

This toolkit was created as part of the *Superman's Cleveland: Lineage and Legacy* celebration.

Superman's Cleveland honored the 85th anniversary of the creation of Superman by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in 1938 in their hometown.

The program was organized by the Rust Belt Humanities Lab at Ursuline College and the Ohio Center for the Book at Cleveland Public Library with support from Ohio Humanities.

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Superman: The Warworld Saga

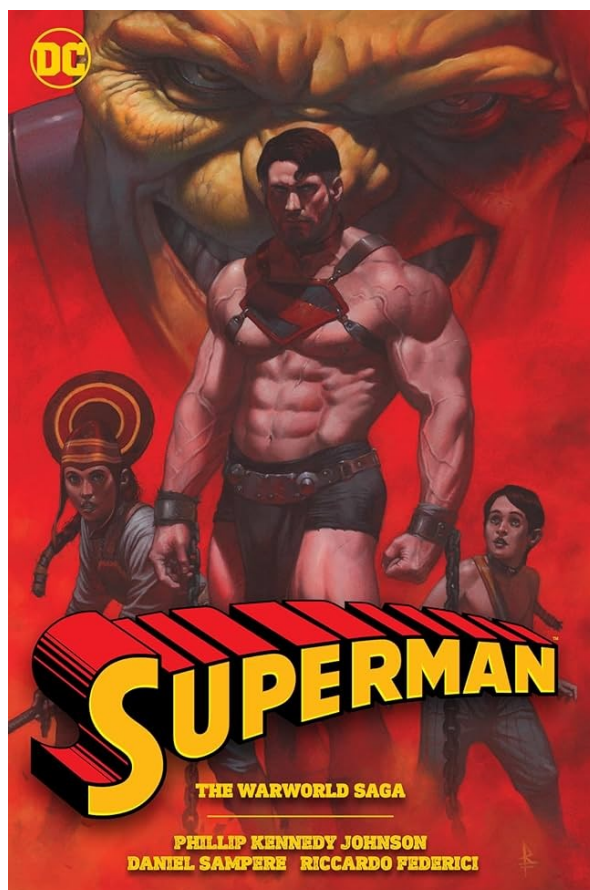
By Phillip Kennedy Johnson Daniel Sampere and Riccardo Federici

About the comic

The *Warworld Saga* is a comic book story featuring Superman written by Phillip Kennedy Johnson in collaboration with several artists over a year of issues in *Action Comics*.

The story begins when enslaved aliens escape from Warworld to find refuge on Earth. What is first perceived as an invasion soon becomes clear to be an emergent crisis that Superman must address. As Superman learns more about the history of these escapees, a mysterious connection to Krypton emerges.

Superman, determined to save these people, leaves for Warworld with the superhero team The Authority, including Midnighter, Apollo, and others in hopes of saving those under Mongul's control. The mission is not so simple, though, because Warworld, powered by star forges, akin to a red sun, saps Superman's powers. He is soon captured by Mongul and enslaved as a gladiator on Warworld. Without his superpowers and with resistance from those he hopes to help, Superman must find another option on Warworld so that he can escape and free everyone from Mongul.



The *Warworld Saga* includes *Action Comics* #1030-1046, *Action Comics 2021 Annual*, *Action Comics 2022 Annual*, *Batman/Superman: Authority Special* #1, *Future State: Superman: House of El* #1, *Future State: Superman: Worlds of War* #1-2, *Superman: Warworld Apocalypse* #1.

Who is Phillip Kennedy Johnson?

Phillip Kennedy Johnson is an Eisner-nominated writer as well as a musician. He is best known for his work on *Superman*, *Action Comics*, *Incredible Hulk*, *Alien*, and *007*. He is the creator of the series *The Fellsythe Chronicles* from DC Black Label, *Last Sons of America*, *Warlords of Appalachia*, *Smoketown*, and *Crocodile Black*. His comics work has been published by DC, Marvel, BOOM! Studios, Dynamite, Archaia, IDW, Aftershock, and Scout Comics.

Outside of writing, Johnson is a Master Sergeant in the United States Army, performing as a trumpet player with The U.S. Army Field Band of Washington, DC. Prior to his enlistment in the Army, he toured the world with the Glenn Miller Orchestra from 2004-2005 and has also performed with such groups as the Moscow Ballet, Dallas Opera, Washington Symphonic Brass, Lexington Philharmonic, and Benny Goodman Orchestra.

Johnson is a devoted lover of American art forms, especially jazz, comic books, and mixed martial arts. He will fight anyone who argues that MMA came from Brazil!

Themes

There are several themes throughout the book that can help frame your discussion.

- **Hope** — Superman's story is an allegory of hope. Despite all of the pain and suffering in this story, Superman remains driven by the hope of a better future. One way to frame the discussion of *The Warworld Saga* is as an allegory of hope for our current moment.
- **Human trafficking** — This is a story about the trafficking of people and the psychological effects of that trauma. Johnson has openly stated parts of this story were influenced by his work to combat human trafficking, and this story can help provide an avenue for that discussion.
- **The refugee experience** — This story reminds us of the fact that the Kryptonians are a people without a home: Superman is a refugee from a dead planet, a powerful metaphor that pervades the mythos and can be a theme that organizes your discussion.
- **Ethics** — This is a story about power and the ethical use of power. The corrupt, like Mongul, use power for evil, but Superman shows that power does not need to corrupt. This story can be explored through how power can be used ethically.



Figure 1. *Action Comics* #1038 p.21 by Phillip Kennedy Johnson and x. ©DC Comics

Questions for Discussion

1. Johnson has shared that the description of Superman in *Action Comics* #1 as the “champion of the oppressed” defines his vision. How does this inform your understanding of *The Warworld Saga*?
2. Johnson expands the Kryptonian mythos with the introduction of the Phaelosians, an exiled colony of Kryptonians who separated long ago. How does the introduction of this group of Kryptonians ask us to rethink what we know of the mythos and the untimely end of Krypton?
3. What makes Superman so relatable to many is his life outside of being superhero: he is Clark Kent raised by Ma and Pa Kent. In this story, he is also a husband and a father to Lois and Jon, respectively. How does Johnson remind us of Superman’s non-superhero identity on this planet ravaged by war? In what ways is he still *Clark* on Warworld?
4. In a flashback story, we learn about Mongul’s early life and about his relationship with his own mother. The story is paired with one of Clark and Ma Kent. How does the parallel stories of Mongul and Clark’s mother-figures illuminate their relationship to the value of life?
5. In the *Future State* stories, which serve as the bookend for *The Warworld Saga* in this volume, Superman writes a letter to humanity. How does this letter to humanity invite us to think about what Superman means as a character and what drives him?
6. Superman’s mission is questioned by many in this story, not only by the villains, but even those on his own team. Yet, he persists, inspiring a fight for truth and justice on this faraway alien planet. His character is known for these inspiring moments and his motivating statements about the value of truth and justice and human life (Fig. 1). Pick one or more lines from this story which you find inspiring and discuss.
7. *The Warworld Saga* could have easily been about the two titans, Superman and Mongul, yet Johnson brings into focus the effects such battles have on the lives of everyday people through the Phaelosian refugees. How do the Phaelosian children serve as a metaphor to help us to think about the place of humanity among these gods?
8. Superman’s story has always been one of hope. How does he push the metaphor in new ways in *The Warworld Saga*?
9. Johnson has called Mongul the “opposite” of Superman, the inverse of “the champion of the oppressed.” In what ways does Mongul, like a “good” villain, serve to illuminate Superman’s character and his mission?
10. Comics as a form is known for documenting current events. Superhero comics, in particular, do this because of their publication schedule. What contemporary events and ideas does Johnson help us to process through Superman?
11. A portion of what transpires on Warworld is told to us by Superman’s journals (Fig. 2). Why do you think Johnson uses this method of storytelling? How can we connect it to Clark’s journalistic history?
12. Superman has a long and varied history in comics, but his story has also been adapted and retold countless times across media. How does this story connect to other Superman stories you may know and in what ways does it expand your experience of the character?



Figure 2. Action Comics #1040 p.1 by Phillip Kennedy Johnson and . ©DC Comics

Further Supplemental Materials

Additional resources to supplement this toolkit:

- Danny Graydon and Mikayla J. Laird, Superhero Project Podcast. “The Enduring Myth of Superman ft. Phillip Kennedy Johnson.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqMUUgERkRo>)
- Steve Younis and Michael Bailey, **Superman Homepage**. “Phillip Kennedy Johnson Joins Superman Homepage Live! (November 28, 2022)” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WIZOe4-SIY>)
- Anthony Desiato, *Digging for Kryptonite*. “Interview with Action Comics Writer Phillip Kennedy Johnson.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elcib47YoDU>)
- Tasmin Humphries, *The Aspiring Kryptonian*. “New York ComicCon 2024: An Interview With Phillip Kennedy Johnson.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3N-gHuaWgA>)
- Katharine G. Trostel, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. “‘To me, Superman is the living antithesis to the adage that absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ An Interview with Philip Kennedy Johnson.”

Further Reading

If you are interested in other Superman stories:

- *Superman: Brainiac* by Geoff Johns and Gary Frank (DC Comics)
- *All Star Superman* by Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely (DC Comics)
- *Superman* by Joshua Williamson and Jamal Campbell (DC Comics)

If you are interested in other comics by Phillip Kennedy Johnson:

- *Fellspyre Chronicles* by Phillip Kennedy Johnson and several artists (DC Black Label)
- *Incredible Hulk* by Phillip Kennedy Johnson and Nic Klein and other artists (Marvel Comics)
- *Green Lantern: War Journal* by Phillip Kennedy Johnson and Montos (DC Comics)

If you are interested in other epic superhero stories:

- *Batman* by Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo (DC Comics)
- *Wonder Woman* by Greg Rucka, Liam Sharp, and Nicola Scott (DC Comics)
- *The Vision* by Tom King, Gabriel Hernandez, and Jordie Bellaire (Marvel Comics)