

THE *amazing* STAN LEE

A SPIDER WHOM FATE
HAS GIVEN A STARRING,
IF BRIEF, ROLE TO PLAY
IN THE DRAMA WE CALL
LIFE!

IN 1940, SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD STANLEY MARTIN LIEBER TOOK A JOB IN THE OFFICES OF HIS COUSIN'S HUSBAND'S PUBLISHING FIRM, TIME-LY COMICS, THE HOME OF CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE HUMAN TORCH, AND SURLY, AQUATIC NAMOR, THE ANARCHIST SUB-MARINER. WITHIN A FEW YEARS, STAN LEE (AS HE PEN-NAMED HIMSELF) HAD TAKEN CHARGE OF WHAT EVENTUALLY BECAME ATLAS COMICS, WRITING, EDITING, AND ART-DIRECTING STORIES WHICH, BY THE LATE '50S, FEATURED GIANT COMMIE MONSTERS AND THE SKINNY, PIPE-SMOKING SCIENTISTS WHO THWARTED THEIR DIABOLICAL PLANS.

THEN, IN 1961, WHILE SUPERMAN WAS STILL DUCKING LOIS LANE IN MYTHICAL METROPOLIS, LEE AND HIS HOUSE ARTISTS LAUNCHED A SERIES OF SUPERHERO TITLES THAT, UNDER THE MARVEL BANNER, CHANGED THE LITERATURE OF COMICS FOREVER. BEGINNING WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR, FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY THE INCREDIBLE HULK, THOR, SPIDER-MAN, AND IRON MAN, LEE WENT BACK TO HIS WISECRACKING ROOTS, CREATING CHARACTERS THAT SUFFERED (SECRET) IDENTITY CRISES, WORRIED ABOUT MORTGAGES, AND TRADED SNIPES WITH N.Y.C. CABBIES. A PARTICULARLY '50S KIND OF LIBERAL/URBAN INTROSPECTION HAD INVADDED THE LIVES OF THESE SPANDEXED WARRIORS, MAKING THEM, IN EFFECT, THE METHOD ACTORS OF THEIR MILIEU. LEE HIMSELF TOOK CENTER STAGE AND BECAME THE HYPERBOLIC SPOKESMAN FOR A NEW GENERATION OF COMIC READERS; ALTHOUGH HE NOW ONLY OCCASIONALLY WRITES MARVEL BOOKS, HE REMAINS THE COMPANY'S HIGHLY VISIBLE FIGUREHEAD, LIVING ON THE WEST COAST AND REPPING MARVEL IN FILM AND TELEVISION PROJECTS. IN THE MEANTIME, MARVEL, WHICH EARLIER THIS YEAR WENT PUBLIC UNDER THE DIRECTION OF REVLON'S RONALD PERELMAN, HAS BECOME THE LARGEST-SELLING COMIC-BOOK COMPANY IN THE COUNTRY. MARVEL: FIVE FABULOUS DECADES OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMICS WILL BE PUBLISHED BY ABRAMS THIS MONTH.



Interview by Henry Cabot Beck

HENRY CABOT BECK: THE FAMOUS MARVEL METHODS OF COMIC-CREATING DIFFERED FROM THOSE OF OTHER COMPANIES IN THAT YOU ESCHEWED FULL SCRIPTS FOR A MORE LAISSEZ-FAIRE KIND OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND WRITERS. AS A RESULT, THERE HAS ALSO BEEN SOME CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE SPECIFIC AMOUNT OF CREATIVE INPUT YOU HAD IN THE INITIAL CREATION OF CERTAIN EARLY CHARACTERS.

STAN LEE: I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAN MEASURE THESE THINGS. THE ONLY THING THAT I DID . . . I WAS THE ONE WHO FIRST SAID, "I WANT TO DO FOUR CHARACTERS AND CALL THEM THE FANTASTIC FOUR, AND THIS IS WHAT I WANT THEM TO BE." AND THEN I CALLED JACK KIRBY, AND I ASKED HIM TO DRAW IT. NOW, AFTER THAT, JACK'S INPUT WAS MONUMENTAL. AND WITH SPIDER-MAN IT WAS THE SAME THING. I FIRST GAVE IT TO KIRBY AND I TOLD HIM, "DON'T MAKE HIM LIKE CAPTAIN AMERICA, JUST MAKE HIM A GUY." BUT JACK WAS SO USED TO DRAWING THESE HEROIC CHARACTERS, I THINK HE COULDN'T STOP HIMSELF. I TOLD JACK TO FORGET IT, AND I CALLED STEVE [DITKO] AND I SAID, "STEVE, I HAVE A CHARACTER NAMED SPIDER-MAN, AND I WANT HIM TO CLIMB ON WALLS, I WANT HIM TO HAVE AN AUNT MAY"—YOU KNOW, ALL OF THAT. AND HIS STYLE WAS JUST PERFECT, I THOUGHT, FOR SPIDER-MAN. AS I SAY, I WROTE THE INITIAL STORIES, I ORIGINATED ALL OF THESE.

HCB: [ARTIST-WRITER] FRANK MILLER SAID IN AN INTERVIEW LAST SPRING THAT THERE'S A "CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS ROOT" TO SUPERMAN, BATMAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, AND THE SUPERHEROES YOU CREATED, THAT THEY WERE ALL INVENTED BY JEWS, BY "PEOPLE WHO HAVE SOME VOLCANIC SENSE OF LONGING AND OUTRAGE." HOW DOES THAT STRIKE YOU?

SL: WELL, IT SOUNDS GOOD. I DON'T THINK IT'S APPLICABLE TO ME. I CAN'T SPEAK FOR THE OTHER WRITERS, BUT MY GUESS IS THAT WHEN PEOPLE CREATE SUPERHEROES, THEIR FIRST THOUGHT IS, I WONDER IF IT WILL SELL, AND THAT CERTAINLY WAS MY THOUGHT. WHEN I CREATED SPIDER-MAN, I HAD NO ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS OR ANY KIND OF CONVICTION. I JUST SAID TO MYSELF, HEY, HERE'S A SUPERPOWER NO ONE'S USING: HOW ABOUT A GUY THAT CLIMBS ON WALLS? AND WHEN I CREATED THE HULK, IT WASN'T AN EFFORT ON MY PART TO SHOW MAN'S REACTION TO MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN OR AN EXPLOSIVE SURGE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CREEPING SYMBOLISM OF INACTION OR WHATEVER. I SAID, "HEY, LET'S GET A MONSTER, AND THAT OUGHT TO BE FUN FOR A HERO."

HCB: I REMEMBER READING AN ANECDOTE SOME YEARS BACK ABOUT A DISAGREEMENT YOU HAD WITH [WRITER] ROY THOMAS AND [ARTIST] BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH ABOUT THE EXPOSURE OF NIPPLES IN CONAN COMICS.

SL: YOU MEAN NIPPLES ON THE GIRLS?

HCB: NO, CONAN'S NIPPLES.

SL: I SWEAR TO GOD I DO NOT REMEMBER THAT. [LAUGHS] WHAT DO I CARE IF THEY WANT TO PUT NIPPLES ON MEN? I'LL TELL YOU HOW THESE THINGS GET STARTED: YEARS AGO SOMEBODY COLORED A COVER WITH GREEN, AND I DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY THE GREEN CLASHED WITH PURPLE OR SOMETHING AND I SAID, "CHANGE THE GREEN." AND I FOUND OUT YEARS LATER THAT THE WORD WENT AROUND, "DON'T EVER USE GREEN ON A COVER, 'CAUSE STAN DOESN'T LIKE GREEN." BUT I'M NOT AN ANTI-NIPPLE MAN. ■

ACCIDENTALLY ABSORBING A FANTASTIC AMOUNT OF RADIOACTIVITY, THE DYING INSECT, IN SUDDEN SHOCK, BITES THE NEAREST LIVING THING, AT THE SPLIT SECOND BEFORE LIFE EBBS FROM ITS RADIOACTIVE BODY!



A-A SPIDER! IT BIT ME! BUT, WHY IS IT BURNING SO? WHY IS IT GLOWING THAT WAY??



MY HEAD-- IT FEELS STRANGE! I-I NEED SOME AIR!

LOOKS AS THOUGH OUR EXPERIMENT UNNERVED YOUNG PARKER!

TOO BAD! HE MUST HAVE A WEAK STOMACH!

