

Title:

Destiny To Despair: The Fall Of Superboy-Prime

Word Count:

1003

Summary:

Among the alternate versions of Superman, Superboy-Prime is often regarded as the most dangerous. His raw power, his lack of a psychological way of holding back, and his obsession with a universe that no longer exists has made him a powerful villain. However, beneath all that is probably just an ordinary kid thrust into a situation far beyond his comprehension.

Keywords:

status anxiety, performance anxiety, separation anxiety

Article Body:

In the comic book industry, it is difficult to find a single character that is as iconic, as well-known, and as popular as Superman. His status has come to the point that DC Comics, the company that publishes his monthly titles, has developed several versions and revisions of his character and his powers over the years. Most of them have followed the same general archetype established by the original Superman, which is that of a lawful and good superhero. However, every so often, there have been darker character versions that, unlike the good version, posed a threat to mankind. Arguably, the most dangerous of these "evil" versions is the one known as Superboy-Prime.

To understand Superboy-Prime's rise as a hero and his subsequent fall to become "the most dangerous individual the universe has ever known," it is necessary to first explore how he came into the DC Comics universe. Originally, Superboy-Prime was the only superhero on Earth-Prime, one of many alternate versions of Earth that existed in the world of DC Comics. According to the storyline, all the alternate Earths had to be destroyed to preserve one. At the end of that cataclysmic series of events, Superboy-Prime, along with Earth-Prime's Lex Luthor and Kal-El, yet another alternate version of Superman, willingly confined themselves to a paradise-like dimension to save the universe. However, trapped in an isolated realm with nothing but memories of his old world to keep him company, his mind became warped. With prompting from the Lex Luthor trapped with him, Superboy-Prime eventually broke free and resolved to correct the mistake he made. In other words, he was intent on returning the existence of Earth-Prime, a goal he could achieve only by destroying the current Earth.

In his mind, the Earth was deeply flawed and had to be destroyed by all means. He saw villains and heroes but somehow he could not distinguish between the two, and, as a result, he treated both sides as enemies. In his skewed black-and-white view of morality, Superboy-Prime considered himself as the only true hero in the current universe. However, as the "Superboy," he felt an intense degree of status anxiety over not having earned the name "Superman." His goal of restoring Earth-Prime ties into this feeling, since by erasing the current universe, he also erases the various other versions of Superman in it. Such an event would eventually leave him as the only Superman in the universe. He hoped to alleviate his status anxiety by eliminating any version of himself that he subconsciously sees as being better than he is.

Superboy-Prime also exhibited some signs of performance anxiety. For all of his great power, he seems psychologically incapable of achieving the same things that the current universe's Superman has done. In his mind, he believed that he cannot hope to attain the level achieved by the heroic versions of Superman that he has encountered. He also doubted his ability to match up to the level of the current universe's Superboy. This performance anxiety, however, had worsened into rage and disdain for all of the alternate versions of Superboy.

His raw, god-like power also contributed to the development of status anxiety since he believed that he deserved the title of "Superman" by virtue of his superhuman abilities alone. He soundly defeated the current universe's Superboy in single combat, breaking his arm in one encounter and killing him in their second battle. He easily defeated Powergirl in battle, despite her being twice as powerful as normal during the battle. Supergirl, the only hero shown to be consistently physically stronger than the current Superman, was also defeated easily by Superboy-Prime. In the end, it took the combined efforts of two versions of Superman, the current one and the Kal-El version, to defeat him in battle. This feat would not have been possible without the sacrifice of Kal-El and the radiation of a red sun, which drained Prime of his powers. Also, he was able to defeat several Green Lanterns simultaneously, a feat that the current Superman believes is impossible for him to do. Unlike his contemporaries, no known form of Kryptonite has an effect on him, and magic has no effect on him. While his mind is vulnerable to telepathic assault, he has proven impossible to control in such a manner, adding yet another advantage over his fellow Kryptonians. These events have solidified his status anxiety, as he believes his power alone should be enough to grant him the place of being a true "Superman."

Superboy-Prime is an interesting combination of an increasingly complex situation as seen through an overly simplistic lens. This, combined with his

lack of maturity or guidance due to having grown up in an isolated "paradise," have left him with little ability to see the more complex moral framework his contemporaries have come to understand and work with. Like the modern Supergirl, he also does not have any psychological impediments to his power, which means he does not hold back and has no regard for whatever damage he might cause. His inability to accept the loss of his home is vaguely reminiscent of separation anxiety, evolving into an obsession. Also, as some heroes have described him, he has become increasingly cold and has apparently lost the ability to care about the innocent lives in the current universe.

However, whether or not he is fully to blame for what he has become is questionable. It was a version of Lex Luthor that prompted him to break out of his isolation and instilled in him the idea that the current universe is inferior to Earth-Prime. The people of his home hailed him as a savior, placing upon him a "destiny" to become the greatest hero of all time. In the end, Superboy-Prime's state of mind and his mentality are best summed up in his own words:

"Cold? Cold is being the lone survivor of a dead universe! Cold is being imprisoned when you tried to make things better! Cold is what this universe has made me!"