

Superman Smashes the Klan

Gene Luen Yang

Gurihiru, Illustrator

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In *Superman Smashes the Klan*, the hero helps two Chinese American kids in 1946 Metropolis.

Inspired by a 1946 Superman radio series, the story follows the Lees and their children, known by their Americanized first names Tommy and Roberta. They move from Chinatown to an area of Metropolis where differences are not always welcome. Here, Superman fights against The Atom Man, a Nazi-sympathizing villain, and is exposed to the villain's Kryptonite-fueled armor, prompting a series of dreamlike interactions with his deceased parents.

Superman's battle with the Klan of the Fiery Cross is at the book's center, complemented by the Lees' situation, which parallels Superman's own struggle to come to terms with his identity as a foreigner. Roberta and Tommy are brave characters; they work to adapt to difficult circumstances. Also resonant is Chuck Riggs, who loses his spot on the baseball team to Tommy. Chuck's uncle, a member of the Klan, encourages him to take revenge, but torn between family loyalty and his own conscience, Chuck instead looks to the example of his hero, Superman, for guidance.

The book's art, by the Japanese studio duo Gurihiru, is an appealing blend of traditional Western comic storytelling with hints of Eastern manga influence. The colorful interiors evoke 1946 with their automobiles, clothing, and architecture.

Yang ends the book with an informative and moving essay, "Superman and Me," that recounts his family and personal experiences alongside background information about the Ku Klux Klan and the impact of Superman's national stance against the group. *Superman Smashes the Klan* is an memorable example of the power of a beloved character to both reflect and affect the real world.

PETER DABBENE (May / June 2020)

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