



What is a Superhero?

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It's easy to name a superhero--Superman, Batman, Thor, Spiderman, the Green Lantern, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Rorschach, Wolverine--but it's not so easy to define what a superhero is. Buffy has superpowers, but she doesn't have a costume. Batman has a costume, but doesn't have superpowers. What is the role of power and superpower? And what are supervillains and why do we need them?

In *What is a Superhero?*, psychologist Robin Rosenberg and comics scholar Peter Coogan explore this question from a variety of viewpoints, bringing together contributions from nineteen comic book experts--including both scholars in such fields as cultural studies, art, and psychology as well as leading comic book writers and editors. What emerges is a kaleidoscopic portrait of this most popular of pop-culture figures. Writer Jeph Loeb, for instance, sees the desire to make the world a better place as the driving force of the superhero. Jennifer K. Stuller argues that the female superhero inspires women to stand up, be strong, support others, and most important, to believe in themselves. More darkly, A. David Lewis sees the indestructible superhero as the ultimate embodiment of the American "denial of death," while writer Danny Fingeroth sees superheroes as embodying the best aspects of humankind, acting with a nobility of purpose that inspires us. Interestingly, Fingeroth also expands the definition of superhero so that it would include characters like John McClane of the *Die Hard* movies: "Once they dodge ridiculous quantities of machine gun bullets they're superheroes, cape or no cape."

From summer blockbusters to best-selling graphic novels, the superhero is an integral part of our culture. *What is a Superhero?* not only illuminates this pop-culture figure, but also sheds much light on the fantasies and beliefs of the American people.

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