

Canadian Superheroes

Canada Post's 1995 set of stamps captures the essence of *Superman* and 4 other Canadian comic book heroes - *Johnny Canuck*, *Nelvana*, *Captain Canuck & Fleur de Lys* - by using colours reminiscent of the early comic books, copying the comic's original typeface for the names, and enclosing the 45-cent stamp denomination in a circle as if it were the price of the comic book. They were issued only in booklet form. Even the booklet is super-sized. Measuring 4 x 6 inches, it is the largest stamp booklet ever produced in Canada.



The first Canadian Superheroes – *Nelvana*, *Johnny Canuck & Canada Jack* – emerged during WW2 when a foreign-exchange crisis led to a ban on the importation of USA comics, including popular titles such as

Superman. In part an outgrowth of national political-cartooning tradition, the early Canadian comic book superheroes threw themselves into the battle against the Axis Powers.

Why is **Superman** included in this set of Canadian stamps? Isn't he American?

Joe Shuster, the comic strip artist who created **Superman**, was Canadian and his early drawings of Metropolis were fashioned after the buildings and skyline of Toronto, his hometown. In 1923 Shuster's family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where he met Jerry Siegel, who became **Superman's** writer. The two were only 17 years old when they created **Superman** in 1933.

Johnny Canuck is a fictional lumberjack and a national personification of Canada. He first appeared in early political cartoons dating to 1869 where he was portrayed as a younger cousin of the United States' **Uncle Sam** and Britain's **John Bull**. He re-emerged during WW2 in the February 1942 issue of **Dime Comics #1**. Cartoonist Leo Bachle created the character as a teenager. Initially, **Johnny Canuck** had no superpowers. He helped Canada fight against Nazism. Like **Captain America**, he met **Adolf Hitler** and almost single-handedly ended the war.

The **Vancouver Canucks**, a professional ice hockey team in the National Hockey League, currently use a lumberjack rendition of **Johnny Canuck** as one of their logos.

Nelvana of the Northern Lights was the first Canadian national superhero. Created by Adrian Dingle in the 1940's she debuted in **Triumph-Adventure Comics #1**. She is also one of the first female superheroes, debuting before ***Wonder Woman***. ***Nelvana*** can fly and travel at the speed of light on a giant ray of the **Aurora Borealis**. She can also call upon other powers of the Northern Lights, including ***Koliak's*** powerful ray, which can melt metal and disrupt radio communications.

Captain Canuck was created by cartoonist Ron Leishman and artist/writer Richard Comely. He first appeared in **Captain Canuck #1** (July 1975). The series was the first successful Canadian comic book since the collapse of the nation's comic book industry following WW2. The first ***Captain Canuck*** patrolled Canada in the then-future year of 1993, where "Canada had become the most powerful country in the world". He was the costumed agent of the "Canadian International Security Organization" (CISO).

French speaking Quebec decided it needed its own superheroine - ***Fleur de Lys*** an ally of ***Northguard*** was created in 1984 by Mark Shainblum and Gabriel Morrissette in the comic **New Triumph**. The name of the character is inspired by the heraldic symbol of the **fleur de lys**, the official emblem of Quebec and a prominent part of its flag. ***Fleur de Lys*** uses a fleur-de-lys-shaped, non-lethal light sabre to vanquish her foes.