

= Hugo Danner =

Hugo Danner is a fictional character and the protagonist of Philip Wylie 's 1930 novel *Gladiator* . Born in the late 19th century with superhuman abilities via prenatal chemical experimentation , Danner tries to use his powers for good , making him a precursor of the superhero . However , Danner grows disillusioned with his inability to find a permanent outlet for his great strength , and dies frustrated .

Apart from Wylie 's novel , the character has also appeared in a feature film and publications by Marvel Comics and DC Comics . Comedic actor Joe E. Brown portrayed him in a 1938 movie adaptation of the book . Decades later the character starred in an adaptation titled " *Man @-@ God* " in Marvel 's black @-@ and @-@ white comics @-@ magazine *Marvel Preview* # 9 (Winter 1976) . He next appeared in DC 's standard color comic book *Young All @-@ Stars* in 1988 and 1989 , as the estranged father of an illegitimate son named Iron Munro . In 2005 , he returned in the comic @-@ book miniseries *Legend* , published by the DC imprint *Wildstorm* . Here Danner , in the late 1960s , fights as a U.S. Army supersoldier in the Vietnam War rather than as a super Legionnaire in World War I.

= = Publication history = =

= = = Creation = = =

In early February 1930 , Wylie described the inspiration for Danner 's creation in the introduction to one of the earliest printings of *Gladiator* :

A temperamental consciousness of material force brought Hugo Danner into being . The frustration of my own muscles by things , and the alarming superiority of machinery started the notion of a man who would be invincible . I gave him a name and planned random deeds for him . I let him tear down Brooklyn Bridge and lift a locomotive . Then I began to speculate about his future and it seemed to me that a human being thus equipped would be foredoomed to vulgar fame or to a life of fruitless destruction . He would share the isolation of geniuses and with them would learn the inflexibility of man 's slow evolution . To that extent Hugo became symbolic and *Gladiator* a satire . The rest was adventure and perhaps more of the book derives from the unliterary excitement of imagining such a life than from a studious juxtaposition of incidents to a theme "

= = = Development = = =

The novel begins during the closing years of the 19th century , as Colorado science Professor Abednego Danner searches for a way to improve the innate weaknesses of human biology and create a new " race that doesn 't know fear ? because it cannot know harm " . After 14 years of research he finally discovers " alkaline radicals " that vastly improve " muscular strength and the nervous discharge of energy " . Following very successful animal testing , which yields super @-@ strong tadpoles and a bulletproof kitten capable of taking down cattle as prey , he injects this super @-@ serum into the womb of his pregnant wife , Matilda . Hugo Danner is born on Christmas several months later .

His parents imbue him with a strong moral compass during his formative years and warn him never to use his great strength in anger . However , during kindergarten , Danner nearly kills the school 's bully in a one @-@ sided fight after being assaulted by the child . This event brands him as an outsider in the eyes of the other children . Because they treat him with such abhorrence , his only solace comes in the form of unleashing his powers within the Colorado wilderness (uprooting trees , throwing huge boulders , leaping to the mountain tops , etc .) . This stigma eventually wears off , though , and is forgotten by the time Danner enters high school .

Danner leaves Colorado after graduating high school to attend Webster University . There , he becomes an unstoppable football star and the most popular boy in school . During the summer

months , he works as a circus strong man and even enters a fight competition for money . However , after returning to college and accidentally killing another player during a game , he quits school and becomes a sailor . A year later , his ship is trapped in France by the outbreak of World War I in 1914 .

He and a fellow American sign up with the French Foreign Legion and find themselves on the battlements after a short training period . He eventually reveals his powers to his Legionnaire superiors , who believe him to be a devil or supernatural Native American , and he is given free rein to roam the battlefield and kill as many German soldiers as he possibly can . Stories of " Le Colorado " (The Colorado) quickly spread from trench to trench and Danner becomes a sort of mythical hero . After a short stint in an American Legionnaire unit , Danner grows weary of war and devises a plan with an airplane :

He would drive it far into Germany . When its petrol failed , he would crash it . Stepping from the ruins , he would hasten on in the darkness , on , on , like Pheidippides , till he reached the centre of the enemy government . There , crashing through the petty human barriers , he would perform his last feat , strangling the Emperor , slaying the generals , pulling buildings apart with his Samsonian arms , and disrupting the control of the war .

However , the Treaty of Versailles is signed the very day he prepares to leave , and so he is forced to abort his mission , much to his dismay . He returns to the United States and works in a number of professions ? steel mill worker , bank teller , farm hand , and disarmament lobbyist ? but his unique stature among mortal men forever brings him grief . He eventually offers his services to a noted history professor preparing a Mayan archaeological dig and travels with the group to the Yucatan Peninsula .

During the trip , Danner wonders if the Mayans and Egyptians had discovered the same formula as his father , " which could be poured into the veins of the slaves [who built the pyramids] , making them stronger than engines " . There , he works as the head steward of the hired Mayan helpers and proves himself an asset to the team . But when a mishap reveals his great strength to the professor , the elderly man suggests Danner use his father 's formula to create a new race of men known as the " Sons of Dawn " , who will use their powers to right the world 's wrongs . The idea appeals to him at first , but Danner fears that these sons would also be hated by humanity for their superiority and treated much the same as himself . In the end , he climbs a mountain amidst an oncoming thunderstorm , and is struck dead by lightning while praying to God . The formula is lost in the resulting fire . The professor discovers his charred remains three days later and buries him among the Mayan ruins .

= = Powers and abilities = =

Even during his early years , Danner displays superhuman strength . He demolishes his wooden crib as a newborn , saves a man 's life by lifting a two @-@ ton supply wagon at 6 years old , and uproots entire trees at 10 . He progressively grows stronger as he gets older . During his twenties , he can stop and kill a charging bull with a single punch , bend a railroad rail , lift a seventy @-@ five millimeter howitzer cannon singlehandedly , lift a car and its driver singlehandedly , rip open a 5 @-@ foot @-@ thick (1 @.@ 5 m) bank vault , and easily catch a falling 8 @,@ 000 @-@ pound block of stone .

Danner 's physical strength extends to his legs , allowing him to leap great heights and distances . At age 10 he can leap 40 feet into the air and run faster than a train . During his freshman year in college , he easily breaks a world track record , though he actually doesn 't run at his full speed . While in the service of the French Foreign Legion in World War I , he traverses thirty @-@ seven miles round trip in just thirty minutes (a speed of about 148 mph) ; all while carrying 2 @,@ 000 pounds of food , water , and ammunition for his unit . Despite his great strength , he is still susceptible to fatigue .

He first learns of his body 's superior resistance to physical injury during the war . Bullets and bayonets glance off his tough skin . He believes he can even survive a plane crash . The only weaponry capable of penetrating his skin at the time are the largest artillery shells . Although , he

still feels the effects of the elements , sweating under the heat of the sun and freezing during winter . Danner 's only vulnerability is lightning , which ultimately kills him .

Danner 's bodily tissues have a somewhat greater density than those of an ordinary human being . Though he has an athletic build , his strength is far greater than what his frame would naturally allow . People guess him to be 155 pounds , but he actually weighs 211 . During his stint as a sailor , he goes pearl diving with the natives of Cristobal and is able to dive deeper and stay under longer because of his density .

His body can heal damaged tissue much faster and more extensively than an ordinary human can . He collapses from exhaustion and wounds sustained from artillery shells after he goes berserk against the Germans to avenge a friend 's death . When he wakes up in an army hospital , he finds " his wounds had healed without the necessity of a single stitch " . Long periods of comatose sleep (up to 20 hours) and the consuming of huge meals also aid in his regenerative process .

= = In other media = =

= = = Film = = =

Danner was portrayed by comedic actor Joe E. Brown in the 1938 film *The Gladiator* , which loosely adapted science @-@ fiction drama as a comedy , and , among the many changes , renamed the protagonist " Hugo Kipp " . The film begins when Kipp wins a large sum of money in a contest and decides to return to college . There , he is talked into joining the football team and fails to live up to his athletic father 's legendary reputation . But after a Professor Danner (Lucien Littlefield) injects Kipp with a serum that gives him superhuman strength , he becomes an unstoppable player and wins the heart of the self @-@ centered quarterback 's girlfriend (June Travis) . In the end , he faces Man Mountain Dean in a wrestling match , but the serum runs out at the last minute .

= = = Comics = = =

In comics , Danner first appeared in the 52 @-@ page story " Man @-@ God " , by writer Roy Thomas and artist Tony DeZuniga (credited as Antony DeZuniga) in *Marvel Comics ' Marvel Preview # 9* (Winter 1976) . Only the first half of the novel is adapted .

Danner next appeared in *DC Comics ' Young All @-@ Stars # 9 @-@ 11* (Feb.-April 1988) and # 28 @-@ 31 (Aug.-Nov. 1989) , as the estranged father of Iron Munro , his illegitimate son . Munro was not a character or even a possibility in the original novel , where , as Danner 's ailing scientist father explained , " the effect of the process is not inherited by the future generations . It must be done over each time " .

In this storyline , Munro comes into possession of his father 's diary and learns of Danner 's troubled life as the 20th century 's first metahuman . After having read the diary , Munro turns to the government 's secret Project M , demanding to know the location of the " Dinosaur Island " mentioned by Danner . There he meets a person who leads him instead to Maple White Land in South America . Munro is surprised when he finds his father is alive . Danner apparently faked his death in the Yucatan and briefly returned home to have a one @-@ night stand with his former high school sweetheart Anna Blake . The resulting union bore Munro , who took his surname from his mother 's new husband (who believed the child to be his own) . Danner has , by this time , succeeded in rearing the first generation of the Sons of Dawn . He later reveals to the *Young @-@ All Stars* that the villain Übermensch has stolen the formula in order to create his own race of supermen .

Munro is forced to oppose his father when Danner orders the Sons of Dawn to attack a Brazilian city . The combined might of the *All @-@ Star Squadron* defeats the Sons of Dawn and Danner is killed during the final battle .

Danner starred in the four @-@ issue miniseries *Legend* (April ? July 2005) by writer Howard Chaykin and artist Russ Heath , published by the DC imprint Wildstorm . Cover blurbs on the first

two issues read , " Inspired by Philip Wylie 's Novel Gladiator " . The story now takes place in the second half of the 20th century , with the Vietnam War replacing World War I , but the story remaining for the most part intact .

= = Comparison with later heroes = =

While no confirmation exists that Superman co @-@ creator Jerry Siegel was influenced by Gladiator , Siegel may have read the novel in 1932 . He and co @-@ creator Joe Shuster began developing Superman in 1934 .

Superman as originally conceived came from an unnamed planet whose inhabitants were millions of years more evolved than humans . When they reached maturity , " the people of his race became gifted with titanic strength " . Their advanced evolution and great strength accounted for Superman 's superhuman abilities on earth . As Siegel described them : " When maturity was reached , he discovered he could easily : leap 1 ? 8th of a mile ; hurdle a twenty @-@ story building ... raise tremendous weights ... run faster than an express train ... and that nothing less than a bursting shell could penetrate his skin ! "

Siegel and Shuster compared Superman 's strength and leaping abilities to those of an ant and a grasshopper , respectively , as did Abednego for his son . Danner also claims descent from a far @-@ off land (Colorado) inhabited by a race of super @-@ strong , indestructible men . In order to keep his true " experimental " origins a secret , he tells his Legionnaire superiors , " [Colorado is a] place in America . A place that has scarcely been explored . I was born there . All the men of Colorado are born as I was born and are like me . We are very strong . We are great fighters . We cannot be wounded except by the largest shells . " Other examples of similarities include both of their biological fathers are scientists (Jor @-@ El and Abednego) , both grow up in rural settings (Smallville and Indian Creek , Colorado) , both are imbued with a strong moral compass from a young age both lift cars over their heads , and both hide their powers from the world .

One critic noted that Danner 's " creation and upbringing by a scientist father recall Doc Savage 's origins " and a " prototype for the famous scene in which the fledgling Spider @-@ Man defeats a hulking wrestler to make money is found in Wylie 's novel ; Hugo 's bout in the ring is similar to that in the Spider @-@ Man 's origin story in 1962 's Amazing Fantasy # 15 . "