Stan Lee was born Stanley Lieber, December 28, 1922. He changed his name to “Stan Lee” once he began working in the nascent comic book industry. Stanley had dreams of writing the Great American Novel and wanted to protect his future reputation from the bad press that tainted funnybooks. Stan got his gig at what was then Timely Comics, the old-fashioned way: he was related to publisher Martin Goodman by marriage. Promoted to interim editor-in-chief in 1941, Lee didn’t leave the position until he was kicked upstairs to the Publisher’s office in 1972. By then, he had seen the company—under the names Timely, Atlas, and eventually Marvel Comics—ride a rollercoaster of success and failure (see sidebar for right). During the company’s lowest point in the late ’50s, Lee wanted to quit comics. He considered himself a hack who had wasted his life cranking out whatever schlock was selling at the time. But at his beloved wife Joan’s urging, he stayed and began writing comics his way. Beginning in 1961 with Fantastic Four #1, Lee and his artistic partners changed the way comic books were created, promoted and even sold (see right). By the time he quit writing, Marvel was leading the industry in sales and influence. Later attempts to re-enter the comics biz were frustrated by both creative and business issues. But Lee went on to garner a new generation of fans with his cameos in the block-breaking series of Marvel films. Despite scandals near the end of his life, Stan “the Man” Lee is assured of his place in the pantheon of popular culture.

When I was a little boy, I wanted to be Stan Lee when I grew up. Unlike most comics-created kids of the Sixties, I was present to be the amazing Spider-Man. I pretended to be the guy who wrote The Amazing Spider-Man. That guy edited all the other comics, too, even the ones for girls and little kids. Inspired by Stan’s example, I made up my own stable of characters—Robo-Man, Time Parrot, the Laper— and lines of comics—WWIII, Mal Ramone, Hunkpapa Full-complex with initiators of Marvel’s promotional Bulwark Bulletin Page featuring my heroine of Lee’sobby “Soapbox” editors. Little Billy Wilder was quite the imaginative publishing magnate. And as the very existence of this handbook will surely continue to be one of the thousands of people influenced by the man they called “The Man.” Actually, it was Stan who called himself “the Man,” and Jack Kirby “the King” and Don Heck “Cholly,” all part of the bubblehead Lee used to sell not only his comics, but the people and company that made them. This was nothing new. Nothing Lee did was new. He just put it all together in a new way. With each editor larding over his own field, his competitors at DC were haggling. Stan Lee was the fox, who had written every kind of comic book there was in sight before he left, circa 1956. He combined the basics of love comics, the levy of seen comics, the self-awareness of parody comics, the low-order violence of adventure comics and the antiscandal weirdness of horror comics into a new kind of comic book formula. It revolutionized superheroes. It also worked for other genres, from commandos to barbarians to talking ducks, as shown by the 1976 photo for right of Lee with his Art Director, John Romita Sr. Lee also shared and revived the two-faced liberal humanism of the old Lee Gleason and EC brands, tapping into the youth movement shaking up the world from Pears to Paris to Peking.

Lee’s\\n\\n\textbf{RIP. BW}
MEANWHILE

It’s only fitting that the man who changed comics has a biography that’s a big fancy funnybook. Amazing Fantastic Incredible is the story of Stan Lee as told by “the Man” and written by Marvel veteran Peter David and rendered by Colleen (A Distant Soil) Doran. Her realistic but colorful style perfectly captures Lee’s rise from Depression baby to the apex of the American Dream with all the ups and downs between and beyond. It’s available from TEEN sections throughout the Lexington Public Library system. This Marvelous Memoir spends a few pages on Lee’s growing disgust with the neutered comics industry of the post-Code era and himself in particular. And it’s true: For most of his career, Lee was a hack. An accomplished hack, for sure—I myself am a big fan of the monster comics starring the likes of Gorgilla and Fin Fang Foom he published in the early Sixties. Those stories fed into the early Marvel

ample of the wonders wrought by “the Man” and “the King” is the work reprinted in the third volume of the Epic Collection starring the Mighty Thor. Available from Tates Creek, The Wrath of Odin shows Kirby sparking off one insane idea after another while Lee hangs on and tries to make sense of it all. Lee loved writing Thor because it let him indulge his love for grandiose language to the hilt, especially when writing for the titular All-Father of the Asgardians (above). For more info on this book, see “Meanwhile”, 741.5 #13 Jan 2018, under the “Collections” tab at lexpublib.org. The extent to which Lee’s artists contributed to the creation of the Marvel Universe is an ongoing debate. The best arguments for the centrality of Jack Kirby and Steve (Dr. Strange) Ditko to the success of the House of Ideas are all the comics Stan wrote that they didn’t draw. Don Heck, Dick Ayers and especially Wallace Wood were excellent draftsmen. But they lacked the imagination that Lee came to depend on. For best evidence, get the Epic Col-

lection of the first two years of Daredevil from Eastside TEEN. While his colleagues battled the likes of Doctor Doom, the Green Goblin and Loki, God of Evil, The Man Without Fear (or fashion sense, until John Romita Sr. designed DD’s iconic red outfit) faced the Matador, the Owl and my favorite C-list bad guy, Stilt-man. Always the bridesmaid among the original slate of Marvel titles, Daredevil was still a good read. But the book didn’t have an identity of its own until former DC romance artist Gene Colan took over the art. His moody, urbane style inspired Lee to write such memorable tales as “Brother, Take My Hand”, one of the many classics reprinted in Marvel Visionaries: Stan Lee. Available from Central TEEN, this 344 page tome includes some work from the 1940s and ’50s. But most of it is made up of the Silver Age superhero comics that made Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. A beautiful ex-

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