

Who needs Powers? Not Batman

[Tagline--Batman—All of the tools and none of the weaknesses]

There are those who believe that heroes need powers to be superheroes. I tend to hear that argument a lot when some claim that Batman is not a superhero. I don't believe that's true. In fact, that is a very narrow interpretation of how one would define a superhero. I would argue any skill or ability can make a hero greater than or superior to other heroes and superheroes. Those same skills and abilities can transform a hero with no powers into a superhero.

Super can mean placed above or over (*Dictionary.com*, 2017). Thus a superhero is placed above heroes. In other words, a superhero is greater than or superior to a hero. So I would argue that this standard is what should be applied when having this discussion. In a way, I suppose people already use the standard. But they apply it inappropriately. And I think that is what has led to the mistaken belief that a character needs powers to be a superhero.

Powers certainly can make a hero greater than or superior to other heroes and even superheroes. And depending on the power, it can have far reaching effects. For instance, Firestorm has the godlike ability of being able to manipulate matter (*Firestorm*, n.d., para. 40). He could rid the world of all nuclear weapons. All of a sudden, Kim Jung-un isn't as much of a threat. Perhaps finite resources like fossil fuels aren't so finite. Do we have to fight wars over resources anymore? Maybe we don't. What about incurable diseases? That's taken care of too. One version of Firestorm could manipulate inorganic and organic matter (*Firestorm*, n.d., para. 46). Certainly the applications of his abilities, the things he could do to make the world a better place would even make him greater than or superior to other heroes and other superheroes. The scope of his power ensures that. Any hero who possesses this type of power, or powers similar to it, deserves to have super affixed to his or her descriptor. But I would submit that *anything* a hero has that makes him or her greater than or superior to other heroes or superheroes also makes him or her a superhero as well. And that thing doesn't necessarily have to be powers.

There are characters with powers that are not superior to characters without powers. For example, Dazzler is a mutant, who originally only had the ability to transform sound to light (James, 2010, para. 9). I would argue that the applications of this ability would be limited. I suppose she could be a lighting designer or a music producer. But it's not a practical ability for a hero. What are you going to do, entertain the villains to death?

Jazz is another character that has an ignominious ability. His power is that he has blue skin (James, 2010, para. 7). That's it. Really. I'm not kidding.

My point is that just because a character has powers, it doesn't mean that they deserve the super prefix. But there are some who believe a character that has powers and calls his or herself a hero is deemed a superhero. I would submit that that should not be the case. As illustrated, not all characters with powers that are heroes should be called superheroes. But even if they are, it's quite possible that heroes without powers could be considered greater than or superior to some heroes with powers.

I believe that powers are merely tools like anything else. Tools aid the hero in accomplishing his mission. Weaknesses are anything that stands in the hero's way of accomplishing his or her mission. Generally, the set up for powers in American comic books is such that a character that has powers that are worth anything also has weaknesses to offset those powers. Superman has green Kryptonite, the version of red kryptonite Batman designed (Waid, 2000, p. 23)) and the red sun (Hamilton, n.d., para. 23). The Martian Manhunter has fire (*Martian Manhunter*, n.d., para. 70). Wolverine has the Muramasa blade (*Muramasa Blade*, n.d., para. 2) and carbonadium (*Carbonadium Synthesizer*, n.d., para. 2). Yet all of these characters are considered superheroes because they have powers.

No one ever looks at the weaknesses. Never mind the fact that these weaknesses can be used against these powered beings. Does anyone ever stop to think if you don't have any powers, perhaps you don't have any weaknesses outside of not having powers? And maybe that's not a problem. There's something to be said for a character that trains his or her body and mind, transforming them into well-oiled machines that hone their skills to such a degree that they achieve high levels of efficiency without the drawbacks that come with having powers. I believe that these types of heroes could be considered greater than or superior to other heroes and even superheroes in some instances.

A perfect example is Green arrow. He can fire 39 arrows a minute (*Green Arrow*, n.d., para. 57). It's also said that he can split a drop of water from a faucet (*Green Arrow*, n.d., para. 57). Green Arrow has stated himself that he never misses (*Green Arrow*, n.d., para. 57). He doesn't have any powers. How many people with powers can make those claims? Now I know someone out there will say, "They don't have to. They have powers." My answer to that is that isn't the point. His skill with a bow makes him virtually peerless in that area. In short, his skill with a bow is a tool that he can use without any significant drawbacks to complete his mission. It makes him greater than or superior to other heroes and superheroes in that arena. Therefore, he's a superhero.

Now imagine for a moment that there exists a hero that has a plethora of skills and training that they have finely tuned for many years. And imagine that their specialty is taking those skills and employing them in such a way that that he exposes opponents' weaknesses and uses them to his advantage. Enter Batman.

Batman is a master strategist and detective (*Batman*, n.d., para. 143). He's trained his body to the peak level of human conditioning and performance (*Batman*, n.d., para. 146). He's mastered over 127 styles of martial arts (*Batman*, n.d., para. 144). Due to his training with the Sufi, he can subconsciously slow his bleeding (*Willpower*, n.d., para 1). On several occasions, he's shown a resistance to mind control (*Willpower*, n.d., para. 15), the effects of drugs (*Willpower*, n.d., para. 2), poisons (*Willpower*, n.d., para. 4) and pheromones (*Willpower*, n.d., para. 3). To be sure, all of these attributes are important. They are all essential in outlining and defining him as a superhero. But of all Batman's abilities, I believe that his gifts as a strategist and detective are the most valuable.

As mentioned, one of Batman's specialties is exposing powered being's weaknesses and exploiting them to his advantage (Waid, 2000, p. 4). The set up for a lot of superheroes is that they have secret identities. And many want to keep those identities secret to prevent exposing their weaknesses. It takes a master detective to uncover what superheroes want to hide. After all, they're very good at hiding their identities and their weaknesses. Otherwise they wouldn't last very long at being superheroes, given the fact that villains would go after their loved ones or discover their weaknesses and exploit them. Once a weakness is discovered, a master strategist can use the weakness to take advantage of his or her opponent. Batman foots the bill.

This Swiss army knife's prowess as a strategist is best illustrated in *JLA: Tower of Babel*. Batman, not trusting the Justice League to check itself, creates a strategy to take out every member that could possibly pose a threat if they turned to the dark side (Waid, 2000, p. 5). Ra's al Ghul steals Batman's plans (Waid, 2000, p. 21) to take down the Justice league.

Some of Ra's al Ghul's success in using Batman's plans for his own nefarious intentions should be proof positive of how successful Batman would be if he ever employed his strategy to take down members of the JLA. Batman knows that if he ever needs to kill Superman, he could just use green kryptonite to do so (Waid, 2000, p. 23). But Batman doesn't want to kill superman, so he creates a new type of red kryptonite that he knows will slow him down and cause incredible pain (Waid, 2000, p. 23). Wonder Woman, locked in virtual reality, combats an opponent she can't defeat (Waid, 2000, p. 14). Trained never to surrender, the game is designed for her to die of exhaustion (Waid, 2000 p. 14). Martian Manhunter's magnesium laced skin bursts into flame (Waid, 2000 p. 8). The list goes on. Ra's altered the plans (Waid, 2000, pp. 23-24). And though Batman never intended for his plans to be lethal, they did work the way he had designed them to. Imagine if Batman had designed the plans to be fatal. What I'm suggesting is that a man with no powers could possibly bring the gods of the JLA to their knees through detective work and strategy. But there are other instances where these two abilities serve Batman well against other powered beings.

In *The Supergirl from Krypton* storyline, Superman, Wonder Woman, Big Barda and Batman journey to Apokolips to save a brainwashed Supergirl from Darkseid (Superman/Batman: The Supergirl from Krypton, n.d., para. 16). Batman makes his way to the planet's core (Superman/Batman: The Supergirl from Krypton, n.d., para. 18). There he finds Hellspores that he rigs to explode (Superman/Batman: The Supergirl from Krypton, n.d., para. 18). Batman threatens Darkseid with his planet's destruction if he doesn't agree to allow all of them to return to earth safely (Superman/Batman: The Supergirl from Krypton, n.d., para. 22). Darkseid relents, acknowledging Batman's ruthlessness (Superman/Batman: The Supergirl from Krypton, n.d., para. 22). He also suggests that Superman and Wonder Woman wouldn't have been able to pull that off (Superman/Batman: The Supergirl from Krypton, n.d., para. 22).

I would agree with Darkseid, but not just because of Batman's ruthlessness. I would argue that, ultimately, it was Batman's detective skills and ability to strategize that won the day for the quartet. It took detective work to find Darkseid's weakness. No king is a king without a place to rule and subjects to rule over. Understanding this fact, Batman sets about discovering how he can use Darkseid's weakness to his advantage. He has to learn about the Hellspores, where to find them and how they can be used (Loeb, 2003, p.11). Once Batman gathers that information, he hits Darkseid where it hurts.

And for all Superman, Wonder Woman and Big Barda's powers, they can't do that. Batman is the only one that can make the god of Apokolips relent. Batman does what they can't. One can argue that that's what makes Batman a superhero. He's greater than or superior to them in this arena. These examples are just a few instances that illustrate Batman's abilities as a master detective and strategist. He is virtually peerless in that arena. Because of that, he should be considered a superhero.

A character doesn't need superpowers to be a superhero. To have the super prefix added to one's descriptor, a hero need only have abilities and skills that make him or her greater than or superior to other heroes or superheroines in some arena. Batman's skills as a master detective and strategist make him virtually peerless when it comes to exploiting the weaknesses of opponents—specifically powered beings. He should be considered a superhero. After all, what does it say about a superhero if someone bests them who isn't super?

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