

SKYROCKET

A New Direction for Conner Kent

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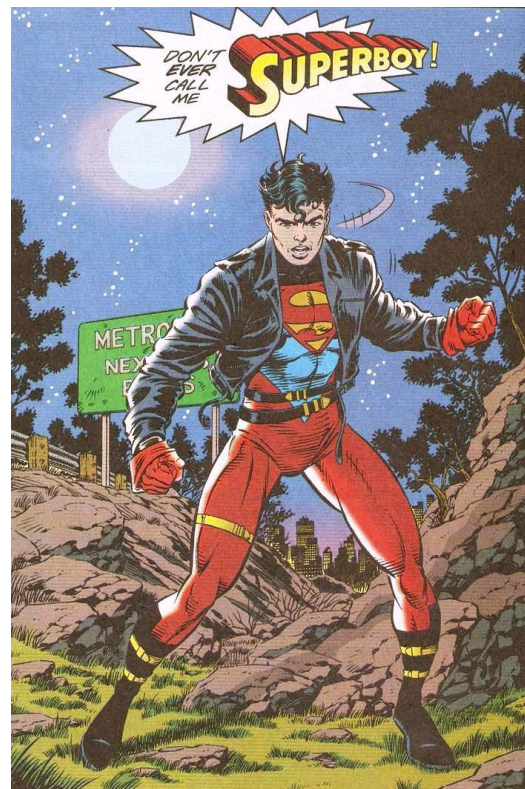
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“DON’T EVER CALL ME SUPERBOY!”

Conner Kent is in a weird place. Originally created for the *Reign of the Supermen*, Conner’s destiny as the next Superman was always at the core of his character. But, perhaps due to embarrassment at the sheer nineties ‘tude of it all, Conner has spent the last thirty years struggling to find a foothold in DC comics, and has seen his concept (and his continuity) continually re-invented. He’s served as leader of various teenage supergroups and even found a devoted fanbase in the *Young Justice* cartoons, but Conner has largely been relegated to being the Jason Todd of the Superman Family: oh yeah, that guy’s around, maybe we should use him.

But I love Conner Kent and he deserves better than to be the also-ran to Jon’s Superman Secundus. My plan below is a radical new direction for the character that honors his connection to Superman’s legacy while giving him the opportunity to find his own place in the DC universe, and critically, a new name.

Thirty years later, it’s time to honor his first words.



THE BIG IDEA

Over **somewhere between 12-24 senses-shattering issues**, Conner is going to have an identity crisis that lets him escape Superman's shadow and establish himself as his own person.

Consider. Conner was created by CADMUS as an insurance policy against Superman's death, and we've seen what he becomes in worlds where that policy pays off: no Superman at all. Further, his creation was complicated by later revelations that a third of his DNA comes from Lex Luthor. Add on top of that the effects of his erasure from (and restoration to) the timeline: the experience of having been completely forgotten. His place restored, he was still a secondary Super-Son. *Jon* was Superboy, and then *Jon* was Superman, and all *Conner* gets is to be, forever, the one name he's explicitly said never to use. What happens when Conner grows up? Who will he be then?

Conner looks around at his life, and all he sees is...*Clark's*. He has Clark's DNA. He sleeps in Clark's old bedroom, goes to Clark's old school in Clark's hometown, being raised by Clark's parents so that he grows up to be...Clark. But he's *not* Clark, and he feels like everyone forgets that more often than not, expecting him to be little more than what he was designed to be: a *clone*. A facsimile. Just a copy.

And not only that. The person he's primarily cloned from *also* happens to be the greatest person in the world, the man who always knows the right thing to do, whose very name exemplifies honesty, goodness, compassion, heroism, and justice. It's like being a clone of Jesus goddamn Christ. So Conner is expected to be someone he isn't, and that person is pretty much perfect and universally beloved – *and he's not even ever going to be Superman now*. So what's the point?

Sure, maybe this life made sense when he was the heir apparent, but now? Conner starts seeing that maybe this life is the one *other people* chose *for* him, and not the one he wants. And maybe, just maybe, he doesn't actually want to be Superboy anymore at all.

ARC 1: QUINTUM'S CHILDREN

Conner has no idea *who* he wants to be. But he sure as *hell* doesn't want to spend the rest of his life as a backup plan, and admitting that is the first step.

The second step is going to be figuring out who he even actually is. That's where we come in.

Conner's confusing continuity is revealed to be, at least partially, neurological degradation as a result of genetic instability arising from the cloning process. It turns out that Conner's particular DNA cocktail of human and Kryptonian DNA is prone to *neuronic decay*, which, among other things, has given him a memory full of contradictions and confabulations. Seeking a cure, he returns to the CADMUS lab where he was created, finding it abandoned save for one person: another teenage clone named Leland Leonardo Luther. Leland reveals that he and Conner are

brothers; Leland is Luthor-dominant where Conner is Superman-dominant, and that this decay isn't just decay: it was a time bomb put in there deliberately by their creators at CADMUS to force them back under their thumb should either ever escape it.

This serves to let us *retell his origin* in a way that *also* allows us to simplify it: Conner is, simply, what he was originally intended to be. And more, meeting Leland gives Conner the opportunity to step away from the Superman family for a time, and get some distance by exploring the side of his parentage that is *neither* Luthor nor Superman.

But it's not just *that* lab: *every* CADMUS facility is in ruins, and the only person seemingly still involved is a madman named Dabney Donovan, supposedly the creator of both Conner and Leland. In poor health and attended by the latest in a string of failed clones all suffering from more aggressive versions of the same genetic instability, Dabney reveals that he never perfected the art. There were so many failures before these two, and the only thing that ensured their survival wasn't *his* expertise, but that of a mysterious scientist named Leonardo Quintum. Quintum was their true creator, the one who stabilized their gene matrices *in utero* through advanced science Dabney couldn't begin to understand, and cannot replicate now. And nobody – *nobody* – has any idea where Quintum is now. There's no record of anyone with that name at CADMUS or anywhere else.

That doesn't dissuade Leland. While Conner turns to the JLA for help, Leland pursues his own path. If anyone can find Quintum, he figures he can, and puts his own considerable genius – and money he's stealing from LexCorp right under their noses – to work on a hunch: that they already have everything they need to find him, right in their genetic code. It takes months, but he finds a message deep in their DNA: a sequence that, converted into binary, is a fully-functional, interactive, intelligent hologram of Quintum himself: Leonardo Luth-El, *quintum* (the fifth).

Quintum, it turns out, was a time traveler from the year 14,000, a world in which the Superman Dynasty, the Ancient House of El, operates with impunity, untethered from humanity, a world very much like that of *Kingdom Come*. To prevent this catastrophic age of Kryptonian rule, Quintum sets out to engineer his own alternative Superman dynasty, one founded on common heritage: the fusion of the best of both worlds. Where CADMUS believed they were cloning a replacement Superman, the Quintum holo reveals that Conner and Leland were supposed to represent a shared future vision of humanity elevated by Kryptonian DNA, a clonal dyad intended to usher in humanity's new future. He used the flaws in Donovan's cloning technology to bring both Conner and Leland to himself.

He can cure them. In the year 14,000.

ARC 2: THE BATTLE FOR THE HOUSE OF EL

This could potentially be a **really big event** for the **entire** Superman line: a fight for the future of what the S means.

Using Quintum tech, Connor and Leland make the perilous journey to the year 14,000 for Quintum's miracle cure, which is a relatively quick fix. It turns out that there's *another* convolution to the plan: he wanted to bring them to the future *specifically* to help him overthrow the descendents of Superman: **the Ancient House of El**. Under the rule of the tyrannical Superiors – Saint, Shepherd, and Savior, all clonal derivatives of the original Superman – the Ancient House of El maintains a monopoly on power, living as gods who follow only their whims, warring with each other while terrorizing the baseline population into serving them. All wear *wearing the S!* The S that used to mean hope, and optimism, and generosity, and kindness, and responsibility? Now, all it means is fear, and death, and capricious violence. It's a symbol the whole *galaxy* fears.

Quintum wants Conner and Leland to show them the error of their ways, to reintroduce the world...to **SUPERMAN**. And to do that, **Conner has to become Superman**. Quintum's plan is for Conner and Leland to directly challenge the Superiors for leadership and call them to their truest and best selves. Of course, Quintum is lying. But that's the plan he gets Conner on board with.

So, Conner assumes the mantle of **SUPERMAN-V**, a legendary ancient Superman and widely regarded as one of Kal El's truest heirs, and Leland takes on that of **DOCTOR KRYPTON**, the greatest mind the house of El ever produced, and in these guises confront the Superiors. After proving their truer genetic link to the original Superman, unsullied by thousands of years of tinkering, a number of the Ancient House of El joins them. This is the first schism within the Ancient House of El since the Luthorites were expelled ten-thousand years earlier – and the Superiors will not brook this insolence. The only possible outcome is war.

Their numbers insufficient to tackle the entire Ancient House of El, Conner and Leland recruit the Superfam of their own era, bringing Clark, Kara, Kenan, the Ironses, the twins, and Jon forward in time. OUR Clark magnanimously recognizes that Conner has to be the one to lead, and disguises himself so as not to undercut his authority. This is it. This is Conner's big chance to be...to be *Superman*. *The* Superman.



What follows could be contained in one book or **spread out to the entire Super-line**: Conner raises the warbanner and does his best to embody the spirit of Superman for this new age, and after **six bone-rattling issues**, the Superiors fall, and hope is restored to the galaxy. But Conner doesn't seem to be celebrating. He seems more morose and angry than ever – and Clark can see it more clearly than anyone. He brings this up to his younger clone-brother, and Conner can't entirely articulate what's wrong. But he gets out enough: *I spent this whole battle being you, Clark. And that didn't feel like me.* And then the dam bursts: he tells Clark how he's been feeling, how this quest was supposed to reinvigorate him, offer him clarity, but he's more confused than ever. He did the thing he thought he was born to do, he *became Superman*, and it still wasn't right. So who the fuck *is* he, if he's not Superman? This quest didn't give him a better sense of identity; it just underlined how little he has of his own.

And what's worse? **This future doesn't even know a "Conner Kent Superboy" existed at all.** Plenty of records for Jon, and Kara, and Kenan, and John Henry, and Natasha...the only one history forgot is *him*. Leland opts to remain in the 140th century, but Conner...Conner needs to go back. He can't be Superman-V. Leland, who wants to remain in the future, promises to find out what happened to the memory of his existence, and Conner departs.

Returning to the present, Conner decides it's time for a change. He designs a new costume for himself, and takes a new name: **SKYROCKET**. In search of "his own Metropolis," he moves off the Kent family farm to go live in Jinny Hex's spare room in Dripping Springs, TX.

LIFE IN DRIPPING SPRINGS

The whole thing is refreshing. It's a small town, but it's not a farm. He gets to work with his hands on something super strength or super speed can't make him do any better: the careful labor of auto repair. He and Alex Mackleford, another of Jinny's friends, build a hot rod together. Nobody calls him Superboy. Nobody talks about the Superman legacy. Nobody expects him to be anything but himself, and he's learning things *about* himself he never knew before. This is the first time in his life nobody is depending on him. The first time nobody has expectations. The first time he can just...get to know Conner Kent.

He takes up guitar. He joins a local band. He actually graduates high school, and starts looking at college, and a future where maybe he's *not* a superhero. But *that's not any better*, and it doesn't make him any more satisfied with himself or his life. He has a long talk with Jinny about it, and realizes what the problem is, although he doesn't say what. But it's time for Conner to leave. **We can dispatch all of this in one issue.**

He flies to Honolulu, his first home, his first base of operations, the first place he ever tried to carve out his own identity before he inevitably fell back into Superman's orbit. And there, he finds someone waiting for him: Leland Luther, wearing Quintum's technicolor lab coat; he says Leo ended up trying to kill him and steal his body, so *he* could rule the entire galaxy, so Leland had to bail. They didn't even have any good music! Conner is grateful to see his brother, who

has a gift for him: he figured out why the future forgot him. He holds out a crystalline rod, Kryptonian technology.

- What is it?
- The answer to the question you keep asking yourself.
- What question is that?
- "Who is Conner Kent?"

Conner places the rod on the ground, and it expands a chamber large enough to fit a human being, or a near enough analog thereof. "Just step inside, and be yourself." He does. All is light and sound. And then, the chamber opens. Conner emerges.

Or should I say *Connie*?

A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR A RADICAL NEW DIRECTION

Conner Kent is a trans girl.

The Kryptonian transformation chamber remade her in this new image. I know this is a big move but bear with me. I believe this is a **very natural, organic direction** that sets Conner apart, builds out the relevant supporting cast, and gives the character a firm foundation for the future.

So. Constance Lara Kent, a name given her by Martha. Constance was her mother's name. And Lara, of course, was Superman's Kryptonian mother, and by extension, Connie's.

From a storytelling perspective, I believe this is as natural a move as Iceman's coming out.

The whole dynamic I've been describing in this document is one of *struggle to secure a sense of self*, and it's...it's just *incredibly* trans. His story is one of failure upon failure: he tried to be Superman, and that didn't take. He tried to make a new life in Hawaii, and that didn't take. He's founded multiple super-teams that crashed and burned. He's had identity crises revolving



around his origins before, but none of which led to meaningful, lasting change, all the while dealing with perpetual rage problems so common to closeted trans women.

Connie always reverts to the mean. Connie found out she's a Luthor, and the most that came of it was she shaved her head. She forged her own life on Gemworld only to end up right back on the farm. Whatever changes she tries to make in her life never stick. In other words, Connie has *never faced herself square in the mirror and admitted the one thing that's really bothering her*.



As a trans woman, I need to make clear that this is *very common*, and it's not a story people tell in the media very often. **There are countless trans folk who finally put it together, finally connect those dots, post-adolescence.** Sending Conner on a quest for personal identity would *absolutely* shake this stuff loose. The person who comes out the other side *would* be meaningfully different no matter what, and forcing her to reckon *with herself* instead of with "legacy" provides strong context.

And if we want, it's not hard to look at Conner's history and see an initial burst of queer bravado followed by a deliberate hyper-masc, rage-filled compensatory phase (the black shirt, the shaved head) followed by a return to a "purer" version of the character *already in the middle of an identity crisis* (Conner on Gemworld, Conner forgotten), and what does he do? He does the same thing he's tried before; starting a new superhero team where he's the Superman guy and it just...doesn't...work.

From a *visual* standpoint, Conner's transitioning would break up the guy-with-short-black-hair monotony of the Superman fam. And seriously, the Superfam already has *three* Supermen. What does Conner offer if he's just another copy? Conner's relationship with Superman would change, his relationship with the Kents would change, *everything* would change and Connie would, at last, be more than just a failed legacy clone.

And look. Conner *already* dresses like a lesbian. The leather jacket, the side buzz, c'mon.

From a sales and editorial perspective, this has some major benefits. First, it *distinguishes* Conner from the rest of the Superman Family in a really big way; second, it *elevates* him by offering a wide range of new stories to be told; third, it *refreshes him*, putting him back in the spotlight while attracting a whole generation of new fans; and lastly, *it would sell like fire*. It

would be in the news. I don't think anyone has "transed" a pre-existing character, let alone one so tied to the deep mythos of the DCU, and while it's sure to excite controversy, it will be the only book anyone is talking about for like a month.

And, even more, Connie wouldn't step on Supergirl's toes; she has her own name, her own aesthetic, her own supporting cast, her own field of operations. Kara is much closer to Clark than Conner has ever been, and Connie would occupy a kind of badass bitch slot that the Superfam has never really had; Supergirl shouldn't have to represent all women.

Most importantly: **Trans issues are at the forefront of the public conversation right now.** Absolutely the forefront. We are in the middle of a sustained, ongoing assault on our right to exist publicly. We are being legislated out of existence. Trans kids are finding their access to gender-affirming care cut off. It feels like the world is closing in on us. Connie Kent/Skyrocket would *immediately* become the most visible trans superhero in the world when trans heroes are desperately needed – all under the S-shield. This will save kids' lives. This will give them hope. **That's what Superman is for.**

Steel brought Black people into the Superfam.
Kenan brought Asian people into the Superfam.

It's time.

