

The Rise of Real-Life Superheroes: And the Fall of Everything Else

Peter Nowak

Douglas & McIntyre (Sep 15, 2020)

Softcover \$19.95 (240pp)

978-1-77162-250-9

Peter Nowak analyzes the phenomenon of real people dressing in costumes to fight crime and help others in *The Rise of Real-Life Superheroes*.

Since 1969, when a junior high school science teacher fought corporate pollution as “The Fox,” ordinary people have taken alter egos and costumed identities to right wrongs in the world. In recent years, the practice has become more widespread and, in some cities, more accepted by both local police and outside skeptics. There are a wide range of personalities, motivations, and behavior among these real-life superheroes, and the book probes its subjects in delightful detail.

The book takes a scholarly approach, offering broad historical context and a wide array of viewpoints, accompanied by firsthand interviews and a thorough list of notes and references. For example, a close look at the early days and continued existence of the vigilante group The Guardian Angels offers not just an origin story for organized heroism, but also a foil to contrast with the colorful individuals who find the group’s rules too constricting.

It’s fascinating to discover the experiences that drive these heroes toward what seems a common goal, but it’s just as interesting to see how and why they differ in their approaches. Some keep their true identities secret, while others are publicly known; some heroes use force if needed, while others restrict themselves to offering handouts of socks or food to the homeless, using costumes to achieve a more effective dialogue.

Descriptions of costumes, along with associated gadgets and gimmicks, make the book as entertaining as it is informative; a notable example is the millionaire-turned-crusader for justice “Captain Sticky,” who drove a “Stickymobile” that sprayed vandals with streams of peanut butter and jelly. Illuminating and fun, *The Rise of Real-Life Superheroes* brings a careful, objective eye to a unique sociological subgroup.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2020)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.