuals.² Before any other writers tackled *Amazing Spider-Man* (beginning with Roy Thomas in October 1971), and before the Wall-Crawler branched out into multiple titles every month (beginning with *Marvel Team-Up* in March 1972), Lee was the only writer to handle Jameson monthly for eight years, establishing the character so strongly that there has been little variation since.

1. Dennis O’Neil, “Spider-Man: Threat or Menace?” *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* 15, Summer 1981, 22.

2. Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York: Fireside, 2002), 136.

“(There were) no instructions regarding JJJ's portrayal,” said Gerry Conway, in response to survey questions. “He was/is such a well-delineated character it wasn't necessary.” The first long-term writer on *Amazing Spider-Man* after Lee, Conway says of his approach to Jameson, “On a subconscious level . . . I admit I probably patterned him a little after Stan. Not in the bluster and temper, but in the lack of self-awareness, matched by self-importance.”

Lee created many other *Bugle* staffers and freelancers from 1963 to 1972, including some who hew to the genre conventions as established by the *Daily Planet* staff or the two-fisted journalists of the Golden Age. But he created many more who did not, including Peter Parker himself, who diverged from expectation almost immediately. As the examples that follow demonstrate, Stan Lee's *Daily Bugle* is perhaps a threat or menace all on its own – to the image of the journalist as hero.

J. Jonah Jameson

Jameson didn't appear in Spider-Man's first story in *Amazing Fantasy* 15 (August 1962), but instead debuted in the Wall-Crawler's second story, in the first issue of *Amazing Spider-Man* in 1963. Lee says “I don't really know where I got him . . . maybe a combination of everybody I've ever known.”³ Co-creator Ditko deliberately drew Jameson ugly, as a “grinning hyena,” and delighted in reader complaints that Jameson

3. Leonard Pitts, Jr., “An Interview with Stan Lee,” *Stan Lee Conversations* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 97.

was “physically grotesque” because, he says, that validated how he had “grounded the character in reality.”⁴

“Something tells me that sub-consciously, Stan also patterned JJ after himself,” says Conway, now the story editor on *Law & Order*. “Or maybe (publisher) Martin Goodman? I guess whenever we write a boss character we use the opportunity to lovingly lampoon our own bosses.”

Lampoon or not, Jameson quickly became a major part of the series. As a predictor of things to come, his first printed words were a smear. “When I’m thru (sic) with this article, Spider-Man will be run out of town!” he says, an angry figure hunched over a typewriter in *Amazing Spider-Man* 1.⁵

“When I first wrote him into the series, he was just a minor throwaway character,” Lee writes in the “Introduction” to a 1988 Spider-Man reprint collection. “Then y’know what happened? The irascible ol’ curmudgeon became one of the mainstays of the entire series.”⁶

He certainly made his presence known in the first issue. He single-handedly ended Spider-Man’s show business career with his first editorial, headlined “Spider-Man Menace.” “There’ll be no show tonight – or any night,” says Spider-Man’s agent. “Look at this editorial! The paper has everyone so steamed up, they’ll probably toss you in jail if you show your face!”⁷

4. Blake Bell, *Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2008), 60.

5. Stan Lee, “Spider-Man Freak! Public Menace!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 1, March 1963, 4.

6. Stan Lee, “Introduction,” *Marvel Masterworks Vol. 5: The Amazing Spider-Man Nos. 11-20* (New York: Marvel Comics, 1988).

7. Lee, “Freak!” 4-5.

Jameson went beyond the printed word, sponsoring a television show to attack Spider-Man, and delivering anti-Spider-Man lectures around New York City:

We cannot allow that masked menace to take the law into his own hands! He is a bad influence on our youngsters! Children may try to imitate his fantastic feats! Think what would happen if they make a hero out of this lawless, inhuman monster! We must not permit it. I say that Spider-Man must be **outlawed!** There is no place for such a dangerous creature in our fair city. The youth of this nation must learn to respect **real** heroes – men such as my son, John Jameson, the test pilot! Not selfish freaks such as Spider-Man – a masked menace who refuses to even let us know his true identity!⁸

Later, Jameson's son was endangered when there was a technical problem with his orbiting space capsule. Despite Jameson calling Spider-Man a “publicity-seeking phony . . . trying to grab a headline,”⁹ Spider-Man saved the astronaut. Jameson became even angrier, writing an editorial with the headline “This newspaper demands that Spider-Man be arrested and prosecuted!” Jameson hit the lecture circuit again, saying “It was all a plot by Spider-Man to steal the spotlight from my son! I accuse Spider-Man **himself** of sabotaging the capsule. . . . I repeat – Spider-Man is a **menace** to America!”¹⁰

Later stories established the television show in this issue as an ongoing platform for Jameson. It was still present forty-nine issues later, when one rant on that show was so full of venom and rage that a shocked Peter Parker began second-guessing himself, and briefly quit being Spider-Man. Jameson called Spider-Man a “**public enemy**,” an “**egomaniac**,” a “neurotic **trouble-maker**,” a “mentally disturbed **menace**,” and offered

8. Lee, “Freak!” 5.

9. Lee, “Freak!,” 9.

10. Lee, “Freak!” 14-15.

a \$1,000 reward “for the capture and **conviction** of that web-slinging, wall-crawling mockery of a man.”¹¹

Jameson’s wild accusations, printed without any evidence at all, were an obvious violation of the letter and spirit of the Code of Ethics. Yet Lee says Jameson is not a villain, but a “perfect foil” for Spider-Man. “JJJ has come to represent the most conservative, strait-laced members of society, the self-righteous know-it-alls who dislike and distrust anyone who looks, acts, or thinks differently than they do,” he says. “He just marches to the beat of a different drummer. Just like Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny*, Jonah and his ilk are part of the fabric of America. We may not want to party with them, but life would surely be a whole lot duller if they weren’t around.”¹²

Lee elaborated on those assertions in another interview. “He’s very reactionary, he thought the last good times we had in America were when Herbert Hoover was president, he hates teenagers, he hated hippies, he hated long hair, he hated guitars. I thought it would be funny to get a guy like that and show he isn’t really a villain.” It is politics, Lee argues, not villainy. “He’s not a bad guy. He just represents that segment of society that is very arch conservative.”¹³

Villain or not, Jameson’s condemnation of Spider-Man was no passing fancy; Jameson harangued Spider-Man verbally or attacked him in print in most issues throughout Lee’s run. The rest of the first ten issues of *Amazing Spider-Man* set the pattern. In the second issue, Jameson ordered his staff to “keep printing stories about

11. Stan Lee, “Spider-Man No More!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 50, July 1967, 6.

12. Lee, “Introduction,” *Masterworks Vol. 5*

13. Pitts, “Interview,” 97.

Spider-Man. . . . I'll never rest until that dangerous menace is destroyed!"¹⁴ In *Amazing Spider-Man* 4, Spider-Man swung past a billboard which read "The Spider-Man menace! A new series by J. Jonah Jameson starting today in the Daily Bugle,"¹⁵ and later Jameson crowed "First **Spider-Man** plagues this city, and now **Sandman**! I wonder if there could be any **connection** between the two! What a **scoop** it would be if I proved there **is!**"¹⁶ Later still, Jameson argued with a policeman to have Spider-Man taken into custody for "taking the law into his own hands. . . . As a taxpayer, I **demand** he be apprehended!"¹⁷ In the fifth issue, he says he sponsored his television program "in the public interest," where he rants for the whole show "to expose **Spider-Man** to the public as the menace he is! . . . I say that Spider-Man belongs behind bars!"¹⁸ In the sixth issue he ran a front-page banner headline challenging Spider-Man to fight a rumored monster in the Everglades called the Lizard, and in the seventh tried to hold him responsible for damage done the *Daily Bugle* building in a life-or-death struggle with the Vulture.

In *Amazing Spider-Man* 9 he crossed a serious ethical line – and possibly a legal one – when he ran a story attesting that Spider-Man was masquerading as a new supervillain, without any evidence to support, or even suggest, the allegation. "I tell you, Electro is Spider-Man! He has to be – there's no doubt about it!" Jameson said to the police. "Do you have any proof??" an officer asked. "How do you know?" "**Proof?**" Jameson shouted. "It can't be anyone **but** Spider-Man! **That's** proof enough!" To make

14. Stan Lee, "Duel to the Death with the Vulture!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 2, May 1963, 2.

15. Stan Lee, "Nothing Can Stop the Sandman!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 4, September 1963, 2.

16. Lee, "Sandman," 8.

17. Lee "Sandman," 18.

18. Stan Lee, "Marked for Destruction by Dr. Doom!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 5, October 1963, 2.

his point, he ran an utterly false story headlined “Electro is really Spider-Man! On the basis of indisputable evidence, the Bugle accuses Spider-Man of launching a crime wave disguised as . . .”¹⁹ Later events muddied the water and got Jameson off the hook in the public eye. However, there was no possible rationalization or justification for the original story.

In 1965 Jameson attempted a ploy familiar to today’s audiences, the verbal equivalent of a push poll. He sent a reporter out on the streets with a tape recorder to get negative comments on Spider-Man, so that Jameson could print “**other** people’s opinions on why they **hate** (Spider-Man)!” The reporter was depicted interviewing a woman, saying “Now then, ma’am, if you’ll just speak into the microphone, I’ll get your answer down on tape! Why do you hate Spider-Man?” When the interviewee demurred – “But . . . I never said I **do** hate Spider-Man!” – the reporter responded: “Look, do you want your name and picture in the paper, or don’t you?” She certainly did. “Well, give me a minute . . . I’ll think of **some** reason!” It worked well, depicted as a montage scene full of negative opinions, until the reporter met Spider-Man booster Flash Thompson, who attempted to give him an earful of praise for the Web-Slinger. “Eh, ah, sorry, son . . . I’m all out of **tape** now!” the reporter said. When Thompson demanded equal time, he said “Sure! Sure! We always try to be **fair** on the *Bugle*! Well, eh . . . gotta run now!”²⁰

Thompson didn’t get published, of course, and the push poll had the intended bandwagon effect. On the street, one pedestrian said, “I never thought Spider-Man was so bad . . . but everybody **else** does! I guess I was **wrong**!” Another responded, “Yeah! He

19. Stan Lee, “The Man Called Electro!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 9, February 1964, 8.

20. Stan Lee, “Spider-Man Goes Mad!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 24, May 1965, 5-6.

must be a menace if everyone **says** he is!” A third said, “**I’m** going to write to the **mayor!** Why isn’t Spider-Man behind bars??” But Jameson remained delusional about his own motives. “All I’m doing is publishing the result of an absolutely impartial, unbiased newspaper survey!” he thought, humming happily to himself.²¹

Jameson continued to falsely accuse Spider-Man for the next forty years, in examples too numerous to list. If a new villain showed up, he claimed it was Spider-Man in disguise until proven otherwise. If there was a major fire, somehow Spider-Man set it. If a new crime-lord debuted, like The Big Man in *Amazing Spider-Man* 10 (March 1964), Jameson would say “Spider-Man **invented** such a character, to throw everyone off the track!”²² His rage was irrational and his suspicions unfounded, but that never deterred him from using his newspaper to harass the object of his hatred, behavior which violates every major category of the SPJ’s Code of Ethics.

In 1964’s “The Enforcers!” a new element was added: an explanation. First, Jameson sent his best crime reporter out for proof that Spider-Man was secretly The Big Man, the kingpin of the city’s underworld (“Do as I say,” he said to Frederick Foswell, “or I’ll fire you and see to it that **no** paper ever hires you again!”²³). But later Lee gave the rationale for Jameson’s loathing of Spider-Man, which was not necessarily evil, but is definitely a character flaw. “Am I **always** to be thwarted, embarrassed, frustrated by **Spider-Man??**” said Jameson, alone in his office. “I hate that costumed freak more than I’ve ever hated anyone before! I’ll never be contented while he’s free!” Then came the speech for which readers had been waiting a year, an explanation for all the vicious

21. Lee, “Mad,” 7.

22. Stan Lee, “The Enforcers!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 10, March 1964, 6.

23. Lee, “Enforcers,” 7.

attacks. Bell said Ditko “dramatically casts the envious publisher in darkened shadows, left to his own despair and shame,”²⁴ as he delivered this three-panel soliloquy:

All my life I’ve been interested in only one thing – making money! And yet, **Spider-Man** risks his life day after day with no thought of reward! If a man like him is good – is a hero – then what am **I??** I can never **respect** myself while **he** lives! Spider-Man represents everything that I’m **not!** He’s brave, powerful, and unselfish! The truth is, I **envy** him! I, J. Jonah Jameson – millionaire, man of the world, civic leader – I’d give everything I won to be the man **he** is! But I can **never** climb to his level! So all that remains for me is – to try to tear him down – because, heaven help me – I’m **jealous** of him!”²⁵

Jameson lies about this motivation to others, so it is never discussed. For example, when his secretary suggested some readers were beginning to suspect his jealousy of Spider-Man in the fifth issue, he exploded. “That’s enough! . . . “I have only **one** real motive . . . to make **money!** The more I attack Spider-Man, the more people read my papers! It’s to our advantage to keep pounding away at that corny costumed clown! Everybody is interested in him . . . whether they **agree** with me or not doesn’t matter . . . Spider-Man **sells papers!** Understand??”²⁶

Jameson’s twisting of the news was not his only ethical problem. He also made a deal with Peter Parker that is rife with potential conflict of interest. When Parker first brought in exclusive photos (of Spider-Man battling the Vulture), Jameson agreed to buy them – and all future Parker photos – without knowing their source.

“ These pictures are **sensational – great!** But how’d a kid like **you** get them?” Jameson asked. “Sorry, sir! I’ll sell them to you on condition that you never ask me that question!” replied Parker. “Okay, Okay! You can **have** your little secret! It doesn’t

24. Bell, *Strange*, 64.

25. Lee, “Enforcers,” 22.

26. Lee, “Dr. Doom,” 8.

matter **how** you got them! The point is, these pictures will make the next issue of **Now** a sell-out!” As if this was not red flag enough, Parker raised another one. “And remember, Mr. Jameson, I don’t want my name used! You can merely give credit to a **Now** magazine staff photographer!” he said. “Sure, my boy, sure!” replied Jameson, dismissively. “And if you get any **more** great pictures, remember to give **me** first crack at them! We’re always in the market for sensational photos!”²⁷ Parker’s name did become attached to his photos within just a few issues, but Jameson allowed the “don’t ask, don’t tell” deal to continue indefinitely. Disguising the source of the photos, and not asking for the source himself, are both violations of the SPJ Code’s admonition to “identify sources. . . . The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources’ reliability.”²⁸

Jameson’s efforts to defeat, humiliate, or arrest Spider-Man sometimes went beyond the unethical into the illegal. His most egregious acts generally involved hiring (or creating) super-villains to attack Spider-Man, which is illegal whether the victim is a masked vigilante or not.

It began relatively innocently, with Jameson printing a challenge to Spider-Man in the *Daily Bugle* from Dr. Octopus -- but that alone was crossing the line. “Jameson, next time you withhold information from us, it will go **hard** with you,” warned a policeman after Spider-Man’s inconclusive battle with the eight-limbed villain. “If you had told us of this, we would have set a **trap** for Dr. Octopus and caught him by now. But you thought more of an exclusive **story** than anything else.”²⁹

27. Lee, “Duel,” 8.

28. SPJ, “Code.”

29. Stan Lee, “Unmasked by Dr. Octopus!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 12, May 1964, 9.

He went farther in the next issue, when he not only printed a challenge from a newcomer “hero” who planned an illegal assault on Spider-Man, but made a shady deal with him. At a news conference, Jameson crowed “once Mysterio has defeated Spider-Man for good, he will reveal his true identity exclusively to **my** newspaper! It’ll be the scoop of the century for me! **Right, Mysterio?**” To which Mysterio responded, “Right! Just so long as you remember the **money** you promised me!”³⁰ Is this checkbook journalism, or is Jameson actually hiring a knee-breaker? The exchange leaves it unclear.

Jameson was aware he was flirting with felonies. When he tried to bribe Kraven the Hunter for an exclusive interview two issues later, the legendary tracker announced his plans to hunt Spider-Man like an animal. “I can’t say it isn’t an intriguing idea, Mr. Kraven!” Jameson said. “But you know there are **laws** against things like that! You can’t just track down a human being in this country.”³¹ But he did agree to it, with the caveat “remember – it has to be perfectly **legal!** Much as I hate Spider-Man, I won’t stand for anything that violates the **law!**”³² Given that everything they had discussed was illegal, that pronouncement seems more of a rationalization for Jameson’s conscience than reality.

He went way over the line in his next effort to destroy Spider-Man, by actually paying to create a super-villain, the Scorpion. In *Amazing Spider-Man* 20, it was revealed that Jameson had been paying a private detective named Mac Gargan to follow Peter Parker and discover how he got his photos – which alone is probably illegal. But in “The Coming of the Scorpion!” he paid Gargan \$10,000 to be the guinea pig in Dr. Farley

30. Stan Lee, “The Menace of . . . Mysterio!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 13, June 1964, 13.

31. Stan Lee, “Kraven the Hunter!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 15, August 1964, 6.

32. Lee, “Kraven,” 15.

Stillwell's experiment to give a man the powers of a scorpion, which would be superior to Parker's spider-powers. Jameson also gave the scientist \$10,000, and promised more. "Stillwell, if this **works**, I'll make you rich . . . famous! I'll become your **patron!** . . . For the world **must** be rid of Spider-Man! And at last we've been given the tools to do the job!"³³

It could be argued that Jameson intended something relatively benign, like a citizen's arrest. But his language left little doubt as to his intentions. He told Gargan the job "might be dangerous"³⁴ and that he wanted someone who can "beat that blasted **Spider-Man!** That's all I **want!**"³⁵ And later, he urged Scorpion to "Smash (Spider-Man)! Atta boy!"³⁶

By the end of the story, Jameson seemed to understand how far he'd gone. "Nobody knows it, but it's all **my** fault! . . . Just to satisfy my own personal hatred, I tried to destroy Spider-Man! And, in so doing, I've unleashed a far **worse** menace upon the world! A menace I can no longer control! A menace which **no one** can control!"³⁷ He indicated awareness of guilt, by worrying that someone might connect him to the Scorpion, and at one point even rooted for Spider-Man. "What's **happening??** Have I gone **mad?** Here I am, cheering for Spider-Man . . . the one I hate **worst** in the world!"³⁸

33. Stan Lee, "The Coming of the Scorpion!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 20, January 1965, 7.

34. Lee, "Scorpion," 5.

35. Lee "Scorpion," 6.

36. Lee, "Scorpion," 9.

37. Lee, "Scorpion," 15.

38. Lee, "Scorpion," 19.

But in the end, he had learned nothing. He published a story that omitted his connection to the Scorpion, invented heroism on his own part, and relegated Spider-Man's role to that of someone who "showed up when it was almost over!"³⁹ He vowed to continue his crusade against the Wall-Crawler with a flimsy justification: "I know now that **anyone** with too much power is liable to turn into a menace sooner or later! And **Spider-Man** is no exception! It's **still** my duty to fight him . . . to expose him . . . and someday . . . to **destroy** him! And I **will** . . . If it takes the rest of my life, I **will!**"⁴⁰

He followed through on his vow five issues later, in "Captured by J. Jonah Jameson!" He funded a robot built by Dr. Spencer Smythe with the ominous name "Spider-Slayer" to capture Spider-Man – one that Jameson could operate, one with his face on the robot's two-way view screen to watch his victory. "I'm **sold!**" Jameson said after a demonstration that trapped, ironically, Peter Parker. "I'll pay whatever you want for the robot. Something tells me I'm gonna **get** Spider-Man this time!"⁴¹ The Spider-Slayer failed, but only barely, and became the first of many Spider-Slayer robots to jeopardize the Wall-Crawler over the years, as Smythe and his progeny became as obsessed with Spider-Man as Jameson. The vendetta continued with Jameson instrumental in the creation of another super-villain, the Human Fly, by funding Harlan Stillwell, brother of the scientist who created the Scorpion.⁴² In *Amazing Spider-Man* 82 (1970), he paid Electro \$5,000 to attack Spider-Man on national television.⁴³

39. Lee, "Scorpion," 20.

40. Lee, "Scorpion," 20.

41. Stan Lee, "Captured by the Spider-Slayer!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 25, June 1965, 6.

42. Len Wein and Bill Mantlo, "Step Into My Parlor . . ." *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* 10, Summer 1976.

43. Stan Lee, "And Then Came Electro!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 82, March 1970.

And yet, in his own mind, Jameson seems to believe he is the good guy, and means no physical harm to Spider-Man. When Smythe returned with another Spider-Slayer that would “**slay** the Web-Slinger without mercy,” Jameson replied, “Now **wait** a minute! Nobody’s talking about **murdering** him! I just want him **captured**, see! I want him behind bars . . . **forever!**”⁴⁴ It is evident here, in his earlier conversation with Kraven, and in dozens of other examples that Jameson deludes himself into thinking his vendetta is somehow heroic. “You’d be ridding the world of a dangerous, deadly **menace**,” he told Ka-Zar in a 1968 issue, as he attempted to pay the Tarzan-like “Lord of the Savage Land” \$10,000 to capture Spider-Man.⁴⁵

Among Jameson’s other characteristics is a lack of courage. The Vulture, a super-villain, thought so. He told Jameson – in disgust – to “stop blubbing like a coward”⁴⁶ when being robbed in 1963. In “The Coming of the Scorpion!” Jameson said to his own threatening creation, “I-I’ll **pay any price** . . . but don’t hurt me . . . !”⁴⁷ In the second Scorpion story, he told the revenge-minded Gargan. “No! You can’t get me! . . . You mustn’t! Get **Spider-Man** instead!” Even the murderous super-villain was appalled. “You’d throw **anyone** to me in order to save yourself, wouldn’t you?”⁴⁸ In “To Die a Hero!” he froze when Spider-Man tried to rescue him from underworld boss The

44. Stan Lee, “To Kill a Spider-Man!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 58, March 1968, 8.

45. Stan Lee, “The Coming of Ka-Zar!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 57, February 1968.

46. Stan Lee, “The Return of the Vulture!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 7, December 1963, 13.

47. Lee, “Scorpion,” 17.

48. Stan Lee, “Never Step on a Scorpion!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 29, October 1965, 11.

Kingpin, and went into a fugue state: “He’s almost petrified with **fright!**” thought Spider-Man, who had to threaten him to provoke a response.⁴⁹

And yet, Jameson remains convinced of his own heroism and altruism. When he agreed to print Mysterio’s challenge to Spider-Man in the paper, he said “if it means the end of Spider-Man, I’ll become a **hero** to this city!”⁵⁰ When Spider-Man and the Scorpion battled it out in the *Bugle* newsroom, Jameson printed the story as if he were the victor over both. “Did you read the exclusive story in the *Bugle* about the Scorpion’s capture?” said a reader at a newsstand. “He’d probably still be at large if not for Jonah Jameson’s bravery!” “Yeah!” said a second. “According to the story, Jameson’s a real fireball!”⁵¹ The same happened after a second Scorpion battle in the newsroom months later, where Jameson staged a photo shoot of himself in the “ruins of battle” after the super-powered pair were gone. “It’ll make a great front-page story!” he gloated. “‘Fearless, courageous publisher saves his employees from deadly costumed killers!’ I’ll be a hero! Make sure these pictures do me justice! Get my courageous expression . . . my determined, fighting stance . . . my iron fists, clenched and ready!”⁵² Later, he said to Parker: “You missed a chance to photograph me in action, heroically defeating Spider-Man and the Scorpion!” Parker thought, “Wow! Now he’s convinced that he **really** beat us!”⁵³ In a later story he bragged to his peers at the exclusive Midtown Business

49. Stan Lee, “To Die a Hero!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 52, September 1967, 9.

50. Lee, “Mysterio,” 8.

51. Lee, “Scorpion,” 20.

52. Lee, “Step,” 13.

53. Lee, “Step,” 18.

Executives Club about his paper's high standards, despite all evidence to the contrary: "You know me! I prefer to run the story straight – no sensationalism!"⁵⁴

He is also arrogant and vain. In "The Man Called Electro!" he yelled at a bank employee, "Nobody keeps J. Jonah Jameson waiting! I want those figures, and I want them **now!** . . . When I give an order, I expect people to **hop!**!"⁵⁵ A few issues later, when Dr. Octopus has Jameson and Parker pinned to a wall, he barked, "Don't just **dangle** there, Parker! Tell him who I **am!**"⁵⁶ And he wrote about himself after the second Scorpion battle, "Jonah Jameson proved himself to be as brave as he is handsome!" because "I don't believe in false modesty!"⁵⁷ Of his son John, he once said he is "too **brave**, too **strong**, too **smart!** He's a chip off the **old block!**"⁵⁸

He is completely self-certain. "Facts? **What** facts? I know all I **need** to know about the man," he said of a mayoral candidate in 1968.⁵⁹ And: "My newspaper is squarely behind the man. What more do you need to know?" Retired police Captain George Stacy demurred, and Jameson demanded to know if Stacy was questioning his judgment. "Since you never question it," Stacy calmly replied, "perhaps someone should."⁶⁰

Jameson also routinely takes credit for the work of others. In response to a suggestion by Parker, he said, "It's a good thing **I** thought of that angle! Another typical

54. Stan Lee, "The Man in the Crime-Master's Mask!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 26, July 1965, 17.

55. Lee, "Electro," 6.

56. Stan Lee, "Turning Point!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 11, April 1964, 5.

57. Lee, "Step," 19.

58. Stan Lee, "Birth of a Super Hero!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 42, November 1966, 19.

59. Stan Lee, "Lo, This Monster!" *The Spectacular Spider-Man* 1, July 1968, 32.

60. Lee, "Monster," 27.

Jameson brainstorm!”⁶¹ When Foswell (and Spider-Man) cracked the Crime-Master case, Jameson told the men at the Executives Club, “Foswell? He was just a cog in the wheel! I was the master planner! The entire capture of the Crime-Master took place under my **personal** direction! But my natural **modesty** prevents me from bragging about it!”⁶²

Jameson is a notorious cheapskate. On one occasion, when Parker didn’t have time to develop film before turning it in, Jameson said he’d “take the cost of developing out of your pay!”⁶³ When a trip with Parker to Florida to track down the Lizard failed, he didn’t pay Parker and said “the way I figure it, you owe me for your plane fare down here and half of the hotel bill!”⁶⁴ Another time he told his son, “**nothing’s** more important than making money, boy! **Remember** that!”⁶⁵

Occasionally Parker asked for financial help for his ailing Aunt May, and Jameson was routinely unsympathetic. “An **advance**??! Are you **kidding**?” he said in *Amazing Spider-Man* 4. “What do you **do** with money, **eat** it?? Look – this is a **business**, not a charity! . . . You teen-agers are all alike – you think the world owes you a living!”⁶⁶ And a few issues later, “I **never** lend money, Parker – you should **know** that!”⁶⁷ Once, when informed of the seriousness of Aunt May’s condition, Jameson chirped, “Really?? Well, never let it be said that big-hearted J. Jonah Jameson doesn’t look after the people who work for him! Let’s do something **generous** for them. . . . Send her a get-well card!

61. Lee, “Captured,” 3.

62. Lee, “Crime-Master,” 17.

63. Lee, “Sandman,” 19.

64. Stan Lee, “Face to Face with . . . the Lizard!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 6, November 1963, 21.

65. Stan Lee, “The Arms of Doctor Octopus!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 88, September 1970, 9.

66. Lee, “Sandman,” 9.

67. Lee, “Electro,” 8.

But don't seal the envelope! You can send it for a penny cheaper that way!"⁶⁸ Another time his idea of showing gratitude was: "I'll allow (Parker) to call me Jonah if he wishes!"⁶⁹

Jameson is so stingy, it even outweighs his cowardice. When the Vulture tried to rob the Bugle payroll, Jameson tried to negotiate. "No! **No!** You can't rob my payroll! You **mustn't!** It's all I've **got!** It would put me out of business! . . . Have you no **conscience?** No **feelings?** Y-you're as bad as **Spider-Man!** . . . I've spent **years** building up this business . . . it means **everything** to me! You can't . . . Look – maybe we can make a deal? I can give you **publicity** . . ." Parker thought, "Jameson is such a skinflint, he'd probably rather get **shot** than part with his dough!"⁷⁰

He routinely takes financial advantage of Parker, but feels fully justified in doing so. "I'm **robbing** him!" he thought in *Amazing Spider-Man* 9. "I'll make a **fortune** with his pictures! But I deserve it – 'cause he's a **fool!**"⁷¹ A few issues later he thought, "I'll write out a check for Parker! . . . I'll be generous and pay him almost **half** of what these pictures are worth!"⁷² Still later: "You deserve a big **bonus** for this! Miss Brant – open the safe and give Parker one of my own personal bars of milk chocolate!"⁷³

In one scene, a determined, humorless, battle-weary Parker demanded full price for his latest photos, as he needed money for his aunt's operation. "It's highway robbery!

68. Stan Lee, "The End of Spider-Man!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 18, November 1964, 7.

69. Lee, "Captured," 17.

70. Lee, "Return," 13.

71. Lee, "Electro," 8.

72. Lee, "Mysterio," 22.

73. Lee, "Kraven," 21.

You're taking advantage of my warm-hearted generosity!" wailed Jameson, who thought "he doesn't realize they're worth **twice** as much!" He continued aloud: "But I'll **take** them – just because I **like** you! Here's your check! I'll probably go **broke** throwing away my money so carelessly!" But his thoughts were hardly as benign. "What's gotten into Parker? He used to be a real little milktoast! (sic) Who wised him up?"⁷⁴

This is particularly egregious in light of the fact that Jameson is under no illusions about how good Parker is. In *Amazing Spider-Man 2*, when Parker first began selling photos to Jameson, the publisher said, "Tell me, Parker, are you a **magician**? How does a teenager like **you** manage to get pictures that our best staff photogs would give their eyeteeth for?"⁷⁵ In the next issue, he blurted, "My best men have tried and failed! But so far, you've succeeded in every assignment! I can't imagine how a teenager like you **does** it!"⁷⁶ In *Amazing Spider-Man 11*, he thought of Parker as "my best freelance photographer."⁷⁷ Two issues later, he told Mysterio of Parker, "Don't let his **age** fool you! Despite his youth, he's the best photographer I've got!"⁷⁸ Several years later, he reminded a reporter that, while the Bugle has plenty of other photographers, "none are as good as that lazy lowlife"⁷⁹ Peter Parker.

Jameson also sent the freelancer on numerous out-of-town trips that would normally be the province of staff photographers. As noted, he took Parker to Florida to

74. Stan Lee, "The Final Chapter!" *Amazing Spider-Man 33*, February 1966, 18.

75. Lee, "Duel," 14.

76. Stan Lee, "Spider-Man Versus Doctor Octopus!" *Amazing Spider-Man 3*, July 1963, 5.

77. Lee, "Turning Point," 5.

78. Lee, "Mysterio," 13.

79. Lee, "Birth," 2.

search for the Lizard as early as *Amazing Spider-Man* 6 (November 1963). He sent Parker to the filming of Spider-Man movies in New Mexico⁸⁰ and in Los Angeles.⁸¹ He took Parker to the “Savage Land” under Antarctica where dinosaurs dwell,⁸² and sent him to Canada to photograph the Hulk.⁸³

Despite Parker’s value, Jameson remains routinely abusive to him. “**Out, Parker!**” Jameson barked in 1964 when Parker came by to pick up secretary Betty Brant for a date. “This is an **office**, not a social club! You can come in here whenever you have a set of exclusive **news photos** for me, and not before! Now **get!**”⁸⁴ This is a representative greeting from Jameson, who reminded Parker in other issues that he didn’t keep him around for his “looks”⁸⁵ or his “personality”⁸⁶ and that he is “lazy.”⁸⁷ He frequently reminded Parker of other things the newsroom was not: “This is an office, not an arena!”⁸⁸ It was also not “a campus hang-out,”⁸⁹ a “lonely hearts club”⁹⁰ or a “hangout for **loafers!**”⁹¹

80. Stan Lee, “The Green Goblin!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 14, July 1964.

81. Stan Lee, “The Web and the Flame!” *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* 4, Summer 1967.

82. Roy Thomas, “Walk the Savage Land!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 103, December 1971.

83. Gerry Conway, “The Gentleman’s Name Is . . . Hulk!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 119, April 1973.

84. Lee, “Unmasked,” 2.

85. Lee, “Enforcers,” 12.

86. Stan Lee, “Duel with Daredevil!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 16, September 1964, 6.

87. Lee, “Unmasked,” 2.

88. Lee, “Captured,” 6.

89. Stan Lee, “How Green Was My Goblin!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 39, August 1966, 14.

90. Stan Lee, “The Goblin and the Gangsters!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 23, April 1965, 5.

91. Stan Lee, “In the Clutches of . . . The Kingpin!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 51, August 1967, 10.

Jameson hated Parker in those early days, Lee says, because Parker was “a teenager, and to Jolly Jonah all teenagers were useless, good-for-nothing, long-haired hippies. The fact that Parker had short hair cut no ice with the intractable Mr. Jameson.” In fact, Jameson said in 1971, “Next to **Spider-Man**, I hate loud-mouthed **students** the most. I even hate ‘em when they’re **quiet**.”⁹² But he is “an equal-opportunity hater,”⁹³ Lee says, and he treats all of his staff poorly. “Can’t anyone think for himself here?” he shouted in 1964. “Am I surrounded by incompetents?”⁹⁴ He resented coffee breaks: “**Coffee break!** Big deal! The only thing no one takes is a **work break** in this place! Blasted gold-brickin’ lazy no-goods! ... @XXX\$!!! Even the **press room** doesn’t answer! How long do coffee breaks **last** around here, anyway? I ought’a give up **publishing** and start raisin’ **coffee beans!**”⁹⁵

By sheer proximity, Jameson’s secretary Betty Brant came in for a lot of abuse in the early issues. “Get to **work**, Miss Brant!” he barked, after she is stunned at receiving an anonymous, threatening phone call. “I don’t pay you to daydream!”⁹⁶ Plus, “I understand you were here at the hospital while I was ill, Miss Brant!” he said, chastising her for visiting him after an injury. “Too lazy to go to **work**, eh??”⁹⁷ He even criticized

92. Stan Lee, “Trap for a Terrorist!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 95, April 1971, 3.

93. Lee, *Excelsior*, 136.

94. Stan Lee, “Spidey Strikes Back!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 19, December 1964, 4.

95. Stan Lee, “In the Hands of the Hunter!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 47, April 1967, 7.

96. Lee, “Turning Point,” 4.

97. Stan Lee, “The Clown and His Masters of Menace,” *Amazing Spider-Man* 22, March 1965, 19.

Brant and her fiancé for planning their wedding on her coffee break. “Everyone takes **advantage** of me because I’m too **soft-hearted!**”⁹⁸

The sentiment was surely returned. “**I quit! Nobody** could work for a tyrant like **you!**” said a fill-in employee in 1964. “You don’t need a secretary, you need a **psychiatrist!**”⁹⁹ Two years later, Jameson had to go through other temporary secretaries, with similar results. “Holy smoke!” thought Parker in 1966. “Has old Jameson got **another** new secretary? She must be the **third** this week! And today’s only **Tuesday!**” Secretary: “**I quit!** I won’t work for that old **skinflint** another second! . . . No **wonder** he can’t keep a secretary! A man with a temper like **his** ought to be in a **cage!**”¹⁰⁰

Staffers felt the same. When Jameson gloated over a particular victory over Spider-Man, one reporter thought, “Jameson’s liable to crack his face wide open with that phony smile of his!” Thought another, “He reminds me of a **tiger** who’s just made a kill!”¹⁰¹ Crime reporter Frederick Foswell told Parker, “Look, son, I write what Jameson tells me to! He’s the boss here! . . . You don’t work on **this** newspaper and argue with ol’ Prune Face!”¹⁰²

Other characters, ones readers are meant to admire, also held Jameson in low esteem. The heroic Ka-Zar, Lord of the Savage Land, thought: “**Jameson** reminds me of a human **jackal.**”¹⁰³ George Stacy, father of Parker’s girlfriend Gwen, said: “I’ve known

98. Stan Lee, “Spidey Smashes Out!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 45, February 1967, 5.

99. Lee, “Unmasked,” 2.

100. Stan Lee, “Just a Guy Named Joe!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 38, July 1966, 3.

101. Lee, “End,” 7.

102. Lee, “Enforcers,” 12.

103. Lee, “Ka-Zar,” 10.

men like **Jonah Jameson** before! Iron-willed, vain, and unwilling to ever change their minds!”¹⁰⁴ Jameson’s heroic astronaut son John challenged his father, “do you think you’re really being **fair** to Spider-Man?”¹⁰⁵

Parker certainly had no illusions. “His heart’s as cold as an ice cube! He doesn’t care about **anyone!**”¹⁰⁶ he thought, when Brant had gone missing, and Jameson’s only concern was the cost and time of training a new secretary. Then: “I know he’s selfish – stingy – and hot-tempered! He’s jealous of Spider-Man – and of **anyone** who’s more glamorous than **he** is!”¹⁰⁷ On another occasion: “The old **phony!** His smile is as warm and friendly as a rattlesnake!”¹⁰⁸

Even Brant, usually written as sweet and patient, was no fan. “He’s as nasty as ever,” she thought after a hospital stay for Jameson, “so I know he’s all right now!”¹⁰⁹ She thought he’s an “old hypocrite” in 1965.¹¹⁰ And the next month exclaimed “Mr. Jameson! You’re smiling! Is anything wrong?”¹¹¹ Years later, she said “I hate to sound **disloyal** . . . but nobody **ever** leaves Mr. Jameson’s office with a **smile.**”¹¹²

The cops liked him no better. “Mr. Jameson, the police **appreciate Spider-Man’s** help,” one said in the fourth issue, in a typical example. “You can print what you want in

104. Lee, “To Kill,” 4.

105. Lee, “Birth,” 4.

106. Lee, “Enforcers,” 11.

107. Lee, “Enforcers,” 13.

108. Lee, “Gangsters, 5.

109. Lee, “Clown,” 19.

110. Stan Lee, “If This Be My Destiny . . . !” *Amazing Spider-Man* 31, December 1965, 14.

111. Stan Lee, “Man on a Rampage!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 32, January 1966, 15.

112. Stan Lee, “The Schemer!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 83, April 1970, 7.

your papers, but sooner or later people will realize you're just airing a private grudge of your own!"¹¹³

Even villains were not fooled. As noted, both Vulture and Scorpion were disgusted by Jameson's cowardice. Spencer Smythe, the creator of the Spider-Slayer, called Jameson a "neurotic nut"¹¹⁴ and said "don't talk to **me** about motives, you pious **hypocrite!** You've **lied** about (Spider-Man) in your paper for **years!**"¹¹⁵

But Jameson has good points, too. He was noted in New York for philanthropy – although it often came with strings attached. In 1965 he sponsored an exhibit, saying "I believe it's my civic **duty** to bring art appreciation to the masses! I love nothing better than helping my fellow man!" But he thought, "And if can make a nice, healthy **profit** as well, it doesn't exactly break my heart, either!"¹¹⁶ And he did co-sign for Parker to get a motorcycle, although his thought balloon read "if he has a debt to pay off, he'd **have** to sell me more pictures – and I can buy 'em cheaper than **ever** from him."¹¹⁷

He also re-hired Foswell after the crime reporter was arrested for being The Big Man, then released on parole. On one occasion he explained this act of charity in cynical terms. "I believe in forgiveness, charity, and brotherly love," he said when re-hiring Foswell. "And besides, it'll be good for my public relations! It'll build up my image as a loveable do-gooder!"¹¹⁸ Later, when Foswell got information on a gangster, Jameson said

113. Lee, "Sandman," 19.

114. Lee, "To Kill," 19.

115. Lee "To Kill, 17.

116. Lee, "Clown," 5.

117. Stan Lee, "The Horns of The Rhino!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 41, October 1966, 2.

118. Lee, "Gangsters," 5.

“Good work, Foswell! A scoop like this will put my paper on the map! And it’ll cement my reputation as a crusading, public-spirited citizen!”¹¹⁹ Later still he explained at the Executives Club, “You know what they say about me, gentlemen . . . I’m all **heart!** And besides, Foswell works like a dog!”¹²⁰

But other times, his generosity seemed genuine. For example, he complimented Foswell on exposing a crime ring: “Your information was helpful to the police, Foswell! It looks as though Lucky Lobo will be behind bars for a long, long time! Just wanted you to know!”¹²¹ When Spider-Man accused the crime reporter of secretly being the Crime-Master or the Green Goblin, Foswell appealed to Jameson: “Look, do I haveta answer questions from **him**, Mister Jameson?” “Of **course** not!” Jameson roared in defense. “Now get back to work – I trust you!”¹²²

Jameson can be charming. While the students at Midtown High razed the speech he gave at Peter Parker’s graduation, he impressed Parker’s Aunt May and her equally elderly friend, Anna Watson. “Such a charming, sincere, warm-hearted man!” enthused Aunt May. “To know him must be to love him!”¹²³ Some of the members of Jameson’s Executives Club believed him to be “mighty generous” for re-hiring Foswell.¹²⁴ His philanthropy went over well with elderly rich women, too, like the one at the art exhibit

119. Lee, “Gangsters,” 7.

120. Lee, “Crime-Master,” 8.

121. Lee, “Gangsters,” 19.

122. Stan Lee, “Bring Back My Goblin to Me!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 27, August 1965, 11.

123. Stan Lee, “The Menace of the Molten Man!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 28, September 1965, 20.

124. Lee, “Gangsters,” 6.

who exclaimed “You dear man! To be so successful and have such taste in art, too! How I admire you!”¹²⁵

He does know the difference between right and wrong. When his son was under the influence of an alien spore and went after Spider-Man, Jameson tried to stop him. “You can’t use your power to satisfy a **grudge!**”¹²⁶ – a line which would be hypocritical in another character with some self-awareness, but Jameson is simply blind to his own faults.

Surprisingly for a character Lee describes as conservative, Jameson has a liberal attitude toward race relations. For example, Jameson defended a black window washer from his racist white supervisor in the *Bugle* building in 1969. “Wh-what are you siding with **him** for, Mr. Jameson?” stammered the supervisor, Mr. Clark. “If you don’t **know** . . . you never **will!**” Jameson replied. “Now **take off**, Clark! All of a sudden, I don’t like the **smell** around here!”¹²⁷ In 1971 he dropped support for mayoral candidate Sam Bullit when City Editor Joe “Robbie” Robertson’s investigation showed financing by hate groups. When the candidate called the black Robertson “Sambo,” Jameson yelled “**Shuddup!** . . . You’ve **had** it, bigot! . . . Get out, Bullit! You’re turning my **stomach!**”

¹²⁸ Later, Jameson told civil rights marchers in front of his building, “The *Bugle*’s been fighting for **civil rights** since before you were **born!**”¹²⁹

125. Lee, “Clown,” 5.

126. Lee, “Birth,” 14.

127. Stan Lee, “The Night of the Prowler!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 78, November 1969, 14.

128. Stan Lee, “When Iceman Attacks!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 92, January 1971, 8-9.

129. Stan Lee, “The Spider-Slayer!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 105, February 1972, 4.

As further proof, there is the very existence of Robertson, Jameson's second-in-command as of 1967. Robertson's race seems to make no difference to Jameson, and as city editor Robertson constantly argues with his boss and corrects his excesses. The fact that a cranky, old, white conservative like Jameson respects anyone enough to let that person correct him – let alone a black man in 1967 – says a lot about Jameson's character. As Robertson told his son Randy, "Jameson is **no more** a racist than **Little Eva!**"¹³⁰

Jameson can also be an impressive newspaperman, when the topic is not costumed vigilantes. In *Amazing Spider-Man* 9, he swings into action when news breaks: "**Stop the presses!** Prepare to reprint Page One! Send all department heads in here on the double! We're going to put out an **extra!**"¹³¹ This was just one occasion of dozens where readers saw Jameson shout "Stop the presses!" and efficiently wield the machinery of a big newspaper. In "The Man in the Crime-Master's Mask!" he was seen working with Foswell to uncover underworld connections. "So far, there's no definite tie-in between the Goblin and that nut who calls himself the Crime-Master," he mused, but ordered Foswell to "keep digging away."¹³² In "Never Step on a Scorpion!" he was demonstrably on top of the news: "Any new reports about the **cat burglar**, Foswell . . . or those robberies of scientific equipment?"¹³³ Those two topics would become major storylines in later issues.

130. Stan Lee, "The Web Closes!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 73, June 1969, 14.

131. Lee, "Electro," 22.

132. Lee, "Crime-Master," 6.

133. Lee, "Step," 3.

There are plenty more examples of Jameson's newspaperman side. For example, when Foswell reported the dangerous Hulk had been sighted in the city, Jameson didn't hesitate. "Well? What are you **waiting** for?" he shouted. "**Get the story!**"¹³⁴

In 1967 he went after a new underworld mastermind, The Kingpin, hammer and tongs. "**Rumors! Rumors! Rumors!** But no blasted news!" he yelled to his staff. "The city's in the grip of its biggest **crime wave**, and no one can find out who's **behind** it!"¹³⁵ But his efforts were effective. "**Jonah Jameson** suspects that something is in the wind!" The Kingpin said. "If he keeps running these **headlines** and **editorials**, someone is liable to figure out what we're **up** to! And that means . . . **Jameson must be silenced!**"¹³⁶ But when Kingpin ordered Jameson to "**stop** steaming up the public about the so-called **crime wave** in the city!" the publisher's cowardice was superseded by his pride: "In a **pig's eye!** Nobody tells **me** what to write in my paper!" Even The Kingpin was impressed: "**Excellent!** Spoken like the true **crusader** that you are! I applaud your obvious courage . . . but alas . . . you will not live to **regret** it!"¹³⁷ Of course, he did – thanks to Spider-Man's interference, which Jameson couldn't have expected when he defied the most dangerous man in the city.

Jameson showed an ethical side when he was blackmailed by a super-villain named the Hobgoblin for funding the creation of the Scorpion – and resigned. "The public had a right to know," he told a flabbergasted Spider-Man. "I love this newspaper. I won't see its journalistic integrity questioned because of my mistake – so I'm stepping

134. Stan Lee, "To Become an Avenger!" *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* 3, Summer 1966, 14.

135. Lee, "Clutches," 9.

136. Lee, "Clutches," 2.

137. Lee, "Clutches," 9.

down as editor-in-chief!”¹³⁸ It wasn’t long before the status quo was restored, but Jameson’s act was surprisingly noble.

On another occasion, Jameson gave an impressive motivation speech to reporter Ben Urich when an agent of The Kingpin broke the fingers on Urich’s right hand and frightened him off a story. “Listen, Urich, there are things that just don’t **happen** in this racket,” he said gruffly. “Number **one** is you **never** get scared away from a **story**. Not while you’ve got the most powerful weapon in the **world** on your side.” Brandishing a newspaper, Jameson continued: “This is **five million readers’** worth of **power**. It can destroy **presidents**. And it’s been due to get aimed at The **Kingpin** for **years** now. But it takes **you** to **do** it.”¹³⁹

In a 2004 story, a new reporter describes him as fully engaged. “He’s got his sleeves rolled up and ink all over his shirt and he’s running around in everyone’s face,” she said in wonder. “Rewriting copy, setting headlines, dictating assignments, enforcing policy . . . he’s everywhere!”¹⁴⁰

In that same story, Jameson gave a fine summary of the current difficulties facing newspapers. “People don’t read,” he said in part. “Back in the day, it was a little easier to get their attention . . . but now with TV, the Internet, the whole thing . . . it’s, well, it’s tough. It’s hard to give people what they think they want along with what you know they need.”¹⁴¹ So he thought (as he puts it) outside the box, and gave ground on his aversion to superheroes to begin a regular supplement covering them. “I have to do something before

138. Roger Stern and Tom DeFalco, “Endings!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 251, April 1984, 16.

139. Frank Miller, “Born Again,” *Daredevil* 230, May 1985, 10.

140. Brian Michael Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 2,” *The Pulse* 2, May 2004, 4.

141. Brian Michael Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 1” *The Pulse* 1, April 2004, 10.

we all **bleed** to death here,” he said, indicating that he can be practical and flexible when need be.¹⁴²

When one of his reporters was killed, Jameson marshaled the paper’s resources to find the killer. “Jonah asked me to tell you,” Robertson said, because Jameson was too choked up to speak, “that we take care of our own. . . . You are, without question, the finest investigative reporters in this city. And you will cast a net so wide and meticulous that no one could escape it. This story will be told and told well. By us.”¹⁴³ And when Urich discovered that Norman Osborn was the probable murderer, Jameson decided to pursue the story – even though Osborn once nearly sued the paper out of business when the *Bugle* (correctly) identified him as the mass murdering Green Goblin, and this new story would likely be called a vendetta. To be fair, Jameson got a little nudging from new hire Jessica Jones, a failed superhero and former private investigator. “One of the most famous men in the city is really this totally evil crazy serial killer?” she asked during the discussion. “And you **know** it? Um, what’s the point of even **having** a paper if you can’t tell everyone that? Isn’t telling people stuff like this, like, the **only** reason to work here?”¹⁴⁴ A fine speech, and a reminder of why the First Amendment exists.

Currently, the *Daily Bugle* is owned by a man named Dexter Bennett, who has turned it into a tabloid called *The DB!* – complete with exclamation point – filled with sensationalized, gossipy content.¹⁴⁵ Bennett pulled a boardroom coup to get majority ownership of the *Bugle* when Jameson was in the hospital after a heart attack, unable to

142. Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 1,” 12.

143. Brian Michael Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 3,” *The Pulse* 3, May 2004, 3.

144. Brian Michael Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 4,” *The Pulse* 4, September 2004, 17.

145. Dan Slott, “Blood Ties,” *Amazing Spider-Man* 548, March 2008.

mount a defense. But Jameson is admired enough in New York that he won a special election for mayor when the occupant resigned.¹⁴⁶ Of course, this being comic books, it is likely the status quo, with Jameson at the head of a reconstituted *Bugle*, will someday return. In the meantime, though, Jameson has been revealed to be secretly bankrolling the *Front Line*, a newspaper founded by two reporters (one of them Urich) with the intention of maintaining high ethics – another example of Jameson’s dedication to good journalism.¹⁴⁷

In summary, Jameson can be both ethical and admirable. But most times he is manifestly not. And despite the poor face of journalism he usually turns to the world, he is part and parcel of one of the world’s best-selling characters and will be with us as long as Spider-Man is. As Lee says, “Spidey without Jonah would be like rock without roll!”¹⁴⁸

Daily Buglers

As the *Daily Planet* is more than just Perry White, the *Daily Bugle* is more than just J. Jonah Jameson. Over the course of the last four decades, numerous reporters and editors have been introduced. Few can be characterized as completely ethical or unethical; all that can really be said is that they come in all flavors.

146. Dan Slott, “Face Front Part Two: ‘Nuff Said!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 591, June 2009.

147. Paul Jenkins, *World War Hulk: Front Line* 1-6, August-December 2007.

148. Stan Lee, “Introduction,” *Marvel Masterworks Vol. 16: The Amazing Spider-Man Nos. 31-40 and Annual No. 2* (New York: Marvel Comics, 1991).

Peter Parker became part of the *Daily Bugle* mix in 1963, when this occurred to him: “Magazines will pay big money for hard-to-get photos! And I know how to get them!”¹⁴⁹ But he became a freelancer, not a staffer – albeit, as noted, a valuable one.

Obviously, Parker suffers from the same ethical breach as Jameson, with their “ask me no questions, I tell you no lies”¹⁵⁰ bargain on his photos. But that is not the only black mark on his ethics.

In *Amazing Spider-Man 4*, he failed to take photos of his fight with the Sandman, and re-enacted the battle by throwing sand in the air and punching through it. “Since this really **happened** a few minutes ago, it can’t be unethical! It’s like shooting a re-take of a movie!”¹⁵¹ The best that can be said is that he was aware of the ethical question, even if he failed the test. The Code specifically states: “Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.”¹⁵²

He went further over the line a few issues later, when – desperate for money – he superimposed images in the darkroom to make it appear as if Spider-Man and Electro were the same person, because that was what Jameson wanted. “I hate taking money under false pretenses – but I’ll make up for it – somehow!” He knew he’d crossed the line by reporting utter falsehoods (“I’ve never cheated anyone before! It feels **terrible!**”¹⁵³) and tried to atone for it by giving a second set of photos, true ones, to Jameson for free.

149. Lee, “Duel,” 2.

150. Lee, “Joe,” 4.

151. Lee, “Sandman,” 17.

152. SPJ, “Code.”

153. Lee, “Electro,” 11.

That hardly un-rings the bell, but it must be said he was roughly sixteen in that scene and appeared to have learned an important lesson.

At one point Parker took his photos to the Bugle's competitor, the *Daily Globe*, in hopes of better money. That proved to be the case, but the *Globe*'s photo editor Barney Bushkin wanted to know how Parker got his photos. He was so nosy – or, arguably, more ethical – that Parker returned to the less-curious Jameson. “Whew! What a **nosy** guy! I’ll take **Jonah** any time!”¹⁵⁴

Parker is ethical, obviously, as a superhero. Sometimes that overlaps with his journalism side. For example, when he learned that the Lizard was actually Dr. Curt Connors – “one of the greatest men I’ve known!”¹⁵⁵ – he withheld that information from not just the *Bugle*, but from the world, to protect Connors and his family. Whether that was superhero ethics or journalism ethics is hard to say, but it demonstrates that Parker’s heart is in the right place.

That point was hammered home in another ethical conundrum years later, when the *Bugle* became *The DB!* and Dexter Bennett changed Parker’s duties in the three-part story with the self-explanatory title “Peter Parker: Paparazzi.”¹⁵⁶ In part three, Parker resigned rather than be a paparazzo, and joined the more reputable *Front Line* a few issues later.¹⁵⁷

154. Lee, “Crime-Master,” 17.

155. Stan Lee, “Rocked by the Shocker!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 72, May 1969, 10.

156. Dan Slott, *Amazing Spider-Man* 559-561, July-August 2008.

157. Dan Slott, “New Ways to Die Part One: Back With Vengeance,” *Amazing Spider-Man* 568, October 2008.

Parker remains to this day a freelance photographer, maintaining the fiction that he and Spider-Man are two separate people. But if we accept the rationale for Clark Kent to keep his secret identity, then we must accept Parker's also. Plus, in one storyline in which his identity was public knowledge (since erased), his Aunt May was assassinated by The Kingpin as revenge on Spider-Man.¹⁵⁸ For the record, he has avoided re-enactments or false photos since the examples cited.

Betty Brant was the next *Bugle* name we learned, introduced as Jameson's secretary (and Parker's love interest) in *Amazing Spider-Man* 4 (1963). Later, after marrying reporter Ned Leeds and becoming a widower, she studied to become an investigative reporter, a position she now holds. Aside from her longevity, there is little else to distinguish Brant, who is generally depicted as a competent reporter, in her role as supporting character. However, it should be noted that she remains with *The DB!* as a crime reporter, despite its tabloid approach to news and after most of her friends have moved to *Front Line*. This does not speak well for her ethics, and in the comics she is now estranged from the old *Bugle* crew as a result.

The next reporter introduced in *Amazing Spider-Man* was Frederick Foswell, who in his short fictional life never managed to decide which side of the law he was on. He flip-flopped often in search of his big break, and can't be described as ethical. But he died on the side of the white hats.

158. J. Michael Straczynski, "The War at Home!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 538, February 2007.

Foswell was introduced in 1964 as “one of (Jameson’s) most capable columnists,”¹⁵⁹ but by the end of the story was revealed to be The Big Man, a criminal overlord. He returned, with the more accurate description of crime reporter, in 1965.

He was shown to be good in that job. In 1965, it was he whose diligence saved the newspaper from disgrace by researching a phony doctor’s credentials.¹⁶⁰ In 1966, he shadowed an old cell-mate who was being released from jail, which paid off when the criminal scientist returned to old habits.¹⁶¹ An underworld character called the Crime-Master considered Foswell “a constant threat to me! Unless . . . unless I eliminate him!”¹⁶²

But the Crime-Master failed, and it was Foswell who brought the criminal down. “When I was known as The Big Man, before I went straight, I knew all the city’s gang leaders – and I knew how they worked!” he explained to Jameson, Spider-Man, and the police. “Using that knowledge, and my own underworld grapevine, it wasn’t hard to figure out which racket boss was the Crime-Master!”¹⁶³

In addition to his insider knowledge, Foswell also engaged in what Saltzman calls “masquerading.”¹⁶⁴ He dressed as “Patch,” an underworld stoolie – an undercover role which could get him killed, and he knew it. “The game I’m playing is a dangerous one! One error . . . one miscalculation . . . could mean my very life! But, I can’t back out

159. Lee, “Enforcers,” 7.

160. Lee, “Mad,” 16.

161. Stan Lee, “Once Upon a Time, There Was a Robot . . . !” *Amazing Spider-Man* 37, June 1966.

162. Lee, “Crime-Master,” 10.

163. Lee “Crime-Master,” 13.

164. Saltzman, “Deception,” 59.

now!”¹⁶⁵ He took the chance because it was the only way to get information that was, as the Code would phrase it, vital to the public interest. “It would have been too dangerous for **Frederick Foswell** to mingle with the mobs, gaining information,” explained Foswell. “But, the underworld never guessed that the informer who betrayed them was the character known as **Patch!**”¹⁶⁶

Foswell routinely tipped off the police as Patch, and in one instance, gave information to the crime-fighter who brought him down as The Big Man. “I think there’s gonna be a **robbery** on pier six tonight!” Patch told Spider-Man. “Haven’t enough evidence to convince the police – but **you** could check on it!”¹⁶⁷ Strangely, Foswell also occasionally seemed to be in Spider-Man’s corner, as when he asked Jameson, “what have you **got** against that guy, anyway, boss?”¹⁶⁸ On another occasion, he reminded Jameson, “Spidey’s the **good guy**, isn’t he?”¹⁶⁹ And then later, “Spider-Man **can’t** be so bad, Chief! They say he helped (Norman) Osborn’s **son!**”¹⁷⁰

But for all that, when criminals began to assemble in New York, he saw a second chance at the big time and decided to take it. “Judging by the (crooks) I’ve **seen**, it could be the most **powerful** army of crime ever assembled!” he thought. “And, since **somebody** will have to **lead** them . . . why couldn’t it be . . . the man called **Patch?!!**”

Later he thought, “Not a man alive knows I’m **really** Frederick Foswell! As **Foswell**, I’m

165. Lee “Crime-Master,” 4.

166. Lee, “Crime-Master,” 20.

167. Lee, “Destiny,” 17.

168. Stan Lee, “The Thrill of the Hunt!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 34, March 1966, 19.

169. Lee, “Hunter,” 14.

170. Lee, “Hunter,” 17.

just a two-bit reporter . . . but if I could become the king of **crime** once again . . . ! Now that I've gone straight, everyone **trusts** me! They'd never suspect!"¹⁷¹ He told the new boss, "I **thought** you'd realize you **needed** me, Kingpin! . . . Because nobody's **ever** been able to take over all the mobs before – except **me**! I know **hard** it is to keep them in **line**! You'd be a **fool** to pass up any help you can **get**!"¹⁷²

But Foswell changed his mind again when The Kingpin ordered Jameson killed. "I'll go along with **anything** that'll make us a buck," he said, "but cold-blooded **murder** just isn't my **style**."¹⁷³ More importantly, it was Jameson's murder in particular he couldn't tolerate. "You're the only one who ever **helped** me," he said, as he tried to rescue Jameson, "or gave me a second **chance** . . . ! I didn't want **you** to be hurt! I'll hold 'em off for you . . . **somehow**!"¹⁷⁴ He did succeed in holding off The Kingpin's goons long enough for Jameson to escape, but was killed in the process.

For all of Foswell's indecision, it was his last decision for which he is remembered. "Jameson gambled **right** . . . for once!" thought Spider-Man. "He gave an ex-con a **job** . . . a second chance . . . ! And, when the chips were down, Foswell **repaid** the debt . . . the only way he could . . . with his **life**!"¹⁷⁵ Jameson summed up the point, in case anyone missed it: "I don't know how . . . or **why** . . . he got involved with The

171. Stan Lee, "From the Depths of Defeat!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 49, June 1967, 10-11.

172. Lee, "Clutches," 6.

173. Lee, "To Die a Hero!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 52, September, 1967, 10.

174. Lee, "Hero," 17.

175. Lee, "Hero," 19.

Kingpin. But there's one thing I **do** know . . . when Fred Foswell breathed his last . . . he died a **hero!**"¹⁷⁶

The next major *Bugle* staffer introduced was the aforementioned Ned Leeds, in *Amazing Spider-Man* 18 (1964).¹⁷⁷ For most of his existence he was little more than a cipher. Originally he was romantic competition for Parker with Betty Brant, and eventually won, marrying her in 1976.¹⁷⁸

In his early days he was depicted as a sterling fellow and nice guy. He came to Brant's defense and took her home when the Scorpion invades the Bugle offices in 1965.¹⁷⁹ The first time he lost his temper with Parker, he apologized the following issue.¹⁸⁰ He was such a nice guy that Parker, despite losing out to him with Brant, thought "I sure wish he was just a **creep**, so I could really dislike him."¹⁸¹

However, the marriage with Brant proved troubled, and eventually the reason why emerged: Leeds had a second, criminal life. It was not his fault, though, since the miniseries *Spider-Man: Hobgoblin Lives* 1-3 (January-April 1997) revealed that the first Hobgoblin, Roderick Kingsley, had repeatedly hypnotized Leeds to take his place as Hobgoblin III (there was another in between). Over the years the repeated procedure resulted in Leeds becoming unstable, further resulting in marital discord. Leeds was

176. Lee, "Hero," 19.

177. Lee, "End."

178. Len Wein, "On a Clear Day You Can See . . . The Mirage!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 156, May 1976.

179. Lee, "Step."

180. Lee, "Green."

181. Lee, "Step," 19.

killed by agents of The Foreigner who mistook him for the original Hobgoblin,¹⁸² making his death, like his life, that of a secondary character.

The introduction of Joe “Robbie” Robertson came on the heels of Leeds, a major character who first appeared in 1967 as Jameson’s second-in-command,¹⁸³ and was usually (but not always) referred to as city editor of the *Bugle*. Readers knew he was a good guy right away, when he reacted to Jameson’s kidnapping in the following issue with a quick, clear, and compassionate response: He deduced the boss had been taken against his will; called the police; took over the city desk; and assigned the best crime reporter to investigate – all in two panels. “Let’s **go**, boy!” he instructed Leeds. “There’s no time to **waste!**”¹⁸⁴

“As a counterpoint to Jameson, I created the character of Robbie Robertson, the clear-thinking, impartial, black editor of the *Daily Bugle*,” Lee explained. “I tried to write the stories so that the reader got the feeling that Robbie suspected Peter might be Spider-Man, but the thoughtful, fair-minded editor would never let on that he knew, nor would he be inclined to blow the whistle on the masked web-slinger who was so truly heroic a figure.”¹⁸⁵

From that alone we knew Lee intended for Robertson to be ethical, and as a corrective to Jameson’s eccentricities. A typical example in one of his earliest

182. Peter David, “The Hobgoblin Revealed!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 289, June 1987.

183. Lee, “Clutches.”

184. Lee, “Hero,” 4.

185. Lee, *Excelsior*, 137.

appearances, when he overrode Jameson's instructions to Leeds to smear Spider-Man: "Write the story as it **is**, Ned! Don't let the boss's **bias** throw you a curve!"¹⁸⁶

His role appears to be sort of a Jiminy Cricket, fearlessly correcting Jameson's unethical and irrational impulses. He is constantly standing up to the boss. When Jameson tried to imply that Spider-Man and Dr. Octopus were the same, Robertson responded, "Come **off** it, JJ! They've been seen **together!**"¹⁸⁷ In the next issue he defended a reluctant source with a "be **reasonable**, chief!" A few panels later, he backed up Brant when she corrected the boss: "She's **right**, JJ!"¹⁸⁸ – even though Jameson then, predictably, exploded in a temper tantrum.

That last is typical of Robertson, in that he tends to protect employees, especially Peter Parker, from Jameson's wrath. "Better hightail it, son" he told Parker paternally in one scene, "before (Jameson) blows a gasket."¹⁸⁹ When Jameson criticized Parker's absences, Robertson responded, "Considering the way you treat that kid . . . it's a wonder you see him at all!"¹⁹⁰ In another instance, Robertson defended Parker for not getting photos no one else could get either: "The kid can't do the **impossible!**"¹⁹¹ Later, Robertson reminded his boss that Parker is as "good as they **come** – and you **know** it!"¹⁹²

Robertson is also the working superhero's friend by virtue of being *Bugle* management. In *Amazing Spider-Man* 71 (April 1969), as acting managing editor he gave

186. Stan Lee, "Doc Ock Wins!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 55, December 1967, 11.

187. Lee, "Wins," 11.

188. Stan Lee, "Disaster!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 56, January 1968, 13.

189. Lee, "Monster," 12.

190. Stan Lee, "Crisis on the Campus!" *Amazing Spider-Man* 68, January 1969, 8.

191. Lee, "Arms," 20.

192. Stan Lee, "A Day in the Life of –" *Amazing Spider-Man* 99, August 1972, 4.

Parker the biggest check he'd ever seen from the *Bugle*. In 1971) he sent Parker to London on assignment – where his girlfriend happened to be, staying with relatives there following the death of her father.¹⁹³

He even defends Spider-Man. “Correct me if I’m **wrong**, JJ,” he said in a 1968 story, “but wasn’t the Web-Slinger fighting to **protect** the city from the **Vulture?**”¹⁹⁴ In another instance, he planted a story for Spider-Man in the *Bugle* to draw out some criminals, and said to the Web-Slinger, “I’ve studied your improbable career too **closely!** Far as **I** can tell, you’ve **never** committed a crime!” But he was aware of the consequences. “You better know what you’re **doing**, man . . . ‘cause **Jameson** will have my hide if I play up a dull yarn like that for **nothing!**”¹⁹⁵ In 1970 he told Jameson, who was ranting out his window at Spider-Man, “**Cool** it, mister! **He’s** not hurting anyone **half** as much as all that **pollution** up there!”¹⁹⁶

He has no illusions, either, about the boss’ state of mind: “If I could just convince **Jameson** that he’s **wrong** about the Web-Slinger!” he told George Stacy. “His **hatred** of him is almost **psychotic!**”¹⁹⁷ Still, he remains compassionate, almost sympathetic. “Poor Jameson!” he thought after yet another display of irrational Jameson temper. “He’s never

193. Lee, “Terrorist.”

194. Stan Lee, “The Impossible Escape!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 65, October 1968, 4,

195. Stan Lee, “On the Trail of . . . The Chameleon!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 80, January 1970, 11.

196. Stan Lee, “Doc Ock Lives!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 89, October 1970, 7.

197. Stan Lee, “The Madness of Mysterio!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 66, November 1968, 11.

happy – unless he’s **miserable!** But, he’ll get **over** it soon enough.”¹⁹⁸ Robertson is so forgiving, he even got injured saving Jameson’s life in 1968.¹⁹⁹

Some may consider Robertson a sell-out, playing second fiddle to a cranky white guy, and even his own son Randy criticized him for becoming “part of the **establishment** . . . the **white man’s** establishment!” Robertson sees it otherwise: “Isn’t this what we all **want** . . . what we’re all **fighting** for, boy? To **make** it on our **own**? To prove we’re as **good** . . . or **better** . . . than **anyone??**”²⁰⁰ Still, Robertson supports his son’s right to protest in that story, again in 1972,²⁰¹ and a few more times down the road.

He occasionally tells Jameson off. When he was awaiting word on a meeting between the dean of Empire State University and his son’s student protest group, he refused an assignment from Jameson. “So long as my **son** is involved, **nobody** covers this story but **me!** If you want **Spider-Man** – go find him **yourself!**” “You . . . you can’t talk to **me** that way!” Jameson huffed. “Don’t **bet** on it!” Robertson replied.²⁰²

Another exchange between Robertson and Jameson was revealing about their relationship. “I don’t **like** it, JJ. You’re too **happy**. That means **trouble** . . . for someone,” Robertson said. “**That’s** why you’re a good city editor,” Jameson replied. “You’ve got a **suspicious** mind.”²⁰³

198. Lee, “Campus,” 8.

199. Stan Lee, “The Vulture’s Prey,” *Amazing Spider-Man* 64, September 1968, 10.

200. Stan Lee, “Mission: Crush The Kingpin!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 69, February 1969, 5.

201. Stan Lee, “The Spider Slayer!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 105, February 1972.

202. Stan Lee, “Spider-Man Wanted!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 70, March 1969, 8.

203. Stan Lee, “And Then Came Electro!” *Amazing Spider-Man* 82, March 1970, 13.

However, Robertson went too far defending Parker after Spider-Man revealed his identity publicly (in a story since erased), and Jameson fired him. Robertson was re-hired later, but quit for ethical reasons when the *Bugle* became *The DB!*²⁰⁴ Robertson was revealed to have joined the more reputable *Front Line* a few issues later.²⁰⁵

But even Robertson is not a perfect newsman. In a 1988 story, Robertson revealed he knew of a murder by a man he grew up with, a super-strong, albino African-American named Lonnie “Tombstone” Lincoln, and failed to reveal it out of fear. When Tombstone returned, Robertson took the high road by reporting Tombstone’s crime and his own to the justice department, and made an offer (that Jameson declined) to avoid hurting the newspaper: “Naturally, I’ll resign as the Bugle’s editor-in-chief.”²⁰⁶ In his subsequent trial Robertson was convicted and sentenced to three years, but his later efforts to recapture an escaped Tombstone earned him a pardon.²⁰⁷ Overall, though, Robertson is painted in hagiographic hues. He is “the real deal,” in the words of newbie reporter Terri Kidder in 2004. “This guy was reporting on the **Klan** down in the **South** when young, black men would disappear and never be **heard** from again,” she said admiringly. “This guy is a reporter’s reporter. . . . I never met **anyone** in our business who so wholeheartedly believes that what they are doing is the single most **important** thing a person can **do** in our society.”²⁰⁸

204. Dan Slott, “Peter Parker, Paparazzi Part Three: Photo Finished,” *Amazing Spider-Man* 561, August 2008.

205. Slott, “Vengeance,” 13.

206. Gerry Conway, “Will!” *Spectacular Spider-Man* 142, September 1988, 20.

207. Gerry Conway, “Shakedown,” *Spectacular Spider-Man* 157, November 1989.

208. Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 2,” 5

One major *Daily Bugle* staffer is a reporter who doesn't spend much time in the pages of *Amazing Spider-Man*. Ben Urich first appeared in 1978,²⁰⁹ and has been mostly a supporting character in that book, rather than *Amazing Spider-Man*. Initially, he was almost a stereotype of a newspaper reporter, described by the Marvel Database website as a "chain-smoking, tough-as-nails investigative journalist."²¹⁰

Urich no longer smokes, and is not physically tough at 5'9" and 140 pounds, but he is often depicted as courageous. For example, he and Daredevil helped each other in uncovering and exposing the activities of The Kingpin, master of the New York underworld, a villain who began in *Amazing Spider-Man* but has had a lengthier career in *Daredevil*. Urich displayed great bravery in this investigation, although it damaged his marriage, as his long-suffering wife complained of never seeing him.

Urich is also a courageous thorn in the side of Norman "Green Goblin" Osborn. He earned the villain's enmity by researching and publishing a book revealing Osborn's criminal identity during a long absence by the super-villain.²¹¹ When Osborn returned and used his resources to restore his good name, and then secretly killed a *Bugle* reporter, it was Urich who discovered Osborn's connection and pushed Jameson to go after him.²¹² Urich continued his crusade even after Osborn became head of the government-run super-villain rehabilitation program the Thunderbolts, the espionage organization S.H.I.E.L.D., and the superhero team the Avengers – and when other news organizations

209. Roger McKenzie, "Death is the Cobra and Mr. Hyde!" *Daredevil* 153, July 1978.

210. "Ben Urich (Earth-616)," Marvel Database, [http://marvel.wikia.com/Benjamin_Urich_\(Earth-616\)](http://marvel.wikia.com/Benjamin_Urich_(Earth-616)) (accessed July 25, 2010).

211. Kurt Busiek, "Legacy of Evil," *Spider-Man: Legacy of Evil* 1, June 1996.

212. Bendis, "Thin Air, Part 4."

were openly cheering Osborn. Urich challenged Osborn at a press conference, with the president standing by Osborn's side, despite catcalls from his colleagues. This prompted Robertson to say: "That's the damned bravest thing I've ever seen."²¹³ Later, when Osborn launched an invasion without presidential permission, Urich risked death to cover the invasion as a counter-point to Osborn's hand-picked media stooge, a caricature of Glenn Beck named Todd Keller.²¹⁴

Urich routinely displays impressive ethics. In 1980 he discovered Daredevil's secret identity as lawyer Matt Murdock, but kept it to himself. "I'm a reporter, Matt, and I know what this story means to me," he said – but also confessed "I know what you mean to this town" and burned his notes.²¹⁵ Years later, when the *Daily Globe* outed Murdock, Urich lied to Jameson by denying that the attorney was Daredevil. He told Jameson that he already knew who Daredevil was before the *Globe* story, and the *Globe* was wrong. When Jameson pressed him to reveal this other identity, Urich refused by giving what amounts to a Journalism 101 speech about protecting sources:

This information of Daredevil's is entrusted to me for a reason. A reason that, frankly, is none of your business. But – in return for my trust in this matter, I have been given any number of confidential pieces of information that I **do** share with this newspaper on a daily basis. If I break this confidence, not only would I be the biggest @!!?* ever, but my open door to dozens of much more important stories – stories that affect the lives of the people of this city – would be closed to me, and you, forever. And on top of that – hey! You know what? It's not news, Jonah. . . . Outing someone? Endangering the life of a decent person for the sole purpose of selling newspapers? . . . It's not news. It's an assassination.²¹⁶

213. Brian Reed, "Chapter Five: Dark Reign," *Secret Invasion: Front Line 5*, January 2009, 21.

214. Brian Reed, "Siege Embedded," *Siege Embedded* 1-4, March-July 2010.

215. Roger McKenzie, "Exposé!" *Daredevil* 164, May 1980.

216. Brian Bendis, *Daredevil* (second series) 34, August 2002, 9-10.

Later, Urich revealed that he also knows Spider-Man's secret identity, which neither the readers nor Peter Parker knew until Urich asked for Spider-Man's help to stop Osborn. When Parker asked how he found out, Urich replied: "Peter, I'm an award-winning journalist for a major metropolitan newspaper! We worked together for years, on the **same** stories . . . it's a **little** more insulting to think that I **wouldn't** have figured it out **eventually**." But Parker had words of warning about that sort of information. "You've clearly proved with Murdock that you can be trusted with a secret . . . it's just that – it's **dangerous**." Urich reminded Parker that Murdock's ninja ex-girlfriend Elektra terrorized and stabbed him as a result of knowing Daredevil's secret,²¹⁷ so danger was nothing new.²¹⁸

A third time Urich withheld information for what he felt were ethical considerations is a bit more questionable. In 2006, the Marvel Universe government passed a Superhero Registration Act that compelled those with super-powers to register with the government or be arrested. Tony "Iron Man" Stark took a pro-registration stance, while Steve "Captain America" Rogers felt the SRA was a violation of civil rights and took an opposite stance, resulting in a superhero "civil war."²¹⁹ Then an assassination attempt on an ambassador from Atlantis almost resulted in war with that undersea kingdom, which briefly united the antagonists. But Urich (and fellow reporter Sally Floyd) discovered the assassination attempt to have been faked by Stark, to provide the warring superheroes with a common enemy. Urich and Floyd opted not to publish the story, as they felt it would jeopardize the good Stark was planning to do as head of the

217. Frank Miller, "Spiked!" *Daredevil* 179, February 1982.

218. Bendis, "Thin Air, Part 4."

219. Mark Millar, "Civil War," *Civil War* 1-7, July 2006-January 2007.

SRA – a dubious position, as journalists have no special right to protect lawbreakers, and Stark had broken a great many, including acts of treason. But Stark was ousted soon anyway, and the point became moot.

This is related to an instance where Urich displayed integrity by resigning from the *Daily Bugle* because Jameson refused to believe a connection Urich found between Stark and Osborn.²²⁰ This circumstance is what led him to co-found the Frontline.com news website, then *Front Line* newspaper, with Floyd,²²¹ which he is deliberately trying to keep to the highest ethical standards.

However, Urich hasn't always been heroic. As discussed above, he was frightened off a story when The Kingpin sent an assassin to break his fingers and warn Urich off his latest exposé of the crime lord. However, when the assassin strangled Urich's source while he could hear the murder on the phone as a means of intimidation, it had the opposite effect. Although the reporter was at first traumatized, he found his courage and turned in stories headlined "Cop strangled in hospital bed" and "The Kingpin of crime – First in a six-part series"²²²

There have been numerous instances since where The Kingpin, Osborn, and other criminals have tried to intimidate Urich, but these attempts no longer work. Urich remains a moral presence in Marvel's superhero comics to this day, especially with the website-cum-newspaper *Front Line*.

Kat Farrell is another *Bugle* reporter, one portrayed as either overly ambitious or dedicated to the truth – often at the same time. In her debut miniseries in 2002, she was

220. Paul Jenkins, "Embedded," *Civil War: Front Line* 10, December 2006, 5.

221. Paul Jenkins, "Embedded," *Civil War: Front Line* 11, April 2007, 14.

222. Frank Miller, "Born Again," *Daredevil* 231, June 1986, 4-5.

determined to report on “real” heroes like policemen and firefighters, rather than “capes.”²²³ But when her story took her into dangerous super-villain territory, she risked death to get the answers. This is admirable behavior, and perfectly in line with Code’s admonition to “seek the truth.”

On the other hand, it is often hinted or broadly implied that her heroism is entwined with her great ambition. She was flabbergasted that Urich didn’t use his knowledge of Daredevil’s identity to make himself more famous, and in 2003 was jealous that Urich was touted by the *Bugle* on bus posters and billboards: “He had the story of the year!! And he kept it . . . to himself! I’m sure he had some big reason and all but that just seems insane to me.”²²⁴ The “big reason” that Urich withheld the secret as a matter of ethics does not seem to occur to her.

Another reporter, Terri Kidder, only appeared in the first two issues of *The Pulse*, and apparently existed for the sole purpose of being killed to provide motivation for the *Bugle* staff. She is only worth mention in that she was obviously an homage to Lois Lane. Her name was a combination of two actresses to play Lane – Teri Hatcher and Margot Kidder – and she made an oblique reference to having worked at a paper very much like the *Daily Planet*: “My last job was at one of those big, old-fashioned, great metropolitan newspapers . . .”²²⁵

Other, less important characters have passed through the *Bugle* doors over the decades – Kate Cushing, Jacob Conover, Lance Bannon, and many more – and taken together, they are a motley collection. But they are not the only journalists to emerge with

223. Bill Rosemann, *Deadline* 1-4, June-September 2002.

224. Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 2,” 7.

225. Bendis, “Thin Air, Part 2,” 3.

ethical conflicts or failings since 1963. Many more reporters and editors followed, and the important ones seemed to owe as much to J. Jonah Jameson as they did to Perry White.

Chapter 4

The Good, the Bad, the Unethical: Journalism 1963-Present

It didn't take long after the advent of J. Jonah Jameson before other journalists began misbehaving. One of the first was another from Stan Lee, in the "Thor" strip in Marvel's *Journey Into Mystery* only two years later.

Harris Hobbs was introduced in 1965 as reporter with the Affiliated Press who, in time-honored, two-fisted journalism fashion, tackled the super-villain Crusher "Absorbing Man" Creel with a box of dynamite.¹ In the next issue, he shadowed Thor to get closer to the story, and even helped the Thunder God, by taunting Creel until he forgot his hostages.² However, in Hobbs' next appearance, he was somewhat less heroic. He surreptitiously took a picture of Thor as he changed into his civilian identity of Dr. Don Blake, and blackmailed the Thunder God into taking him to Asgard. "I am a **reporter!**" Hobbs exclaimed. "It would be the greatest story of all! Even if I never **write** it – even if I must one day **forget** it – **still**, I would have done what no newsman before me has done! I'd have seen the home of the **gods!**"³ Thor was impressed by what he considered professional dedication, and risked Odin's wrath to bring a mere mortal across the Rainbow Bridge. At the end of the tale, though, Hobbs returned with nothing – his camera accidentally smashed, and "granted the gift of forgetfulness" by Thor. "Back to Earth!" Hobbs lamented. "Without pictures – without evidence – without even –

1. Stan Lee, "The Stronger I Am, the Sooner I Die!" *Journey Into Mystery* 114, March 1965, 6.

2. Stan Lee, "The Vengeance of the Thunder God," *Journey Into Mystery* 115, April 1965, 9.

3. Stan Lee, "Where Mortals Fear to Tread!" *Journey Into Mystery* 122, November 1965, 15.

memory!”⁴ That was only appropriate, given that extortion is frowned upon by the Code of Ethics.

Hobbs returned when “the gift of forgetfulness” began to wear off in 1978,⁵ and the following issue Loki spirited Hobbs and a documentary crew to Asgard. This time it wasn’t Hobbs who acted unethically, but a cameraman, Roger “Red” Norvell, who flirted with Thor’s significant other, the goddess Sif. Rebuffed and angry, Norvell accepted Loki’s offer to become a fake Thor with items imbued with the Thunder God’s power. He did so, then kidnapped Sif, acting more like the mythological, red-haired Thor than the current blond superhero version – quick to anger, petulant, and arrogant. He died nobly enough to go to Valhalla, though, when the prophesied Ragnarok swept over Asgard and he was killed by the Midgard Serpent, Jörmungand, as predicted in the Elder Eddas.⁶ Norvell was resurrected in 1994⁷ and behaved a bit more heroically, but disappeared after another disaster struck the gods in 1997,⁸ his civilian self not having been seen since 1978.⁹ Neither he nor Hobbs can take much pride in their overall behavior, however.

Some of the more extreme journalism characters come from Spider-Man co-creator Steve Ditko, who in the 1960s became a fierce adherent of the Ayn Rand philosophy known as Objectivism, as extolled in books like *Atlas Shrugged*. He left *Amazing Spider-Man* in 1966, according to the late Charlton and DC editor Dick

4. Stan Lee, “While a Universe Trembles!” *Journey Into Mystery* 123, December 1965, 16.

5. Roy Thomas, “The Midgard Serpent!” *Thor* 273, July 1978.

6. Roy Thomas, “At Long Last – Ragnarok?” *Thor* 278, December 1978.

7. Roy Thomas, “Come the Lightning,” *Thor* 478, September 1994.

8. Tom DeFalco, “Final Jeopardy!” *Journey Into Mystery* 513, October 1997.

9. Roy Thomas, “Thor vs. Thor!” *Thor* 276, October 1978.

Giordano, due to disagreements with Lee over scripting credits, and became “the main architect” of the superhero line at Charlton Comics.¹⁰

One Ditko creation didn’t find a home in mainstream publications, that being the Objectivist avenger named Mr. A, a character Bell calls “a hero that ran counter to any of the prevailing moral, political, or sociological mores of the time.”¹¹ The name “Mr. A” is an homage to the chapter title “A is A” in *Atlas Shrugged*, and to the law of identity in Aristotelian logic, signifying that “reality is a truth Man cannot deny.”¹² Mr. A – and his civilian identity, reporter Rex Graine of the *Daily Crusader* – saw things in starkly black and white terms and preferred to allow criminals to die. “I have no mercy or compassion for aggressors . . . only for their victims . . . for the innocent!” Says Mr. A as he rescues an injured woman while allowing a criminal named Angel to fall to his death. “To have any sympathy for a killer is an insult to their victims. Even if you weren’t hurt . . . I wouldn’t have saved Angel!”¹³ Liberals in the strip were depicted as sappy, impotent bleeding hearts. Ditko had no illusions that such a character could fly past the Comics Code of the day, given its many prohibitions and restrictions on behavior. The very first rule alone prohibits any action “to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice.”¹⁴ So Ditko published Mr. A in non-Code-approved “underground” comic books like *witzend*.

10. Dick Giordano, “Foreword,” *The Action Heroes Archives, Vol. 2* (DC Comics: New York, 2007).

11. Blake Bell, *Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2008), 109.

12. Bell, *Strange*, 110.

13. Steve Ditko, “Mr. A,” *witzend* 3, 1967, 5.

14. Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), 166.

For Charlton he created a watered-down version of Mr. A called The Question, who by night was a crime-fighter in a blank full-face mask, but by day was television broadcaster Vic Sage of the World-Wide Broadcasting Co. As described by Bell, Sage's "Rand-inspired editorials infuriated sponsors, the public, and all but the sympathetic owner of the station, Sam Starr."¹⁵ For example, when police were working to shut down gangster Lou Dicer's illegal gambling operation, Sage lectured in his nightly broadcast: "As usual, you, the enraged public, wonder how a leech like Dicer can thrive so readily among you. . . . Part of the responsibility lies with *you!* You are willing partners in Dicer's crimes!"¹⁶ Sage followed the two-fisted journalist tradition by tracking down criminals himself (along with his staff, especially producer/love interest Nora Lace), but changed into The Question for most of the fist-fights. Still, Sage was hated by Ditko's vision of the liberal public, who picketed his station ("Even criminals have rights!"¹⁷), and by his superiors, who feared his crusades would drive away advertising or put them in danger. This was in line with Objectivist philosophy, which labeled people as cowardly who didn't adhere to its Manichean tenets. But while The Question was not as heavy-handed as Mr. A in doling out the philosophy, Sage did leave two criminals to drown in the sewer in 1967 – although Ditko dodged the Code with a word balloon implying they survived.¹⁸ Co-writer Steve Skeates explains, "(Ditko) was aware that the Code wouldn't let him get away with really being a hard-liner."¹⁹ In The Question's final

15. Bell, *Strange*, 110.

16. Steve Ditko, "Who Is The Question?" *Blue Beetle* 1, June 1967, 2-3.

17. Steve Ditko and Steve Skeates, "Kill Vic Sage!" *Blue Beetle* 4, December 1967, 2.

18. Ditko "Kill," 8.

19. Bell, *Strange*, 115.

appearance at Charlton, Ditko delivered a classic Randian soliloquy as Vic Sage ignores, rather than confronts, a colleague who stole his news story: “When does a man achieve victory?” he asked. “When after he has honestly applied himself to the task facing him and having overcome it . . . is secure in the knowledge that whatever he has accomplished, the fruits of that goal belong to him! He will know . . . no one else matters!”²⁰

The Charlton properties were sold to DC Comics in 1983, and *The Question* made a comeback in the hands of writer Denny O’Neil and artist Denys Cowan in 1987. O’Neil dispensed with Objectivism, but still illustrated a different philosophical slant in most adventures, with a suggested reading list on the letters page. O’Neil was more interested in Eastern philosophies than Randism; both Sage and *The Question* became Zen-like, and more interested in posing questions than doling out answers, as they did under Ditko. Nor was this *Question* a journalist in his private life, but he did date one – Myra Connelly of KBEL-TV, a television reporter who later became mayor of Hub City. She wasn’t depicted as perfect by any means; she cheated on her (admittedly abusive and alcoholic) husband with Sage, and wasn’t above a dirty trick or two to get elected. However, *The Question* was canceled after thirty-six issues at DC, and Sage was written out altogether in the series *52*, where he died of lung cancer in 2007.²¹ The new *Question* is a female ex-cop, with no connection to journalism.

Ditko created another variation on Mr. A in 1968 at DC Comics with *The Creeper*, in a try-out book called *Showcase*. Once again, the superhero’s civilian identity

20. Steve Ditko, “What Makes a Hero?” *Mysterious Suspense* 1, October 1968, 25.

21. Geoff Johns, Grant Morrison, Greg Rucka, and Mark Waid, “Miracles and Wonders,” *52* 41, February 2007.

was a broadcaster – “outspoken program host” Jack Ryder, who is first seen insulting a friend of the sponsor’s, a “crusader against all kinds of violence,” with the unlikely name Clayton Wetley.²² Again, this is in line with Objectivist philosophy. Ryder was fired, as horror writer Steve Niles describes in a reprint collection, “for mouthing off to the wrong person about said person’s soft attitude toward criminals.”²³ Ryder was then hired by “network security,” which was (improbably) doing a favor for the CIA, and got involved in an international espionage plot where another convenient scientist gave him the ability to turn into The Creeper, a weird, yellow-skinned, green-haired Spider-Man-like gymnast with enhanced strength, increased stamina, and a weird laugh.

The try-out led to a series with O’Neil added as scripter, and once again Ditko’s Objectivism was watered down. “O’Neil’s and Ditko’s philosophical beliefs were at opposite ends of the spectrum,”²⁴ Bell explains, and by the second issue Ditko’s name no longer appeared as co-plotter. Also, Ryder remained an investigator, not a broadcaster.

By 1975, however, Ryder was back in front of a camera, doing “a documentary on prison reform”²⁵ for WHAM-TV. Although the art in “Menace of the Human Firefly!” was by Ditko, no Objectivist would believe in reform; Giordano remembers Ditko having once “jotted down a very bold note on (a *Creeper*) script that there was no such thing as an ex-criminal. Once you’ve committed a crime, you’re a criminal for life.”²⁶ So it is reasonable to assume Michael Fleisher’s script had no Ditko influence. At any rate, The

22. Steve Ditko and Don Segall, “The Coming of The Creeper!!” *Showcase* 73, March-April 1968, 2.

23. Steve Niles, “Introduction,” *The Creeper by Steve Ditko* (New York: DC Comics, 2010).

24. Bell, *Strange*, 117.

25. Michael Fleisher, “Menace of the Human Firefly!” *First Issue Special* 7, October 1975, 2.

26. Bell, *Strange*, 118.

Creeper returned in that story, and is still a viable character today, with Ryder still in front of the camera. The Objectivism is gone, but Ryder is still an obnoxious right-wing pundit, something along the lines of Bill O'Reilly, with a show called *You Are Wrong!* in Batman's Gotham City.²⁷ He is not, for the most part, depicted as particularly likeable.

Lamponing or riffing on real-world media personalities like O'Reilly is a temptation to which many comics writers have succumbed. A race-baiting conservative character named Dan Dunn, based on the confrontational style of Joe Pyne, appeared in a 1970 *Avengers* two-parter,²⁸ and was suspected to be the leader of a racist group called the Sons of the Serpent. (It turned out that both he and an African-American, left-wing pundit both sponsored the group, to increase ratings – and money – for them both.²⁹) Lola Barnett, an obvious play on gossip columnist Rona Barrett, set up shop at the *Daily Planet* for a while beginning in 1974.³⁰ Lester Verde, who began a villainous turn as Dr. Bong in the satirical *Howard the Duck* title in 1977,³¹ was based on the *Chicago Tribune*'s Bob Greene. Rush Limbaugh has had at least two characters modeled after him at DC Comics alone, Link Rambeau (beginning in 1993³²) and Dirk Armstrong (beginning in 1996³³). Rambeau was a throwaway character, but Armstrong appeared in at least twenty-seven issues of various Superman books, depicted as unpleasant but sincere – and therefore worthy of respect – in his right-wing beliefs. Arrogant right-wing

27. Steve Niles, "TV Eye on Me," *DCU: Brave New World* 1, August 2006, 1.

28. Roy Thomas, "The Sting of the Serpent!" *Avengers* 73, February 1970.

29. Roy Thomas, "Pursue the Panther!" *Avengers* 74, March 1970.

30. Cary Bates, "The Dragonfly Invasion of Metropolis!" *Superman* 275, May 1974.

31. Steve Gerber, "The Island of Dr. Bong!" *Howard the Duck* 15, August 1977.

32. Chuck Dixon, "City on Fire," *Detective Comics* 661, June 1993.

33. Roger Stern, "Going to Extremes," *Superman: The Man of Tomorrow* 6, Fall 1996.

cable news host Todd Keller, who appeared as a counterpoint to Ben Urich in *Siege: Embedded*, was an obvious stand-in for Glenn Beck, complete with fake tears.³⁴

Some journalists are depicted as using their power for personal agendas. Bethany Snow was introduced in *New Teen Titans* 22 (August 1982) as a television reporter who turned public opinion temporarily against the Titans by depicting them as persecuting the Church of Blood (of which she was secretly a member). She remained a major character through the Baron Blood storyline, which ran off and on in *New Teen Titans* for a couple of years.

Trish Tilby was introduced in *X-Factor* 7 (August 1986) as a reporter for NCBC (sometimes W-ARC TV), who became Hank “Beast” McCoy’s girlfriend, but whose sense of ethics and desire for ratings combined to induce her to report that a human was infected by the Legacy virus, which previously had affected only mutants. This predictably caused anti-mutant hysteria and violence, and resulted in hard feelings with the X-Men – especially the Beast, who broke up with her. They got back together, but when Hank further mutated into a feline state, she broke up with him, fearing his new look would be bad for her career. That wasn’t evil, but was certainly shallow.

However, Eddie Brock *was* evil. A reporter for the *Daily Globe*, Brock first appeared in *Web of Spider-Man* 18 (September 1986), apparently breaking the “Sin-Eater” serial-killer case with the confession of a man named Emil Gregg (although Brock dragged the mystery out for a while to boost circulation). But Spider-Man and Daredevil discovered, and revealed, that Gregg was a serial confessor and the real Sin-Eater was policeman Stan Carter, who was then captured before he could kill the next person on his

34. Reed, “Siege Embedded” (Part One), 4.

list, J. Jonah Jameson.³⁵ Brock was fired, and blamed it on Spider-Man. “I was a solid reporter, a respected member of the fourth estate,” Brock says, giving a somewhat subjective view of events. “If (Spider-Man) hadn’t butted in, no one would have known Gregg wasn’t the Sin-Eater. . . . Perhaps my life wouldn’t have been shattered!”³⁶ Consideration for the fate of Carter’s potential future victims didn’t seem to enter into Brock’s bout of self-pity, nor the possibility that an innocent man would be convicted. Nor did he seem aware that his sloppy reporting on Gregg was his own fault, as was keeping the information from the police, who would have quickly discovered Gregg was not the Sin-Eater. Those sins are substantially worse than the “error in judgment” Brock called them.³⁷ At any rate, he eventually got his chance for revenge after he bonded with an alien symbiote to become the super-villain Venom.

As mentioned above, Sally Floyd is another another significant journalist in the Marvel superhero universe, who was introduced in *Generation M* 1 (January 2006) as an alcoholic reporter for the left-wing *Alternative* newspaper in New York City. It was revealed in the course of the *Generation M* miniseries that Floyd’s daughter died of a mutation, which is what led to Floyd’s alcoholism. At the end of the series she saved her job by entering rehab, but later resigned from the *Alternative* at the end of *Civil War: Front Line*, having become disillusioned with her newspaper and her place in it.³⁸ As a solution to their mutual dissatisfaction, as noted above, she and Ben Urich formed

35. Peter David, “All My Sins Remembered!” *Spectacular Spider-Man* 110, January 1986.

36. David Michelinie, “Venom,” *Amazing Spider-Man* 300, May 1988, 26-28.

37. Michelinie, “Venom,” 28.

38. Jenkins, “Embedded” (Part 11), 6.

Frontline.com and later the *Front Line* newspaper, “to seek the truth without corporate meddling.”³⁹

It seems evident that readers are meant to believe Floyd is a journalist of the highest caliber, although her actions in the stories suggest otherwise. As one reviewer put it, “Sally Floyd is not a good journalist. Sally Floyd is not half as intelligent as she thinks she is. Sally Floyd is not a likeable human being.”⁴⁰ Her interviews in *Civil War: Front Line* 11 with the principals in the Civil War story she was covering – Tony Stark and Steve Rogers – read as incredibly shallow, immature, and biased. And her decision not to reveal what she had learned about Stark’s Machiavellian moves during the Civil War is a bit baffling, although it was presented as an ethical and admirable decision. Also, her decision to withhold from Urich that she had figured out Jameson is the secret financial backer of *Front Line*, which she divined in *World War Hulk: Front Line* 6 (December 2007),⁴¹ is also a terrible idea. After all, Urich is supposed to be a top-flight investigative journalist, one who figured out who both Daredevil and Spider-Man are in their civilian identities, and it is hard to believe he will not find out who is paying his bills. In all three cases, however, the stories indicated we were supposed to be impressed. So the takeaway is that Sally Floyd is supposed to be a competent and ethical journalist with a few personal foibles, despite clumsy stories that often indicate the reverse.

Another flawed character we’re meant to admire is Phil Sheldon, the freelance photographer who is the narrator and reader’s point-of-view character in *Marvels* and

39. Paul Jenkins, “Embedded: Behind Enemy Lines,” *World War Hulk: Front Line* 6, December 2007, 1.

40. Dave Wallace, “Daily Reviews: Civil War: Front Line #11,” *Comics Bulletin*, posted March 2, 2007, <http://www.comicsbulletin.com/reviews/117283547328642.htm> (accessed July 25, 2010).

41. Jenkins, “Embedded: Behind” (Part 6), 20.

Marvels: Eye of the Camera. The two miniseries are essentially histories of the rise of superheroes in the Marvel line, from the 1940s to present, and thanks to his job, Sheldon was always where the action was. “I was part of it,” he said in *Marvels* 1, as he provides a new perspective on the battle between the original Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner originally published in *Marvel Mystery Comics* 8-10 (June-August 1940). “I was right where I belonged. I was the **witness**.”⁴²

Sheldon was depicted as good-hearted and ethical. His heroes, for example, were Walter Winchell and H.V. Kaltenborn.⁴³ Although he occasionally freelanced for the *Daily Bugle*, he had no illusions about “Jonah’s distortions.”⁴⁴

Ironically, he despised Peter Parker, whom he saw as “leeching off Spider-Man’s deeds to earn a **dirty buck**.”⁴⁵ When he ran into Parker in the Bugle newsroom in *Marvels* 3, he thought: “Now **there’s** unbiased journalism in action for you! If I was Spider-Man, I’d beat the **stuffing** out of that little weasel!”⁴⁶

But Sheldon was hardly perfect. In the 1940s, he resented and feared the “Marvels,” as he called the superheroes popping up on the landscape, and broke off his engagement as a result. “This is **our** city! **Our world!**” he said in frustration to other journalists. “Who gave **them** the right to just come in and **take it away** from us?” Then to his fiancé, “A man’s got to be able to **protect** his family. If he can’t do that . . . he’s

42. Kurt Busiek, “A Time of Marvels,” *Marvels* 1, January 1994, 37-38.

43. Kurt Busiek, “The Day She Died,” *Marvels* 4, April 1994, 3.

44. Busiek, “Died,” 20.

45. Busiek, “Died,” 31.

46. Kurt Busiek, “Judgment Day,” *Marvels* 3, March 1994, 43.

got no business being a **husband**.”⁴⁷ But Sheldon showed he was capable of learning; by the end of the book he came to appreciate the Marvels, got over his fears and insecurities, and got married.

Sheldon also demonstrated myopic bigotry when mutants arrived in *Marvels 2* (February 1994). He joined with a mob throwing bricks at suspected mutants, but again showed he was capable of growth, as he changed his tune when he got home and discovered his two young daughters had taken in a young mutant girl whose parents have rejected her. She was cold, wet, homeless, on the run from the mob and mutant-hunting robots called Sentinels – and shockingly ugly. His first reaction – which he later regretted – was to wonder if she was “contagious.” Then he remembered Auschwitz, where he was at the liberation, and a witness to how cruel mankind can be to a minority, and was ashamed. “Dear **God**, Doris,” he said to his wife, before taking the child in. “She’s just a **little girl** -- !”⁴⁸

In the sequel, *Marvels: Eye of the Camera*, Sheldon suffered from depression, and began to doubt the utility of a life in journalism. “All these **pictures!**” he shouted to his wife. “All these **other people**, living, **doing** things, **matter!** And that’s **it**. That’s my **life!**”⁴⁹ When he was diagnosed with lung cancer, his frustration and self-loathing only intensified. In the end, though, Sheldon demonstrated he was still learning, when the young mutant girl he saved returned to thank him, and he came to understand the true value of his life. “But right there, **that** was my legacy,” he thought as he looked from his deathbed at his family. “Oh, the **pictures** were important. They meant something. And

47. Busiek, “Marvels,” 20-23.

48. Kurt Busiek, “Monsters,” *Marvels 2*, February 1994, 28-29.

49. Kurt Busiek, “Making Sense of the World,” *Marvels: Eye of the Camera 2*, February 2009, 13.

maybe that'd **last** a while. But **Jen**, and **Bethie**. And **Maggie**. . . . They're what **matters**, what always did. And we didn't do so **bad**, did we, Doris?"⁵⁰

Another significant comics journalist is Spider Jerusalem, the protagonist of writer Warren Ellis's sixty-issue *Transmetropolitan*, published by DC's mature-readers Vertigo line. Set in a far future (likely the twenty-third century), in "The City" (probably New York), *Transmetropolitan* followed the adventures of the combative Jerusalem as he jostled with two successive, and amazingly corrupt, presidential administrations. Jerusalem was patterned on gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, especially in erratic behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, and vulgar, self-referential journalism. The tone of the series was light, with abundant, often sexual, sight gags in a dystopian and chaotic future. But the series left little doubt that whatever Jerusalem's faults, he was a true believer in the cleansing power of journalism, and was, in a strange way, the only really moral character in the series.

Another Vertigo series starring a journalist is *DMZ*, by writer Brian Wood. This current series – expected to run sixty or seventy issues – is set in the near future, when militia groups across the country have linked up to fight a second American Civil War, pushing the United States Army east and north, with an uneasy standoff centering around Manhattan Island. Manhattan – the DMZ of the title – is where rookie photojournalist Matty Roth is air-dropped by the Liberty News Network in the first issue.⁵¹ Roth is the point-of-view character, a cynical but naïve outsider who eventually becomes something of an untouchable due to his fame as the only journalist on the island. He reports on the

50. Kurt Busiek, "Closing the Book," *Marvels: Eye of the Camera* 6, April 2010, 16-17.

51. Brian Wood, "On the Ground – Part 1," *DMZ* 1, January 2006.

struggles of daily life in this strange and dangerous place, and becomes increasingly sucked into its politics. It is not a clean, orderly story of journalistic purity, but the DMZ is not a very clean, orderly place, and Roth is depicted routinely sacrificing ethics on a daily basis to survive.

Meanwhile, the venerable *Daily Planet* is still adding employees. Some are quite admirable, like Ron Troupe, a level-headed African-American editorial writer who is described as “the most highly educated reporter on staff (who) has won more awards than anyone else at the paper.”⁵² Troupe made his debut in 1991,⁵³ and was married to Lois Lane’s sister Lucy in one incarnation, although it’s unlikely that union has survived the latest reboot.

Some are less admirable. Morgan Edge was introduced in *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen* 133 (1970) as the CEO of Galaxy Broadcasting System, which bought the *Daily Planet*. Edge was an outright villain for several years, a member of the crime cartel “Inter-Gang,” which was allied with the evil god Darkseid of Apokolips – until it was revealed in 1972 that the real Edge had been replaced by an evil clone.⁵⁴ However, when the real Edge was rescued, he was not much of an improvement, as he was an arrogant, condescending, micro-managing boss who made life difficult for the *Planet* staff. Edge was responsible for hiring Steve Lombard in 1973,⁵⁵ a former pro quarterback modeled physically on Joe Namath, whose practical jokes and bullying ways made him the bane of Clark Kent’s professional existence. Lombard was originally a sports broadcaster with

52. Geoff Johns, “Last Son Conclusion,” *Action Comics Annual* 11, Summer 2008, 54.

53. Dan Jurgens, “Dying Breed,” *Adventures of Superman* 480, July 1991.

54. Robert Kanigher, “Edge of Darkness!” *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* 118, January 1972.

55. Elliot S. Maggin, “Protectors of Earth, Inc.” *Superman* 274, April 1974.

GBS, and was dropped from the Superman books for a while, but was re-introduced in 2008 by Perry White at the *Daily Planet* as “our news Sports Editor.”⁵⁶ “Lombard sees himself as a man’s man,” according to *Action Comics Annual 11*, “everything that Clark Kent isn’t . . . (and) can’t figure out why Lois Lane doesn’t throw herself at him.”⁵⁷

Another new face is Cat Grant, a gossip columnist who first appeared in 1987.⁵⁸ She, too, was dropped from the books for several years but was re-introduced by Perry White in 2008: “**Catherine Grant** returns to us after a stint at the *Los Angeles Tattler*. She’ll be heading up entertainment and the arts.” To which Grant replied, “Why are you boys so **shy**? Call it what it **is**, Perry. I’m back to dish out the **gossip**. Teenage actresses pregnant, drunk, and in all-around general **discord** are a **specialty**.”⁵⁹ She then made a play for the married Clark Kent, drawing attention to her breasts, mentioning “surgery did **wonders** for **me**”⁶⁰ – a reference he pretended to misunderstand. Her description in the 2008 *Action Annual* said she “prides herself on knowing everyone’s personal business” and “often uses her looks to get into places most people don’t want her.”⁶¹ And, as mentioned, she picked a fight with Superman’s cousin by writing a vicious, petty, and mendacious hatchet job on the front page of the *Daily Planet* with the headline “Why the world doesn’t need a Supergirl.”

56. Geoff Johns, “First Contact,” *Action Comics* 866, August 2008, 9.

57. Johns, “Conclusion,” 54.

58. Marv Wolfman, “Man O’ War,” *Adventures of Superman* 424, January 1987.

59. Johns, “Contact,” 9.

60. Johns, “Contact,” 11.

61. Johns, “Conclusion,” 54.

While the examples above are some of the most significant journalists to be added to comics since *Amazing Spider-Man* 1, they barely scratch the surface. There are hundreds more, which would only be worth mention for fun, like Charlton's Johnny "Son of Vulcan" Mann, of the Worldwide News Syndicate; the *Nova Express* and *New Frontier* newspapers in *Watchmen*; the invisible *Phantom Jack*, written by *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reporter Michael San Giacomo; DC's Colin Thornton, editor of *Newstime* (and hidden alien); Roy Raymond, TV detective; "Becky Burdock, Vampire Reporter" from *Jack Staff*; Leonard "Scoop" Michaels from *G.I. Joe*; Carol "Ms. Marvel" Danvers, who for a short time was editor of Jameson's *Woman* magazine; Angel, the murdered girl friend in Pacific's *Skateman*; Vesper Fairchild, the radio personality who romanced Batman and was the victim in the long-running "Bruce Wayne: Murderer" storyline; the obituary writer who dies a different death in every issue of Vertigo's new *Daytripper*; all the lesser characters at the *Planet*, the *Bugle*, the *Metropolis Eagle*, the *Daily Globe*, WHIZ-AM, WHAM-TV, WGBS-TV, KBEL-TV, WMET-TV; and many, many more.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

From the advent of Clark Kent and Lois Lane in 1938 to the present, there have been seventy-two years of journalists in comics, and those stories, taken in aggregate, reveal a number of trends.

One is that until J. Jonah Jameson, only one major story from a major publisher – “Deadline!” from EC’s *Strange Suspense Stories* – portrayed a journalist as an out-and-out villain. There are doubtless many more stories in the many anthologies published from 1938 to 1963 that feature a criminal reporter or editor, like the reporter who becomes a killer in Ditko’s six-page “Dead Right” (*Strange Suspense Stories* #18, May 1954),¹ just given the sheer number of stories involved. But if so, they have not proved important enough to contest the prominence of heroic journalists in hundreds of famous and oft-reprinted stories, like those involving the *Daily Planet*.

It is inarguable that those *Daily Planet* reporters behaved in strange, unethical, or frivolous ways until roughly 1970. Certainly Jimmy Olsen and Lois Lane had a tendency to go in disguise, which, as Saltzman points out, is not a popular technique among the powers that be in journalism. In 1978 the Pulitzer committee denied the *Chicago Sun-Times* an award for setting up a fake bar to discover which city officials would demand

1. Blake Bell, ed., *Strange Suspense: The Steve Ditko Archives Vol. 1* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2009), 127.

bribes, he says, and “by the 1990s there was a good deal of hand-wringing and soul-searching over undercover reporting.”²

Yet “masquerading,”³ as Saltzman calls it, has a long and popular history in entertainment. From Babe Bennett pretending to be out-of-work stenographer Mary Dawson in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) to Gregory Peck pretending to be Jewish in *Gentlemen’s Agreement* (1947) to Kirstie Alley as Gloria Steinem pretending to be a Playboy bunny in *A Bunny’s Tale* (1985), film has a long and robust history of journalists masquerading as something they’re not. So have other areas of pop culture, like the “Fletch” series of novels by Gregory McDonald, about a Los Angeles reporter who is virtually always pretending to be someone he’s not (and became a movie in 1985). Why should comic books be any different?

The *Daily Planet* crew also occasionally crossed ethical or legal lines getting into places they didn’t belong – which pales in light of the illegalities perpetrated by the many two-fisted journalists of the 1940s and 1950s. The reporters found in superhero and crime comics of the Golden Age frequently acted more like police or private detectives than journalists, or acted as if they had no boundaries at all. But again, this is not unprecedented in pop culture, from the tough gumshoes of the pulps to the gunslingers of cowboy fiction to the soldiers of fortune in the comic strips to TV reporters like Carl Kolchak of *The Night Stalker* and Jack McGee of *The Incredible Hulk*, who pretty much went anywhere they wanted to, whether legal or not. All of these characters tended to act pretty much alike, so it’s no surprise to see that trend in comics as well.

2. Joe Saltzman, “Deception and Undercover Journalism: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Mr. Deeds*,” *Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies* (Lanham, MD: 2008), 61.

3. Saltzman, “Deception,” 59.

The upshot is that whatever illegalities we see in two-fisted journalists, or whatever questionable antics we observe in the *Daily Planet* staff, their creators meant for them to be seen as heroes. At the end of the day, they were acting as adjuncts to law enforcement, and were often seen to have the blessing of the police.

This stands in evidence to support the first hypothesis, “from the 1940s to 1963, the depiction of journalists in comics was as moral authority figures.” These characters may not have always acted in ways that conform to real-world legalities or codes of ethics, but in the eyes of their creators and their audience, they were clearly wearing white hats.

And with the 1986 revamp, the *Daily Planet* staff has become even more heroic. Perry White no longer prints “hoaxes,” Olsen no longer cross-dresses, and Lane no longer obsesses over Superman’s secret identity. The current Superman stories feature a tight-knit, highly professional, highly ethical editorial team of White, Kent, Lane, and Olsen.

But while writers of Perry White over the years expected him to be admired, creators who handled J. Jonah Jameson at Marvel expected very much the reverse. “I always thought the *Planet* and the *Bugle* were two different animals,” says former DC writer Elliot Maggin. “Jonah was a comic relief character. Perry was a mentor figure. It never even occurred to me to contrast the two.” Gerry Conway, primarily a Marvel writer, says much the same. “JJ and Perry are such different personalities, coming from completely different ethical and journalistic perspectives, that it wasn't hard to contrast them,” Conway said. “I saw JJ as the publisher of a *New York Post*, and Perry as the editor/publisher of a more tradition-oriented paper like the *Washington Post*.” Jameson’s

creator says the difference is on purpose: “I came up with the idea of the irascible publisher, and Spidey being a freelance photographer,” Stan Lee says in an unpublished interview. “I loved it, and weeks later, I said, ‘My God! Superman works for an editor, Perry White!’ I said, ‘Oh, how did I get so close!’ So I knocked myself out to make him as different as possible.”⁴

Nowhere is the contrast stronger than in *Marvel Treasury Edition 28*, a rare moment of cooperation between America’s two largest comics companies, which co-starred DC’s Superman and Marvel’s Spider-Man. Published in 1981, it was actually the second meeting of the Man of Steel and the Wall-Crawler, but was the most telling about the differences between White and Jameson – because the superheroes’ alter egos traded bosses for the story.

News photographer Peter “Spider-Man” Parker got fed up with Jameson’s abuse, and began freelancing for the *Daily Planet* in Metropolis. Meanwhile, reporter Clark “Superman” Kent went on sabbatical from his great metropolitan newspaper and took a freelance job with the *Daily Bugle* in New York, in order to divert Dr. Doom’s attention from his friends in “The Big Apricot.”⁵ Their experiences were telling.

When Parker showed some news photos to White, instead of a typical Jameson tirade, his new editor gave him an honest and encouraging critique – plus a lot more money. “The angle’s not the best on these photos of yours, son, but it looks like you got closer than any of our staff photogs!” White said. “I like that! It shows **guts!** Reminds me of when I was a newshound! I don’t dicker, Parker! I’ll pay five hundred dollars!”

4. Leonard Pitts, Jr., “An Interview with Stan Lee,” *Stan Lee Conversations* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 97.

5. “Metropolis,” DC Comics Database, <http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Metropolis> (accessed July 1, 2010).

Parker was stunned. “That’s three times what J.J.J. would have paid,” he thought.⁶ Later, when White complimented Parker’s talent – and offered some “pointers” – Parker thought, “Whew! He’s **nicer** than Jonah, but just as tough!”⁷

Meanwhile, the blustering J. Jonah Jameson found his match in Superman – or rather, mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent. Jameson employed the bullying tactics he normally used on Parker, only to discover to his consternation that the disguised Man of Steel easily evaded his questions and deflected criticism with regular exclusive stories involving Superman. Later, when the status quo was restored, Jameson admits he re-hired Parker because he is, a Jameson thought balloon reveals, “easier to push around than that slippery Kent!”⁸

One editor offered tips, encouragement, praise, and a decent check. The other was a bully, a liar, and a cheapskate. Both were editors of major metropolitan newspapers, both were hard as nails, both were careful with money. But the contrast couldn’t be stronger: One was a heroic journalist in a time-honored tradition, and the other was not.

Jameson is no hero. Nor are the journalists who followed him – at least, not entirely. The last few decades have offered a cavalcade of unethical or downright evil journalists: Eddie Brock, who becomes Venom; Frederick Foswell, who makes two attempts at taking over the New York mobs; Bethany Snow, who acts as a shill for a murderous cult. Even the *Daily Planet* hires a couple of bad apples, the tawdry guttersnipe Cat Grant and the abusive, bullying Steve Lombard. As the overview of

6. Jim Shooter, “The Heroes and the Holocaust,” *Marvel Treasury Edition* 28, July 1981, 23.

7. Shooter, “Heroes,” 35.

8. Shooter, “Heroes,” 62.

comics from 1938 to 1963 demonstrates, journalists as creeps or criminals before Jameson was virtually unknown. But *après Jameson, le déluge*.

Even the good guys come with warts after 1963. Sally Floyd is an alcoholic suffering from depression over the death of her daughter. Trish Tilby betrays her friends – including her boyfriend – for a scoop. Kat Farrel is blinded by ambition. Joe Robertson carries a heavy secret. Even the frequently heroic Ben Urich once lost his nerve when threatened by The Kingpin.

But the reverse is true as well. Even the worst characters sometimes show glimmers of the better angels of their nature, and nowhere is that more true than with the character that started it all. J. Jonah Jameson, for all his bullying, bile and bluster, frequently demonstrates tremendous dedication to, and competency in, his trade. When he yells “Stop the presses!” it is exciting to watch, because the reader knows he knows what he’s doing. And when Urich loses his nerve, it is Jameson who gives him a pep talk that demonstrates an impressive understanding of everything that is right about journalism.

The second hypothesis is “from 1963 to present, the depiction of journalists in comics was more varied: some heroic, some flawed, some morally gray and some outright villains.” Given the above, that comics since 1963 have provided an avalanche of conflicted journalists, and given that comics since 1963 provide us with scenes where Ben Urich is a coward and Jameson a mentor, the second hypothesis seems proved well.

“It should be abundantly clear that I’ve always tried to make our characters as realistic as possible,” Lee says, “given the fact that they were living in a world of

fantasy.”⁹ And the result of that is characters in shades of gray, who are neither all hero nor all villain. Jameson is testament to that, and provides contrast to the *Daily Planet*, demonstrating the changing depiction of journalism in comics.

9. Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York: Fireside, 2002), 137.

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Appendix

Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics

(This material copied from the Society of Professional Journalists website at <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>)

The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of journalists, regardless of place or platform, and is widely used in newsrooms and classrooms as a guide for ethical behavior. The code is intended not as a set of “rules” but as a resource for ethical decision-making. It is not — nor can it be under the First Amendment — legally enforceable.

Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.

- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect. Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.

- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges. Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know. Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.

- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of writers, editors and other news professionals. The present version of the code was adopted by the 1996 SPJ National Convention, after months of study and debate among the Society's members.

Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984, 1987 and 1996.