

Reboot. Reboot. Reboot.

"Reboot" is a term I've been hearing a lot recently. "Reboot." Reboot." "Reboot." Is it a frog? Is it a tech support guy? No, it's Superman . . . and Batman, and the Green Lantern, and a whole lot of other superheroes. These are all characters owned by companies rather than by individual authors, and those companies tightly control how the characters get used. Because of this, the characters tend to have long-running, well-defined histories. When a company announces they're going to "reboot" a character or a series, it means they intend to scrap most of that history, keeping only the most basic aspects.

Although the term "reboot" is new, the idea of a publicized revamping of a character goes back to at least the mid-80s, when DC Comics hired a writer and artist named John Byrne to recreate Superman. DC's reasons were the same as most companies that do reboots. First of all, they are able to make the character more up-to-date: Superman first appeared in 1938—by modernizing Superman, Byrne made him more interesting to modern readers. Second, DC had an easy way to get rid of storylines and characters that had accumulated over time, making the character confusing to new readers. By effectively making Superman a new character, Byrne could choose what to keep and what to get rid of. For instance, he kept Superman's arch-villain, Lex Luthor, but got rid of Krypto, the super-dog (who wore a red cape, just like Superman). Finally, by publically announcing they were recreating Superman, DC Comics was able to get more people interested in reading about (and buying) Superman.

The first issue of the Superman reboot, titled "The Man of Steel," is reprinted in the ambitiously titled *Superman: the Greatest Stories Ever Told*, which you can find at BCPL in the Graphic Fic area. The superhero Iron Man, whose origin was set in 1960s Vietnam, was rebooted in the 2008 movie with Robert Downey, Jr., with his origin in modern-day Afghanistan, instead.

Green Lantern, the title character of a new movie starring Ryan Reynolds, has been rebooted a couple times, including 1989's *Green Lantern: Emerald Dawn*, which is also at BCPL, and which I recommend.

Before working on the Superman reboot, John Byrne wrote and drew Marvel Comics' superhero team, the Fantastic Four, in the early 1980s. Although he didn't reboot the Fantastic Four, he couldn't help making some major changes, like blowing up the team's headquarters and changing their costumes. You can read his memorable run reprinted in *Fantastic Four: Visionaries*, volumes 2 – 6 (which, of course, you can find at BCPL).

Longtime fans of a character often get angry with reboots, saying the companies are "messing with" a character to make money (well, *yeah*), and done poorly, it's obvious that they are. Done well, however, a reboot lets the company make money while allowing new fans to discover and enjoy classic characters.

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