SOFTWARE & TECH

# Superman Whatever Happened To The Man Of Tomorrow

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## Introduction: The End of an Era

For decades, Superman stood as the unshakeable pillar of truth, justice, and the American way. Yet, even the Man of Steel must face his final chapter. In 1986, DC Comics released **Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?**, a landmark story written by the legendary Alan Moore with art by Curt Swan. This tale was not merely another comic book adventure; it was a deliberate and poignant farewell to the Silver Age Superman, a character who had evolved over nearly fifty years. For readers who grew up with this version of the hero, the question posed by the title was deeply personal. It asked us to imagine a world where Superman no longer flew through the skies of Metropolis, where the last son of Krypton had vanished, leaving only a legacy and a mystery.

The story is framed as an interview with Lois Lane, now older and living a quiet life, who finally agrees to tell the truth about what happened to the man she loved. This narrative device immediately grounds the tale in emotional reality. It transforms Superman from an invincible icon into a flesh-and-blood figure whose fate matters. As Lois recounts the events leading to Superman's disappearance, we are drawn into a final, epic confrontation that pits the hero against almost every supervillain he has ever faced. But the story is not about the battle itself; it is about the choices a hero makes when the cost of victory is measured in lives, principles, and the very future of hope. This article explores the depth of this classic story, its thematic resonance, and why it remains a defining moment in comic book history.

## The Context: A Farewell to the Silver Age

### The Need for a Clean Slate

By the mid-1980s, superhero comics were undergoing a massive transformation. DC Comics had launched *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, a sprawling event designed to simplify its complex multiverse and reboot its core characters. Superman, in particular, had accumulated decades of increasingly convoluted lore. There were multiple Superboys, a legion of Super-Pets, bizarre imaginary stories, and a tangled web of continuities that made the character inaccessible to new readers. The decision was made to retire the original Superman and introduce a modernized version. But before the reboot, DC wanted to give the classic character a respectful, definitive send-off. This is where Alan Moore came in.

### Alan Moore's Unique Vision

Alan Moore, known for his deconstructive work on *Watchmen* and *Swamp Thing*, might seem like an unusual choice for a Superman farewell. However, Moore possessed a deep affection for the Silver Age comics he grew up reading. Unlike his later, darker works, **Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?** is a love letter to the hopeful, whimsical era of Superman. Moore treats the absurd elements of the Silver Age—Mr. Mxyzptlk,

Bizarro, the composite Superman—with genuine respect, weaving them into a story that feels both classic and profoundly human. His challenge was to give these characters a meaningful exit while honoring their legacy.

## The Plot Unfolds: A Final Stand

### The Attack from All Sides

The story opens with Lois Lane being interviewed by a journalist who wants to know the truth. She hesitates but begins to recount the terrifying week that led to Superman's end. Everything starts when a defeated Lex Luthor, dying of radiation poisoning from his own experiments, makes a final, desperate move. He releases a recording that reveals Superman's secret identity to the world. Almost immediately, the villains begin to gather. The Prankster, the Toyman, the Kryptonite Man, and a host of other foes converge on the Daily Planet. This is not a typical supervillain plot; it is a coordinated assault designed to destroy Superman's entire life.

The attacks are personal. The Parasite drains the life from Superman's friends. Bizarro, in a tragic twist, tries to replace Superman but can only create chaos. The most chilling threat comes from a resurrected Jor-El, who appears to reclaim his son for Krypton. Moore masterfully escalates the tension, showing that every aspect of Superman's existence is under siege. The Fortress of Solitude is breached, and the villains unite under the banner of pure destruction. It becomes clear that this is not a battle Superman can win through sheer strength alone.

### The Tragic Price of Victory

As the story reaches its climax, Superman makes a series of impossible choices. He confronts the composite Superman, a being made from the merged remnants of all the heroes who had died in the *Crisis*. This creature is a mirror of Superman's own mortality, a being of immense power with no moral compass. The battle is brutal and relentless. But the turning point comes when Superman is forced to use a weapon he had sworn never to use: Gold Kryptonite. This form of the mineral does not kill Kryptonians but permanently removes their powers. It is a fate worse than death for Superman, but he uses it to depower the composite creature, ending the threat.

The victory, however, is hollow. In the process, Superman's closest friends and allies are killed or gravely injured. The emotional weight of these losses is immense. Lois recounts how Superman, now powerless, looks around at the wreckage of his life and makes a decision. He cannot stay as Clark Kent. He cannot be Superman anymore. The only way to protect those he loves is to let the world believe he is dead. With Lois's help, he orchestrates his own disappearance, becoming a ghost.

## The Themes: What the Story Really Means

### The Hero's Ultimate Sacrifice

At its core, **Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?** is a meditation on sacrifice. Superman's power is not his strength, his flight, or his heat vision. It is his ability to choose the harder path. In this story, he chooses to give up everything—his identity, his friends, his very existence—to ensure that the world can move forward without him. This is a deeply adult concept that elevates the story above typical superhero fare. It suggests that true heroism is not about winning the fight but about knowing when to walk away for the greater good.

### The Loss of Innocence

The story also serves as a eulogy for the Silver Age itself. The bright, optimistic world of Superman was giving way to a darker, more cynical era. Moore captures this transition perfectly. The villains are not cartoonish; they are genuinely dangerous and cruel. The humor of the Silver Age is replaced by a somber, elegiac tone. When Lois finishes her story, the interviewer asks if Superman is truly dead. She replies with a mysterious smile, leaving the answer ambiguous. This ambiguity is intentional. It allows readers to hold onto the hope that Superman, in some form, still exists. It is a bittersweet ending that respects the past while acknowledging the

future.

### The Power of the Human Connection

Another key theme is the importance of human relationships. Superman's love for Lois, his friendship with Jimmy Olsen, his rivalry with Lex Luthor—these connections define him as much as his alien heritage. In the end, it is Lois who helps him escape, who keeps his secret, who guards his legacy. The story underscores that even the most powerful being in the universe is nothing without the bonds he forms with ordinary people. This humanistic touch is what makes the story resonate decades later.

## The Legacy of the Story

### Influence on Future Superman Comics

While **Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?** was intended as a definitive ending, Superman's story obviously continued. The reboot that followed, spearheaded by John Byrne, introduced a streamlined, modern Superman for a new generation. However, Moore's story cast a long shadow. Later writers would frequently reference the emotional depth and moral complexity of this farewell. It set a benchmark for how to conclude a superhero's journey with dignity and meaning. Stories like *All-Star Superman* and *Superman: For All Seasons* owe a clear debt to the tone and structure that Moore established.

### A Timeless Reading Experience

For readers discovering the story today, it remains remarkably accessible. You do not need to be a Silver Age expert to appreciate the emotional core. The story works as a standalone graphic novel, a self-contained masterpiece that can be enjoyed by anyone. The art by Curt Swan, the definitive Superman artist of the Silver Age, provides a visual consistency that grounds the fantastical elements. Swan's clean, expressive style perfectly complements Moore's script, creating a unified work that feels both classic and fresh.

### The Enduring Mystery

The final pages of **Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?** show Lois, years later, sitting in a quiet diner with her husband, Jordan Elliott. The interviewer notes a strange coincidence: Jordan Elliott looks remarkably like a young Clark Kent. Lois simply smiles. The implication is clear, yet never stated. Superman may have found a quiet, happy life, stripped of his powers but rich in love. This final image is one of the most powerful in all of comics. It suggests that the Man of Tomorrow found his peace, not in the skies, but on the ground, surrounded by those he loves. It is a fittingly human ending for a hero who always represented the best of humanity.

## Conclusion: The Man Who Endures

Ultimately, **Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?** is not a story about death. It is a story about transformation. Alan Moore and Curt Swan gave the Silver Age Superman a send-off that was equal parts tragic and hopeful. They answered the central question with grace: the Man of Tomorrow did not vanish into nothingness. He became a legend, a memory that continues to inspire. For any fan of Superman, or for anyone seeking a masterclass in storytelling, this graphic novel remains an essential read. It reminds us that while heroes may step out of the spotlight, the ideals they stand for can never truly be extinguished. The last son of Krypton may have left the world behind, but the hope he carried lives on in every page of this timeless tale. And perhaps, if we look closely enough, we might find him still—working quietly, smiling gently, and living the happy ending he so richly deserved.

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