

# *Smallville*: The Mythology of Perry White

By Junelle Mallari

## Perry White Is Born

Perry White is Superman's editor. Well, to be more accurate, he is Clark Kent's editor at the great metropolitan newspaper, the *Daily Planet*.<sup>1</sup> He is the stern-but-sympathetic editor who acts very much like a father to his favorite reporters—Clark Kent, Lois Lane and cub reporter-photographer Jimmy Olsen. He screams out assignments, wants his newspaper to always get the story first, and works to make sure the Fourth Estate fulfills its responsibilities. White frightens his reporters sometimes, but when Kent, Lane and Olsen are in any kind of tangle, they always turn to Perry White to straighten things out.

Although the Superman mythology began in 1938 with Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's comic books, the character of Perry White did not debut until the second episode of the radio series that began on Feb. 12, 1940. "Since the *Daily Planet* editor was a new character created for the radio program by Bob Maxwell and Allen Ducovny, actor Julian Noa was allowed to develop his portrayal independent of the comic book and newspaper features. Julian Noa's blustery style set the standard for the character's late appearances in comic strips, and would eventually be echoed by Pierre Watkin and Jackie Cooper in film, and John Hamilton, Jackson Beck and Lane Smith on television."<sup>2</sup> These first images showed White as a brusque and snappy editor who wanted nothing more than to scoop the competition. However, underneath his rough exterior, the audience could sense that Perry White also felt compassion for his reporters. This image of White went from one medium to another, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

After the radio series presented the Perry White character, the comic book, *Superman*, followed suit and introduced White as the new editor for the also newly named newspaper, the *Daily Planet*. One biography described White as "one of the Planet's all-time great reporters. Now, as managing editor, Perry is the heart and soul of the publication...Perry is opinionated, explosive, and a bit nuts...Perry's a no-nonsense, hard-hitting individual who not only scoops the competition, but does it in a way that earns the respect of everyone – except the criminal element."<sup>3</sup> Subsequent portrayals in other media offered the same portrayal of Perry White as the typical editor of the 1930s-1940s. These include the Fleischer *Superman* cartoons (1941-1943), the *Superman* movie serial (1948), the *Adventures of Superman* television series (1950s), the *Superman* films (1978-1987), and the *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series (1993-1997).

Perry White was the subject of the "Perry" episode of *Smallville*, which aired on Oct. 29, 2003. In the episode, White, a once-great journalist whose career was ruined by Metropolis tycoon Lionel Luthor, comes to Smallville, Kansas, to look for alien stories for a tabloid news show. In the episode, Perry White is still a reporter, but anyone familiar with the Superman mythology knows that White eventually will become the editor of the *Daily Planet* in Metropolis. The

episode fuses the Superman mythology because the audience knows that Clark Kent will someday go to Metropolis and work for the *Planet* with Perry White as his editor. In *Smallville*, Perry White's character really has the makings of an editor, which the episode foreshadows.

"The most consistent heroic image of the journalist from 1938 to 2001 and beyond involves Clark Kent and the rest of the staff of the *Daily Planet*. The story contains many of the fundamental reporter-as-hero clichés, [including] the hard-boiled, get-the-story-at-any-cost editor."<sup>4</sup> Almost 65 years from the beginning of the Superman mythology, the *Smallville* series still offers the same image of Perry White and other characters. The show also retains each character's legacy. The continuity of White's character for some 65 years has given him and the other *Superman* characters almost real-life status.

### Perry White in Radio (1940)

*"I take chances, Kent, and I'm going to take a chance on you."*  
-- Perry White's debut in Superman on Radio (1940)

*"Listen, Mr. White, how long before you go to press?"*  
*"Now, wait a minute. Why, I'm going to press right now."*  
*"Well, hold it, will you?"*  
*"Stop the press? It better be good, Kent!"*  
-- Perry White to Clark Kent in "Menace to the Silver Clipper" (1940)

The first image of Perry White on radio set the standard for all Perry Whites to come – in comics, in cartoons, on television, and on film. Sixty-five years and several media later, Perry White in *Smallville* still resembles the Perry White of radio. "Editors throughout the century were always gruff and sharp-tongued but usually understanding under their bluster."<sup>5</sup> In a nutshell, this is Perry White.

In "Clark Kent, Mild-Mannered Reporter," the radio program's second episode, which aired on Feb. 14, 1940, Perry White is flustered because he needs a reporter for a breaking story. The secretary tells him that a young man wanting a job, Clark Kent, is still waiting to meet with him. White tells her to keep him waiting and asks what reporters are free. She offers a list of reporters who are out of town and busy with other assignments. White: "I knew it! Confound it's always the way! Something breaks and nobody to handle it." Secretary: "What is it, Mr. White?" White: "Railroads. Sabotage. I didn't believe it, but there may be something in it after all. If there is, Miss Smith, it'll be the biggest story since Lindbergh. And me shorthanded! Oh, what's the use!"

In the same episode, Perry White and Clark Kent discuss the background of the railroad story. Kent remembers reading about something of it in the papers. White: "Eh, naturally. But you didn't read about the warnings because they weren't printed." Kent is confused: "Weren't printed?" White: "No, and they won't be. Not until we've checked all the angles." Even though White wants his paper to be the first to print the story, he knows that printing the truth is more

important than being first. A biography of White on the Batman-Superman Web site explains: “Perry has made a career out of bringing down the biggest crooks in Metropolis, but he’s no muckraker. Perry insists on having the hard, cold facts before he prints a story, a trait he demands of all his reporters, too.”<sup>6</sup>

But the audience knows that Perry White will regain respectability in his work once again because the audience knows what’s in store for him. To know what’s in White’s future, all viewers need do is look to past portrayals. In *Superman* on radio’s “Menace to the Silver Clipper,” White is the chief, the one with the authority to say which stories go in the paper. In the episode, Clark Kent seeks permission from his editor to stop the presses, or holding off printing the newspaper for a breaking story. Kent: “Listen, Mr. White, how long before you go to press?” Perry White: “Now, wait a minute. Why, I’m going to press right now.” Kent: “Well, hold it, will you?” White: “Stop the press? It better be good, Kent!” The editors “decided what stories to run and where to run them, and when a reporter ran into the city room screaming, ‘Stop the presses!’ it was the city editor who decided if the story was worth such theatrics.<sup>7</sup>

The editor on radio, Perry White is unyielding and obstinate. The villain the Yellow Mask threatens to bomb the *Daily Planet*. Clark Kent suggests that the editor empty the building. White has too much pride: “No. No. You want us to be the laughing stock of the city? Suppose nothing happens?” Kent doesn’t think that they should take any chances: “On the other hand, suppose something does?” White’s ego wins out: “Well, they can’t intimidate me. If the Yellow Mask means business, he’ll find us right here at six-o-clock!” White cares more about not having the city laugh at the *Daily Planet* than he does about keeping his staff out of harm’s way. “Nothing must get in the way of a story,” explains Saltzman. “If anyone slights him or insults him, he’ll get back at that person if it takes the rest of his life and all the resources of the newspaper.”<sup>8</sup>

### Perry White in Comics (1940)

“My apologies to you and Lois! You’re still the two best reporters in town!”

“Coming from you, that’s something!”

-- Clark Kent’s response to Perry White’s compliment in *Superman* comics (1940)

“This is no laughing matter! Either get me a bang-up story on “The Black Gang,” or I get two brand new reporters!”

-- Perry White threatens to fire his ace reporters in *Superman* comics (1940)

Perry White in the *Superman* comic books is the same brusque editor of the radio show. After the radio program introduced Perry White as the *Daily Planet* editor, the *Superman* comics followed suit, renaming its editor, George Taylor, as Perry White.<sup>9</sup> The comics then adapted the character to the radio image.

In the comics, Perry White debuts in *Superman* Vol. 2 No. 7. Clark Kent: “Got a good assignment for us, White?” Perry White: “A splendid one! Hop down to police headquarters and interview our very successful prosecuting attorney, George Lash!”

Lois Lane admits that Lash is young, energetic and gets results, but also complains that his success goes to his head. In the cab, Lane complains to Kent about White’s idea of a good assignment: “Splendid assignment, eh? White wouldn’t think so if he had to listen to that windbag blow off steam!” Kent agrees: “It must be fun to be an editor and pass out sour assignments like this to unsuspecting reporters like us!” According to White’s ace reporters, their editor isn’t familiar with what a great assignment is. For the most part, the editor knows better than his reporters. “Some of the major functions of an editor are to assign and see that his publication’s reporters get the best and latest news, write well and turn their copy in by or before the deadline for going to press. He helps set the publication’s policies on issues and personalities of the day, and he uses the authority vested in his position to prod and/or encourage his hirelings along desired paths of endeavor,”<sup>10</sup> notes Maxwell Taylor Courson.

In another storyline in *Superman* Vol. 2 No. 7, Perry White is angry that the *Planet*’s rival paper is scooping his paper: “The new gossip columnist on the *Morning Pictorial* is making us look like saps with his news beats on ‘The Black Gang!’” Clark Kent: “How Peter Peeker gets his news so fast is beyond me!” Lois Lane: “Who knows? Maybe he’s Superman disguised as a reporter!” White is serious: “This is no laughing matter! Either get me a bang-up story on ‘The Black Gang,’ or I get two brand new reporters!” Editors in films often threaten to fire their reporters. “If [the editors] weren’t the stars of the film, they seldom left their desks. They screamed out orders at cubs and veterans alike, smoked cigars any chance they could, and regularly fired their star reporter who always came back for more,”<sup>11</sup> says Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman.

In *Superman* Vol. 2 No. 8, Lois Lane comes racing in to the editor’s office at the *Daily Planet*. Perry White: “What’s eating you?” Lane: “Plenty! Clark was just taken in by some carnival thieves! They deserve to be exposed! This is what happened...” She explains to White how the carnival workers encouraged Lane and Kent to keep throwing balls to win the prize. In the end, the workers seemed to ask for more money to play the game than it was actually worth, and the prize was worthless junk. White: “Anyone who would fall for such a shoddy skin game almost deserves to be trimmed. However, if you can dig up actual proof of wrongdoing, I’ll be glad to give it space in the paper.” White’s respectable character arises mostly from his willingness to do the right thing, something that will contribute to the good of society. “The lesson is an old one—a journalist’s first job is to do the right thing by protecting the public interest. Betraying the public trust is, for the journalist both in and out of the movies, the greatest sin of all,”<sup>12</sup> notes Saltzman.

“Whatever Happened to Perry White?” from *The Superman Family* Vol. 24 No. 183 starts off with, “Perry White is a great newspaper editor, but a sugar-sweet nice guy he’s not.” In the comic strip, Perry White’s doctor advises him to reduce his stress, or else his health might suffer. So White heeds the doctor’s orders. A few of the *Planet* staff discuss White’s new friendly demeanor. Lois Lane: “Have you guys noticed Perry acting... differently today?” Co-worker:

“Nice, you mean?” Jimmy Olsen: “Yeah – it’s spooky!” Lane thinks that he might be sick, but a co-worker disagrees: “Sick people get more grouchy – not less grouchy!” Olsen: “I think he’s in some kind of shock! And I know just the way to snap him out of it.”

Jimmy Olsen thinks the solution is to offer the editor a cigar—an exploding cigar. White explodes himself: “You idiot! You’re fired!” Olsen: “Gee, Mr. White, I was only trying to bring you to your senses!” White: “Get out of my sight, you imbecile! Out, out, OUT! Moron... Dunderhead...” Meanwhile, in the newsroom, Lane asks what that yelling could be: “It sounded like...” The co-worker finishes her sentence: “...Perry White, returning to normal.” Normal for Perry White is obviously shouting and name-calling, but underneath it all, White is still a softie. “Despite his tough exterior, Perry is more a paternal figure to his staff than a boss. He has a special fondness for Clark and Lois...He also likes Jimmy Olsen more than he’ll ever admit, even though he does get tired of the little punk calling him ‘Chief’ all the time.”<sup>13</sup>

### Perry White in Cartoons (1941)

“Kent, you help Lois follow up her lead. She may have an angle on this thing.”  
“Yes, sir!”

“But, Chief, I’d like the chance to crack the story on my own!”

“Well...”

“Thanks, Chief!”

“But, Lois—! Chief, don’t you think that’s a dangerous mission?”

-- Perry White and his star reporters in the first episode of Fleischer’s *Superman* cartoons (1941)

The *Superman* cartoons produced by Fleischer Studios and Paramount Pictures (and Famous Studios for the last eight cartoons) were originally released in movie theaters from 1941-1943.<sup>14</sup> In the Fleischer cartoons, Perry White is not as commanding and authoritative as he is portrayed in other media. Instead, he is actually mild-tempered and almost docile. But the ten-minute episodes do not give him a chance to appear in more than one scene, if he even appears at all. In other media, Perry White does not play a major role. His main purpose, as in the cartoons, is usually just to give Clark Kent and Lois Lane their assignments. In the cartoons, this doesn’t leave room for much presence.

In the first episode of the Fleischer *Superman* cartoons, Perry White only appears once. White presses a switch on his intercom box: “Kent, I want to see you. Just received another threatening note.” Kent: “Okay, Mr. White.” White presses another switch: “Lois, another note from the mad scientist.” Lane: “Coming in, Chief!” The two star reporters are at White’s desk. White: “Now listen to this warning. He plans to strike tonight.” He reads them the warning.<sup>15</sup> “This nut may prove dangerous! Kent, you help Lois follow up her lead. She may have an angle on this thing.” Kent: “Yes, sir!” Lane interjects: “But, Chief, I’d like the chance to crack the story on my own!” White thinks about it, but Lane already assumes an answer: “Thanks, Chief!” Kent protests:

“But, Lois—!” Lane is already out the door. White doesn’t even give Kent an answer back when Kent asks if it’s dangerous for Lois to go out on the assignment alone.

In the cartoons, White customarily just leads reporters to the story. “[S]ome [editors] appeared in roles reflecting intelligence, an understanding of both news and human values...although these qualities tended to be possessed most often by editors with minimal roles in the films,” according to Courson. “Thus, the lack of character development resulted in many of these editors making more or less ritual appearances but not entering deeply into the films’ plots and action sequences.”<sup>16</sup> In the radio program, the comics, and the cartoons, Perry White has not been a central character, but rather the editor who never appears away from his desk.

In “The Arctic Giant” cartoon episode, Perry White is on the phone in his office: “You mean to say that if the ice were permitted to thaw there’s a possibility the monster might still be alive? Thank you, professor!” Again, White has the information that will lead his reporters to the story. White buzzes Lois on his intercom: “Lois, there’s a new angle on that frozen monster story. Get over to the museum and see what’s doing. They’ve got him in a special refrigerator.” Later, Kent and White receive a ticker-tape news flash: “Arctic Monster Runs Amuck in City...” Kent: “Chief, Lois is in the museum!” White: “Better get over there, Kent!” Despite Perry White’s minimal role in the cartoons, he still shows concern for his best reporters. When Lois Lane is in trouble, as she often is, White forgets the story—even if only for a second—to make sure that his reporters are all right.

In “The Magnetic Telescope” episode of the Fleischer Superman cartoons, Clark Kent and Lois Lane are looking out the window at a fireworks show being put on by a magnetic telescope. Perry White seems impressed: “What do you think of the professor’s show, now?” Lane: “I still think it’s pretty dangerous business.” Kent: “I hope nothing goes wrong.” Later on, Lois Lane is out reporting for a story on the magnetic telescope. She calls Perry White as the building she’s in starts to fall apart. White answers: “City editor.” Lane: “Look, Chief. The pan is gone. The thing’s gone haywire!” Lane screams. White: “Lois? Lois? What happened? Lois?” Perry White is more than the gruff, sharp-tongued editor. He is a paternal figure and someone to turn to in time of need. While his reporters turn to him in their crises, he in turn works for their well-being and safety.

### Perry White in Movie Serials (1948)

*“I warned you not to get any wild ideas, but you did! And you not only muffed this story, you lost Hackett!...Perhaps someday I’ll find out what really happened! Now get out, all of you, and find Hackett! And don’t come back until you do! Get out, all of you!”*  
-- Perry White to his star reporters in *Superman – The Serial* (1948)

*Superman – The Serial* came out in movie theaters in 1948. One chapter was released every week for fifteen weeks.<sup>17</sup> Perry White in the movie serial has greater presence than the Perry

White of the cartoons, partly because the chapters have a longer running time than the cartoon episodes. But also, Perry White in the serial has a stronger, imposing authority than he has in other media. When the character is allowed to become a greater part of the story, his sternness intensifies, and his personality comes through.

In the second chapter of the serial, “Depths of the Earth!,” Perry White is talking to two men and a woman, presumably his reporters: “Of all the stupid stories that have come across this desk, this is the worst. A guy bending a broken rail and preventing a train wreck. Flies into burning building and rescues woman. It’s a case of mass hysteria, and that’s the way I want it played! Now get out of here, all of you!” The three leave. Kent, who had snuck into White’s office while he was yelling at the reporters, sets down his suitcases and walks up to White’s desk. White looks up: “Well, what do you want.” “A job” is Kent’s quick answer. White says sarcastically: “Any special kind, or would mine do?” Kent: “Well, I’d like to be a reporter. I haven’t had any experience in writing, but—” White, sarcastic again: “That should help.” Kent: “Well I have other qualifications that might be valuable.” Sarcasm and quick wit were qualities that could always be used to describe White.

In the movie serial’s third chapter, “The Reducer Ray!,” White’s sarcasm continues. Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen walk into Perry White’s office. White greets them: “Why hello! May I congratulate you two?” Lane: “Skip the sarcasm, Chief.” White gets serious: “You missed a Page One story!” Lane defends herself: “We had the story, and we’d have phoned it in if we hadn’t been stabbed in the back.” White: “You got the wrong slant, Lois. Kent gave the *Planet* a scoop we badly needed.” The sarcasm and clever quips leaven. When his reporters really screw up, there are no jokes.

In “Into the Electric Furnace!,” Chapter 7 of the movie series, Lois Lane explains how she passed out after her rustle with Hackett and wound up in the doctor’s office. White has no sympathy for her: “And Dr. Hackett, no doubt, is with the Spider Lady, helping her menace society!” White turns to Kent and starts scolding him: “I warned you not to get any wild ideas, but you did! And you not only muffed this story, you lost Hackett!” Kent seems confused: “But I did have him. I tied him up and left him in the closet.” Lane defends him: “Clark’s right, Chief. It was my fault that Hackett got away. I untied him.” White: “Perhaps someday I’ll find out what really happened! Now get out, all of you, and find Hackett! And don’t come back until you do!” White isn’t concerned that Lane wound up in the doctor’s office. He’s worried that the prison escapee Hackett has escaped once again. He’s even more vexed that they lost the story. “The success of the newspaper, the triumph over all competition, is more important than anything else,”<sup>18</sup> according to Saltzman.

### Perry White in *Adventures of Superman* Television Series (1953)

*“Oh, Chief. What’s wrong? Nothing? Well, isn’t it kind of late at night to be calling if nothing’s wrong?”*

*“Late? Of course it isn’t late—not for me. Great Caesar’s ghost! When do you think I get my work done if didn’t work at night?”*

-- Perry White to Clark Kent on the phone in *Adventures of Superman* (1953)

The image of Perry White from radio through television has been consistent – stern editor shouting out assignments and orders to get the story first, but also showing compassion for his favorite reporters, especially when they’re in real trouble. The *Adventures of Superman* keeps this image of White intact while making him a more central character. In many episodes, White appears outside his office at the *Daily Planet*. The series premiered on television in early 1953 (though it began filming in 1951<sup>19</sup>) and ran until 1957.

The first episode of the series, “Superman on Earth,” shows Perry White as an editor who wants to scoop the competition more than anything else, “...a man whose whole concern was getting out a newspaper that would squash the competition.”<sup>20</sup> White and his three favorites, Clark Kent, Lois Lane, and Jimmy Olsen, surround the man who survived a 1,000-foot fall from a blimp. White: “And when you came to, Kent was there.” Man: “Yes, sir. And he hustled me around to the side of the administration building, got me into a cab and then we came straight here.” White: “Pretty smart, Kent! We’ve got a clean beat over every other paper in town!” Kent: “Does this mean that I get the job, sir?” A staff member hands White the newspaper. White hands the paper over to Kent: “There’s your answer, son.” Kent, spying his byline: “Oh, thank you, Mr. White. Thanks a million!”

In the 1930s, newspaper reporters and their editors were often pitted against each other. The editor was the reporter’s natural enemy.<sup>21</sup> “Almost every media film has at least one major argument between the reporter and the editor...The mold was cast in *The Front Page* (1931) when the reporter Hildy Johnson and the editor Walter Burns went at it from the first reel to the last.”<sup>22</sup>

In “Great Caesar’s Ghost,” Perry White is the main character of the plot. “Great Caesar’s ghost!” is one of White’s classic expressions (the other is “...and don’t call me ‘Chief!'”). In this episode, White repeats the expression so much that he starts to hear and see Julius Caesar’s ghost. The episode begins with Perry White in his office dialing on the phone. “Answer the phone!” White says impatiently. Clark Kent, in his apartment, picks up his phone: “Hello? Kent speaking. Oh, Chief. What’s wrong? Nothing? Well, isn’t it kind of late at night to be calling if nothing’s wrong?” White: “Late? Of course it isn’t late—not for me. Great Caesar’s ghost! When do you think I get my work done if I didn’t work at night?” Perry White apparently doesn’t consider his time in the office during the day real work. It was never disputed that Perry

White wasn't a hardworking editor, but in this episode, the *Daily Planet* staff thinks he's working just a little too hard.

Lois Lane asks Perry White if he's sure the newspaper he gave her was the one he wanted her to take a look at. White is incensed: "Great Caesar's ghost! Of course I'm sure! Don't all of you treat me as though I were going crazy!" White walks out the door, but before he leaves: "Well now, is everything clear? You've all got your assignments. I'll be back in five minutes!" When White leaves, Lane shows Clark Kent and Jimmy Olsen the newspaper. Paper doll patterns were cut neatly on the front page.

Perry White finally decides to take a rest when he sees Clark Kent bending pipes with his bare hands. Kent becomes the *Daily Planet* editor in White's absence and begins to take on White's typical demeanor. Jimmy Olsen starts to call Kent "Chief," and Lois Lane looks to him for advice on an assignment. The scene even ends with Kent adopting Perry White's famed line to Olsen: "...and don't call me 'Chief!'" Kent's espousal of White's position shows that anyone trying to be Perry White would adopt the same stern qualities.

### **Perry White in Films (1978-1987)**

*"It's got everything. It's got sex, it's got violence, it's got the ethnic angle. I mean, look at it."*  
*"Yeah, so does a lady wrestler with a foreign accent."*

-- Perry White's response to Lois Lane's story pitch in *Superman: The Movie* (1978)

*"The minute the story broke, I bundled her on the first Concorde out of here. If Paris is gonna go kablooey, I want my best reporter right in the middle of it!"*

-- Perry White explains why he sends Lois Lane into danger in *Superman II* (1981)

*"You're lucky I didn't fire you! 'I'll get a chance to get exclusive pictures of the biggest chemical factory fire in history,' and what does he come home with? A broken leg and twelve melted rolls of film!"*

-- Perry White chews out cub reporter-photographer Jimmy Olsen in *Superman III* (1983)

*"If you think I'm going to let you turn this grand old lady into one of your bimbos—!"*

-- Perry White warns *Daily Planet* owner David Warfield in *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987)

The *Superman* films focused primarily on action and even comedy rather than journalism. But the journalism element always included Perry White. In the films, White is the same editor he had been for the past 40 years – the hard-shelled father figure who was really a softie underneath all the gruffness. He has the same sarcastic attitude, the same quick wit, and he values getting the story first and getting it right for the *Daily Planet*.

In *Superman: The Movie* (1978), Perry White calls a meeting in his office. He shows the reporters competing newspapers, reading their headlines: “We’re sitting on top of the story of the century here. I want the name of this flying whatchamacallit to go with the *Daily Planet* like bacon and eggs, franks and beans, death and taxes, politics and corruption!” Kent stammers: “I don’t, I don’t think that he would lend himself to any ch-ch-cheap, promotion schemes, Mr. White.” White barks at Kent: “Exactly how would you know that, Kent?” Kent timidly replies: “Um... j-just, uh, a first impression?” White: “Well, anyway, who’s talking cheap? I’ll make him a partner if I have to! Right?” Assistant: “Right, Chief.”

White continues: “I want the REAL story! I want the inside dope on this guy! Has he got a family? Where does he live? What does the ‘S’ stand for? Family? Relatives? How does he fly? Tony, who is he? Milo, what’s his name. What’s he got hidden under that cape of his? Batteries? Why did he show up last night? Nick, where does he come from? Does he have a girlfriend? What’s his favorite ball team, Kent? Now, listen to me. I tell you, boys and girls, whichever one of you gets it out of him is gonna wind up with the single-most important interview since...God talked to Moses!” An employee lights a cigar for the editor. He takes a puff and then yells to his reporters: “What are you standing around about for? Move! Get on that story!”

Perry White’s minimal role in *Superman II* (1981) almost has no place in the romantic storyline between Clark Kent and Lois Lane. In one of White’s two total scenes, White and Kent discuss a gang of terrorists who have seized the Eiffel Tower. Jimmy Olsen is appalled that twenty tourists have been taking hostage. White dismisses the tourists: “Yeah, but that’s just penny ante stuff. These guys claim that if the French government doesn’t meet their demands, they’ve got a hydrogen bomb ready to level Paris!” Kent: “But tippers, Mr. White, tha-tha-that’s terrible!” White: “That’s why they call them ‘terrorists,’ Kent. Now get to the Morgue. I want to know everything there is on terrorism!” Kent asks if Lane knows anything about what’s happening. White: “Does she know about it? She’s in it!” Kent is aghast. White: “The minute the story broke, I bundled her on the first Concorde out of here. If Paris is gonna go kablooey, I want my best reporter right in the middle of it!” Kent: “But gee, Mr. White—” White thinks he has hurt Kent’s feelings: “No offense, Kent. You’re good, but Lois Lane is better!” Kent: “No, I meant, isn’t that a little bit dangerous, sir?” White: “That goes with the territory, Kent. But don’t worry. If I know Lois Lane, she’ll not only come back with a Pulitzer Prize story but a one-on-one interview with a hydrogen bomb titled ‘What Makes Me Tick.’ Now don’t stand around, Kent!”

In *Superman III* (1983), instead of being a serious editor for a great metropolitan newspaper, Perry White’s character shows up more as a comical role for a contest the newspaper is having. However, in the beginning of the film, White is allowed time to give some advice to his cub reporter, which he divulges in the only way Perry White knows how—with derisive shouting. White: “I really don’t understand you, Olsen. A boring banquet, and you bring me 3,000 boring pictures! Yet Superman saves a man from drowning on Third Avenue this morning while you just stand there watching the whole thing, and you don’t bring me one picture!” White lights up a cigar and starts to smoke. Olsen tries to explain that he couldn’t take the pictures because he didn’t have his camera with him. The editor will have none of it: “A photographer eats with his

camera. A photographer sleeps with his camera.” Lois Lane, who has been quiet in the office, quips: “I’m glad I’m a writer.”

Perry White in *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987) had more substance as a character than in the previous two films combined. Perry White battles throughout the film with Rupert Murdoch-type<sup>23</sup> media owner David Warfield. “Crusading screen journalists usually come in two flavors, the publisher and the editor...The editor, [however], is depicted as more conscience-driven [than the publisher]”<sup>24</sup> notes Larry Langman. At the end of the film, White finds a way to remove Warfield from his authority over the *Daily Planet* since he has ruined the paper’s reputation. White: “You know, I’m not a tycoon. I’m just an old reporter! But I’ve read enough of my own newspaper over the years about hostile takeovers of big companies.” White ascends the escalator, still talking to Warfield: “And you, Mr. Warfield, must’ve been asleep at the wheel! Because I managed to convince the bankers of this city that our *Daily Planet* should be treated like a natural resource, protected from predators! So I convinced them to lend me the money. I bought all the outstanding shares, and you, Mr. Warfield, are now a minority shareholder!” Everyone in the lobby applauds. But even in triumph, everything is still work for Perry White. White: “Now everyone, back to work!” Jimmy Olsen: “Way to go, Chief!”

### **Perry White in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993)**

“*You know, Kent, there’s only one attribute I value more than experience, and that’s initiative. Clark Kent, welcome to the Daily Planet.*”

-- Perry White hiring Clark Kent in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993)

“*Wait a minute. What happened to that mood piece I gave you about the raising of that old theater on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street?*”

“*I wasn’t in the mood.*”

“*You weren’t in the mood? Now look, Lois—you can’t come in here and tell me you’re not—*”

-- Perry White lectures Lois Lane, who leaves before he finishes, in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993)

The *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television program aired from 1993 to 1997 and highlighted the human side of Clark Kent and the relationship between Kent and Lois Lane. Perry White played a larger role in the series than he had in prior movies, cartoons, radio, and comics. He appeared primarily in the newsroom like most editors in films, but the show allowed the Perry White character to develop more than the other media had. Just as the show gives attention to the human aspect of Clark Kent, it does the same for Perry White.

The first image of Perry White in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993) is of a light-hearted, but still serious, editor who can connect with his staff. It opens with the *Daily Planet* newsroom celebrating Lois Lane’s breaking story. Perry White jokes: “Hey, hey, hey!

Turn that thing off. Jimmy, don't encourage her. She's got her head as big as the Metrodome, as it is." Everyone laughs. Lane: "Well, it's nice to know I'm appreciated around here, Chief." White jokes: "Oh well, what do you expect? Garlands strewn at your feet?" Lane laughs: "No!" Then she becomes serious: "But I would like a raise." White isn't through joking around: "Well, I'd like a 145-foot triple mast and schooner with a teak interior, but hey Lois..." White turns his empty pants pockets inside-out "...times are tough." Everyone laughs again. White tries to be serious: "What's everybody standing around for? This is a newspaper, not happy hour at Buckingham Palace!"

Later in the episode, as White interviews Clark Kent for a reporter position, they are interrupted by White's ringing phone. White tells Kent to hold on: "Yeah? Oh, tell him to keep his pants on. If [they] can't deliver on time, just find a place who can!" White slams the phone down and puts his fingers on his neck to check his pulse. "Can you believe I had to buy a blood pressure monitor last week?" White says to Kent. "Pava leaves," Kent answers. White: "I beg your pardon?" Kent explains that a tribe in New Guinea eats Pava leaves to relieve stress. Kent: "It puts them in a meditative state. Maybe you should try it." White: "Oh. Well, I see you've done some traveling."

In *Lois & Clark*, Perry White is also disappointed in not getting the story – because the facts are missing. White talks with his star reporters, Lois Lane and Clark Kent, about the story they want to publish: "Alright, let me see if I've got this straight. Now, you want me to publish a story that says that the Prometheus project is being sabotaged; that the space transport *Messenger* exploded; and that the transport carrying the habitation module to Space Station Prometheus—scheduled to be launched in less than three days—is probably also going to blow up. And all of this information you got from interviewing Samuel Platt, a man who was banned from the scientific community, underwent psychiatric treatment, and committed suicide—although he was 'probably' murdered. Now, does that about sum it up?" Lane senses what White is getting at, so she tries to defend them, but White doesn't give her a chance: "Hard facts! Hard facts! That's the name of this game. Now, go out there and get me some." Like all great editors, Perry White wants to make sure the story is right before printing it. White's character was born in the 1940s when "major newspaper publishers and editors were growing more conscious of their important and powerful role in society and were acting with greater concern about accuracy and fairness."<sup>25</sup> So Perry White is concerned with accuracy and fairness because it is part of who he is.

### Perry White in *Smallville* (2003)

*“You’re a reporter?”*

*“In a past life.”*

-- Perry White’s answer to Clark Kent in *Smallville* (2003)

*“You know the only thing worse than never landing that story of a lifetime?...Having it, and being afraid to write it.”*

*“Perry ‘The Pit Bull’ White backing off a story? That’s hard to believe.”*

-- Chloe Sullivan to Perry White in *Smallville* (2003)

*“No, look, look—okay, okay, I’m a jerk. And I’ve got the broken engagements and the sleepless nights to prove it.”*

*“If your job bothers you so much, why don’t you just stop?”*

*“Cause I’m a journalist. It’s in my blood. And sometimes you have to push to get the truth, even when it hurts.”*

-- Perry White to Lana Lang in *Smallville* (2003)

*“Something tells me the world hasn’t seen the last of Perry White.”*

*“Somethin’ tells me you’re right. Rumor has it I still have a friend or two on the Daily Planet. Oh, by the way, I went over a couple more of your Torch stories...They’re rough, and half the time you bury the lead. But I see a glimmer of hope. If you ever make it to Metropolis, look me up. I owe you one.”*

-- Foreshadow of Perry White as editor in *Smallville* (2003)

Perry White’s character appeared once in the *Smallville* series (2001-) in “Perry,” an episode devoted to introducing the future newspaper editor. In the episode, White is a journalist for *X-Styles*, a tabloid sci-fi news show. He comes to Smallville, Kansas, to report on the paranormal events of the town.

At the beginning of the *Smallville* episode, a news program about a solar flare is on television at a local bar. Perry White, who is watching the program, asks the bartender: “Do you believe that there are powers, greater than we can know, somewhere in the universe?” The bartender answers back apathetically: “Sure. Look, do you mind if I switch back to the game?” White shakes his head, more in a drunken stupor than in response to the bartender’s question. The bartender switches to a sports game. Perry White laughs, and says to no one in particular: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for the Metropolis Sharks.” He toasts the room: “To Littleville, Kansas, and all the Little Kansassians in it.” White then downs a shot, which appears not to be his first. White orders: “One more.” Bartender: “Look, pal, we don’t want any trouble here. I think you might’ve had enough.” White threatens him: “If you want trouble, you just try cutting me off!” Next, White is seen being thrown out of the bar and told not to return. White retorts: “Small-town friendly, my butt.”

Here, White acts more like the drunken reporter than the respectable *Daily Planet* editor. The 1930s journalist, however, was no stranger to strong drink. In fact, 1930s films showed that the journalist and alcohol went hand-in-hand. “Several films have news gatherers who cover news events with their whiskey flasks firmly lodged in their hip pockets. In most instances the drinking...was an extension of the masculine image these reporters projected. Probably because even a sodden man can look and sound like a hero and be capable ultimately of confronting his destiny, the drinking journalists were almost always limited on film to the male sex.”<sup>26</sup> Only in *Smallville* has Perry White been shown drinking. Its purpose in this episode illustrates how washed-up White has become since corporate bigwig Lionel Luthor ruined his successful stint as a *Daily Planet* reporter. So while for 1930s reporters, drinking acted “as a solace and a means of maintaining a hard, steady, up-to-the-deadline pace,”<sup>27</sup> for Perry White in *Smallville* drinking was solace for losing respectability as a reporter.

Clark Kent runs full speed along the empty roads that cut through endless Kansas fields. White, speaking on a mobile phone and studying a map, is driving these roads. While trying to get directions, White pays little attention to the road. Kent, still running at full speed, suddenly stops because the solar flare impedes his superhuman abilities. At that moment, White’s car crosses over into Kent’s lane. White narrowly misses him as he swerves into an electrical post. Kent quickly comes to White’s aid, ripping the door off of his car. Kent grabs a bewildered White out of the driver’s seat and speedily runs him to safety. Kent: “You okay?” With slurred speech, White replies: “You pulled the door off of the car with your bare hands? You walked right through the power lines.” Kent: “You’re a little drunk, Mr...” White: “White. Perry White.”

In their first meeting, Kent saves White. Throughout the episode, Kent is always right there to save him. In a sense, Kent is more like White’s editor, because Kent helps him in his transformation back to the respectable reporter. As Joe Saltzman describes the editor’s role: “They are loyal to their reporters and often the reporter’s last best friend. Behind all the yelling and name-calling, when they see their reporters in serious trouble, they’re always there to lend a helping hand.”<sup>28</sup> In the episode, Kent really is Perry White’s only friend always there to lend him a helping hand. In a way, White learns from Kent how to be the editor he will become.

Perry White convinces Clark Kent to take him around Smallville, Kansas, by offering not to sue for the accident. Ever the astute reporter, Perry White cashes in on the tactics that will get him the story. He uses every resource at his disposal, and even finds ways to get at ones that aren’t. Kent and White enter The Talon, a coffee shop in Smallville run by Lana Lang.<sup>29</sup> Kent: “Two meteor craters—that’s it? You don’t want to see anything else?” Perry White: “No. Blown-out buildings and sinkholes are background, Clark. I’m looking for substance. Texture. Human dimension.” White makes a beeline for Lana Lang. “Hi. Perry White. I’d like a triple cappuccino and a couple of those glazed crawlers and an interview.” White drops *Time* magazine on the counter with a young Lang on the front cover. Headline: “Heart Break in the Heart Land.” “Smallville’s very own cover girl,” White says with a smile. Lang looks at White with a mixture of contempt and disbelief at his callousness. Kent: “What’re you doing?” White: “It’s called ‘getting the story.’ Now, nothing fancy Miss Lang, just a simple Q and A. You know, how’s Miss Meteor coping fourteen years after the Big Bang?” Perry says with a smile. Lang: “Maybe

this is a joke to you, but my parents died that day.” White: “And I’m sorry. But that makes you newsworthy.” Kent: “That’s it. You’re leaving.” White bullies her: “You know, either she talks to me now, or she faces the cameras in the morning!” Lang says with disgust: “Clark, I can’t believe you’re with this guy!” Clark Kent protests, but Lang suggests they leave. White’s rough ways and his push for the story are beginning to look more like the *Daily Planet* editor that audiences are familiar with.

Betraying the public trust is the greatest sin in journalism, but in Superman almost anything is excusable to get the story. Clark Kent: “You didn’t tell me Lana was part of your agenda.” White isn’t sorry: “Hey, you didn’t tell me you knew her. Hey, I’m sorry if I hurt your girlfriend’s feelings, but she’s a legitimate source.” Clark Kent: “No, she’s not anymore.” White: “It doesn’t work that way, Clark. I still have to find faces to put on camera.” White doesn’t see that the person is more important than the story; to the journalist, the story is everything. “Editors are malevolent creatures in most novels and movies. They teach eager, inexperienced cubs, or re-teach temporarily forgetful veterans, the basic rules of the newspaper game: that there are no rules except get the story and get it first,”<sup>30</sup> according to Howard Good.

Perry White wants to know if the editor of Clark Kent’s high school newspaper knows anything about Smallville’s paranormal events. Kent tries to feign ignorance, but White already knows that he writes for the paper. Soon, Kent and White are at Smallville High in front of the Wall of Weird. Chloe Sullivan, the editor of Smallville High’s school newspaper *The Torch*, covered a wall of the Torch’s office with newspaper clippings on the paranormal events of the town and dubbed it the Wall of Weird. Clark Kent: “I think we should go.” White: “Boy, I thought our stuff was off-the-wall. This is incredible.” Chloe Sullivan appears behind the two: “It’s also all true.” Clark Kent: “Chloe. Mr. White is interested in the meteor shower. I didn’t think it would hurt if he had a look.” Sullivan: “I have nothing to hide.” White: “Oh, good. I think we’ve already borrowed two or three of your ideas for our show. Now, do you make it all up yourself, or do you pull in other writers?” Sullivan looks quizzically at Kent and then back at White: “Excuse me?” White appears apologetic at not being clear enough and pulls out his business card: “Oh, just professional curiosity! It’s not every day that I meet another junk journalist with a penchant for the bizarre.” Sullivan says with antipathy: “X-styles?” White snickers and nods. Sullivan: “I have a penchant for the truth, something your freaks and shrieks cable show gave up around Episode 2.” White laughs at Sullivan’s earnestness while Kent pushes him toward the exit: “That’s it. We’re done.” Sullivan then looks at the business card in her hand, moving her thumb to reveal Perry White’s name: “Wait. Wait, wait, wait!” Kent and White stop and turn around. Sullivan: “You’re *the* Perry White?” White makes up an excuse to leave. Sullivan cannot believe it’s really him.

Clark Kent enters the local bar: “Mr. White, I’ve been looking for you.” “And here I am. You may have the makings of a reporter yet, Kent,” White says with a laugh. This hints at Kent’s future career as *Daily Planet* reporter under the editorship of Perry White. White’s smile disappears when Kent counters: “Like you used to be? Chloe and I did some checking after you left.” White quips: “Memories fade, but a Google search never forgets.” Kent: “And another drink isn’t going to erase the fact that you used to be one of the best reporters in Metropolis.

What happened?” White feigns an explanation: “Life is a journey, Grasshopper<sup>31</sup> ...and sometimes the trip is smoother with a little lubricant.”

White takes another drink: “What’s it to you, anyway?” Kent answers: “Maybe it’s the journalist in me. Or that I realize that if you have a gift, you shouldn’t turn your back on it.” White appears serious for once: “Hmm. I’ve made exactly two mistakes in my life, kid. The first was getting into journalism.” He pauses and Kent asks: “What was the second?” White: “Thinking it mattered.”

Clark Kent’s words cut Perry White to the core, even though he tries to hide it. Soon, White will believe that journalism does matter. White’s transformation from sensationalist reporter back to respected journalist help him form the values he needs to become a good editor. “Chiefly, the journalist plays a role in the instigation of the action, goes through some transformation or development as a result of that action, and ethical questions or other issues related to the profession are addressed by the character or by others around the character with regard to his or her actions,” says Richard Ness. “The transformation the journalist undergoes does not always take the form of a complete reformation, but usually involves a sense of growth or heightened awareness.”<sup>32</sup>

Perry White, again at the *Torch* office at Smallville High, goes to look at the Wall of Weird. Chloe Sullivan, who is sitting at her computer, quickly gets up: “If you let me know what you’re looking for, I’m sure I could help you find it.” White: “Now, why would you want to do that?” Sullivan: “Because you were once the reporter that I would like to be.” White examines her to see if she’s serious. Sullivan ignores it: “Though I’m curious how one goes from multiple Pulitzer nominations to walking the Big Foot beat?” White: “You know the only thing worse than never landing that story of a lifetime?” Sullivan: “What?” White: “Having it, and being afraid to write it.” Sullivan laughs in disbelief: “Perry ‘The Pit Bull’ White backing off a story? That’s hard to believe.” White answers as if she has no idea: “Well, Lionel Luthor can be very persuasive.” Sullivan’s bright countenance quickly darkens: “Are you saying he had something to do with your career slide?” White: “Let’s just say that not everyone respects good investigative journalism, especially when it treads on the toes of the rich and vengeful.” The audience learns more about why Perry White sacrificed his talent for respectable journalism to do a sensational sci-fi news cable show.

Perry White appears at the Luthor Mansion. Lex Luthor: “When they told me you were at the gate, I could hardly believe it.” White jokes: “Yeah, you and me both. I just thought we should talk.” Luthor: “We have nothing to talk about.” White: “Oh. I’m sorry to hear that. Now I guess you’ll never find out what I have on your father.” White turns to leave. Luthor: “If it’s personal, I don’t care. If it’s legal, the statute of limitations must have passed long ago.” White: “That depends.” Luthor: “If this information is so damning, why did my father stop at simply destroying your career?” White: “Multiple copies plus multiple attorneys, all within the event of my death, instructions to disseminate... Well, you do the math. It’s all yours. I just want one thing in return.” Luthor: “What’d you have in mind?” White answers eagerly: “Everything you know about Clark Kent.” Luthor wonders why White has taken a sudden interest in Kent: “Clark?” White nods his head: “Yeah. Two years ago, you drove your Porsche off a bridge. I

went over the police photos, Lex. There's no way you could have walked away from that crash without the miracle that is Clark Kent. Imagine my surprise when I found out that you actually cultivated a friendship with this kid." Luthor: "So now you're going after Clark? This is a new low, even for you." The audience would agree. White: "The Lex I knew wouldn't shake your hand without an ulterior motive. You must have something. Give it to me, and I'll bring you a story that will give new meaning to the phrase 'sins of the father.'"

Films and other media often allow the public to overlook the reporter's sinful doings, as long as the end serves a good purpose. "Reporters, editors and news broadcasters can get away with almost anything as long as the end result is in the public interest. They can lie, cheat, distort, bribe, betray or violate any ethical code as long as they expose some political or business corruption, solve a murder, catch a thief or save an innocent"<sup>33</sup> notes Ghiglione and Saltzman. But when this is not the case, the audience sees the reporter's tactics as despicable and low. In this instance, White is trying to expose the truth about Clark Kent, and most of the audience would consider it shady for White to solicit Lex Luthor's help because Luthor is evil, and doing so would betray the protagonist, Clark Kent.

Perry White is back at The Talon in Smallville, and Lana Lang slams a small placard down on the table in front of him. White reads aloud: "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone." Lang: "I think you'd be more comfortable at the Wild Coyote." "Oh, I was, till they threw me out," White says with a laugh. Lang: "Either way, I'd like you to leave." Lang turns away. White gets up after her: "Please. Miss Lang. Sometimes I let my enthusiasm for a story outweigh my good sense." Lang isn't having any of it: "Is that your idea of an apology?" Lang walks away again. White: "No, look, look—okay, okay, I'm a jerk. And I've got the broken engagements and the sleepless nights to prove it." Lang: "If your job bothers you so much, why don't you just stop?" White's answer is easy: "'Cause I'm a journalist. It's in my blood. And sometimes you have to push to get the truth...even when it hurts." Most of media's journalists suffer in relationships because their main priority is the story. "The path of a crusader was not exactly an easy one, for it could sometimes create roadblocks in family relationships...And at other times, the crusading newspaperman has to make a personal sacrifice,"<sup>34</sup> says Larry Langman. Lang: "Well, if you're finished, I'm going to call you a cab." White: "It won't come. It's a little issue of non-payment of fares. But, I'll make you a deal. I'll trade permanently staying out of your life for a ride to the bus stop." Lang answers slowly: "Let me get my coat." White pulls the flask out of his jacket and takes a drink.

Clark Kent and Pete Ross arrive at the gorge after receiving Lana Lang's frantic phone call while they were setting up camp. Lang explains that she was driving Perry White to the bus stop when she pulled over because White was sick. He was only pretending, and he ran out to the gorge's viewpoint, threatening to jump off the ledge unless Lang called Clark Kent. White yells to Kent that he bets Kent will save him. White falls over the edge, and Kent leaps over after him.<sup>35</sup> A black rope unravels, and the end of the rope is seen tied to the ledge. White hangs upside down, holding on to Kent's hands. White's flask falls out of his jacket pocket into the gorge below. Pete Ross and Lana Lang look down at the two, not knowing what to do. White hangs calmly: "Okay, fun's over. Time to unleash those incredible powers there, Clark." Kent tells the truth: "I don't

have any powers!” The solar flare’s effects have again zapped Kent’s abilities. White begins to panic as he looks at the black rope tied simply to his ankle and the hundreds of feet to the bottom of the gorge. White was “...driven by the dictum that getting the story was more important than anything else and that this goal justified any means,”<sup>36</sup> according to Alex Barris. Tricking Kent into using his superpowers to save him was the only way White thought he would get his story, and he was willing to do anything—including risking his life—to get it. Kent and White continue to struggle to keep from falling into the gorge. Pete Ross and Lana Lang work together to pull the two up with a rope from Kent’s and Ross’ camping gear. Kent and White finally get back up to safety. White sees Kent’s hands bleeding from holding the rope so tightly. The look on White’s face expresses his shame and guilt for causing the incident, as well as slight disappointment in not getting the story.

In the last scene of the *Smallville* episode, Perry White’s transformation has occurred. His visit to Smallville helped him to return to his career of respectable journalism, and placed him on his path to the *Daily Planet* editorship. Clark Kent drives White to the bus stop. Perry White: “Thanks again for the ride.” Kent: “It’s the only way I could be sure you’d get on the bus. White gives Kent a funny look. Kent: “What?” White: “You really are kind of a freak, you know that?” Kent: “Mr. White!” White: “I’m serious! You try to help people, even fools like me, and you never ask for anything in return. When I saw your face up there after it was all over, I suddenly realized I was about to tear down a good person. I just couldn’t believe there was actually anyone like you out there.” Kent: “Trust me, Mr. White, I’m not that good.” White: “Well, I’m just glad nobody got hurt. Chalk it up to hallucinations...All I know is that I got a wake-up call.<sup>37</sup> I am exactly seventeen hours and five minutes sober!” Kent smiles: “Well, I’m glad some good came out of all this.” White smiles and nods in agreement. “So, what’s next?” Kent asks. White: “Well, if you found the guts to go over that cliff, maybe I can find the courage to finish the one story I let go.” Kent: “Something tells me the world hasn’t seen the last of Perry White.” White agrees: “Somethin’ tells me you’re right. Rumor has it I still have a friend or two on the *Daily Planet*. Oh, by the way, I went over a couple more of your *Torch* stories...” Kent: “And?” White: “Well, they’re rough, and half the time you bury the lead. But I see a glimmer of hope. If you ever make it to Metropolis, look me up. I owe you one.” The bus doors close, and the bus leaves Smallville.

### Sixty-five Years of Perry White

Perry White has not made another appearance in the *Smallville* series, but his byline did appear in “Gone,” the second episode of the fourth season of *Smallville*. The headline of the *Daily Planet* newspaper that Jonathan Kent was reading: “GUILTY! Jury Returns Verdict in High Profile Case.” The story was about Lionel Luthor’s murder conviction.

The *Smallville* episode of Perry White fuses the images of the character from radio, the comics, television and film. Showing White as he was as a reporter sets the stage for his process in becoming the great *Daily Planet* editor. It has not been hard keeping Perry White’s character intact since White has not changed at all since 1940. Perry White seems to retain a timeless

image: brusque, but sometimes compassionate; tough on his reporters, yet loving at the same time; and obstinate, although he is flexible when the situation calls for it.

So what's next for Perry White? *Superman Returns* comes out in 2006, so another image of Perry White may possibly arise. If White does appear in the coming film, it would be a surprise if the White character did not fit the mold that has already been cast for him in radio, comics, film and television.

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<sup>1</sup> In *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography*, Richard Ness calls the *Daily Planet* “a great metropolitan newspaper whose reputation for clarity and truth had become a symbol of hope for the city of Metropolis,” Ness, p. 546.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Tollin, *Superman on Radio*, CD-Set Booklet (Smithsonian Historical Performances, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.batman-superman.com/superman/cmp/perry.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ghiglione, Loren and Joe Saltzman, “Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News” from The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Web site <<http://www.ijpc.org>>, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Ghiglione, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.batman-superman.com/superman/cmp/perry.html>

<sup>7</sup> Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture, The Norman Lear Center, Los Angeles, 2002), p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Saltzman, *Frank Capra*, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> There is no explanation in the comics as to how the new editor becomes Perry White. The preceding editor, George Taylor, just gets renamed so that the comics are in line with the *Superman* radio program.

<sup>10</sup> Maxwell Taylor Courson, *The Newspaper Movies: An Analysis of the Rise and Decline of the News Gatherer as a Hero in American Motion Pictures, 1900-1974* (Xerox University Microfilms, Michigan, 1984), published in an authorized facsimile, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Ghiglione, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Saltzman, *Frank Capra*, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.batman-superman.com/superman/cmp/perry.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.supermanhomepage.com/movies/movies.php?topic=m-fleis>

<sup>15</sup> The warning reads: “Beware you fools! My Electrothanasia-Ray strikes tonight at twelve. Total destruction will come to those who laughed at me and failed to heed my warnings. Beware—I strike at midnight!”

<sup>16</sup> Courson, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> The second, and final, movie serial, *Atom Man vs. Superman*, came out two years later, in 1950. This one also had 15 chapters.

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<sup>18</sup> Saltzman, *Frank Capra*, p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Grossman, Superman: Serial To Cereal, from  
<http://www.supermanhomepage.com/tv/tv.php?topic=episode-guides/t-aos>.

<sup>20</sup> Ghiglione, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Alex Barris, *Stop the Presses! The Newspaperman in American Films* (A.S. Barnes and Company, New York, 1976), p. 157.

<sup>22</sup> Joe Saltzman, *Syllabus: Journalism 576: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Seminar*. (Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2003), p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, MD, 1997), p. 645.

<sup>24</sup> Larry Langman, *The Media in the Movies: A Catalog of American Journalism Films, 1900-1996* (McFarland & Company, Inc., North Carolina, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Saltzman, *Syllabus*, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Courson, p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> Alan Churchill, *Park Row* (Rinehart & Company, New York, 1958), pp. 54-55, from Courson, p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> Saltzman, *Frank Capra*, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> The character of Lana Lang was played by Annette O'Toole in *Superman III* (1983). O'Toole currently plays Martha Kent in *Smallville* (2001-).

<sup>30</sup> Howard Good, *Outcasts: The Image of Journalists in Contemporary Film* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, NJ, 1989), p. 156.

<sup>31</sup> Reference to ABC television program *Kung Fu* (1972-1975), starring David Carradine. From TV Tome.

<sup>32</sup> Ness, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ghiglione, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Langman, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> The scene of Perry White jumping to get Clark Kent to reveal his powers echoes the scene in *Superman II* (1981) where Lois Lane throws herself into Niagara Falls. In both cases, they fail to get Clark to reveal his superpowers. From TV Tome.

<sup>36</sup> Barris, p. 157.

<sup>37</sup> At this point in the episode the song “Walking in Memphis,” originally performed by Elvis Presley, begins to play. In the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, Perry White is a big fan of Elvis Presley. The song played, however, is not the Elvis Presley original. Warner owns the cover, which is why they probably played this version rather than the original. From TV Tome.