



Law & Order Supersized

Blog examines superheroes and the law

In America, it is said that no one is above the law. But suppose superheroes and supervillains lived among us, like in the world of comic books. Would the law apply to them in the same way as it does to us mere mortals?

This premise was featured in the hit animated movie “The Incredibles,” when Mr. Incredible was sued by a man who was injured while being saved by the superhero. It is explored in greater detail on the website **Law and the Multiverse** (lawandthemultiverse.com).

The site is set up as a blog and is written by two attorneys. They examine fictional events from the world of comic book superbeings and explain the real-world legal consequences that would result. Criminal and civil laws are explained, as well as more exotic areas such as estate, immigration, property, civil rights and intellectual property laws.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

That's not in your policy

So what happens if, during the course of an epic battle between Superman and Doomsday, your house sustains severe damage caused by one of them crashing through the walls? Will your homeowner's insurance pay to repair the damages? Of course not! Insurance companies are just as slippery in comic book world as they are in the real world. It turns out that every homeowner's policy has coverage exclusions for acts of terrorism, war or civil unrest. It's more than likely that a good insurance company attorney will be able to make the argument that the damages were the result of terrorism or civil unrest. You may not be in good hands, but

your insurance company sure is.

We've seen it a million times. Batman scales the wall of the Joker's lair with his bat-arang and bat-rope. He then swoops down upon the evil villain and his henchmen just as they're about to execute their evil plan. A violent struggle ensues without anyone actually getting seriously injured. Batman is temporarily captured and tied up in an overly elaborate, not to mention ridiculously slow, device designed to kill him. Fortunately, the evil genius who spent tremendous amounts of time and money plotting to take over Gotham City neglects to remove Batman's utility belt. The caped crusader uses some specially designed bat-tool to escape. He then rounds up the bad guys and turns them over to the just-arriving police, led by Commissioner Gordon.

Who was that masked man?

All's well that ends well, right? Not exactly. In the real world there are numerous legal steps that must follow the apprehension of criminals if they are to be thrown in jail. In order for them to be charged and convicted there needs to be legally gathered evidence, and ideally, witnesses willing to testify.

The website examines the legality of Batman entering the hideout without a warrant, and thus the admissibility of any evidence seized within. It seems that because of our hero's close working relationship with the authorities he may be deemed a state actor. This poses some legal restrictions on his crime-fighting activities.

If the bad guys are put on trial, the sixth amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives them the right to confront the witnesses against them. This poses some thorny legal issues if the chief witness is a vigilante wearing a mask and harboring a secret identity. Any good defense lawyer would be able to raise reason-

able doubt about the identity of a witness that was wearing a mask.

License and registration

Superheroes and supervillains have some of the coolest gadgets around. Batman probably leads the pack with a fleet of vehicles including, the batmobile, batcycle, batcoper and batjet, not to mention his belt that carries more gadgets than a Swiss army knife. The Green Goblin has his flying scooter and the X-Men have a jet. In addition to exotic transportation, there's a plethora of lethal weapons floating around the super multiverse.

Here in the land of the free, everything is regulated, and you need to pay a fee and get a license for just about everything. The supervillains, of course, don't have to worry about this, since they are evil by nature and live to break the rules. The heroes, on the other hand, are supposed to stand for truth, justice and the American way. So how do they stay on the right side of the law and still use their secret technology?

Those that come by their powers naturally, like Superman, are pretty much in the clear since they don't rely on devices to get the job done. Ironman, on the other hand, is probably going to run into trouble with the Federal Aviation Administration over his flying suit.

The blog has a straightforward design that is easy to navigate. Other than an illustrated banner at the top, the site is all text. A list of topics on the right side takes you to each one with the click of the mouse.

Law and the Multiverse is a fun and interesting read. It deftly mixes the fantasy of comics with the reality of the law in a way that diminishes neither.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.