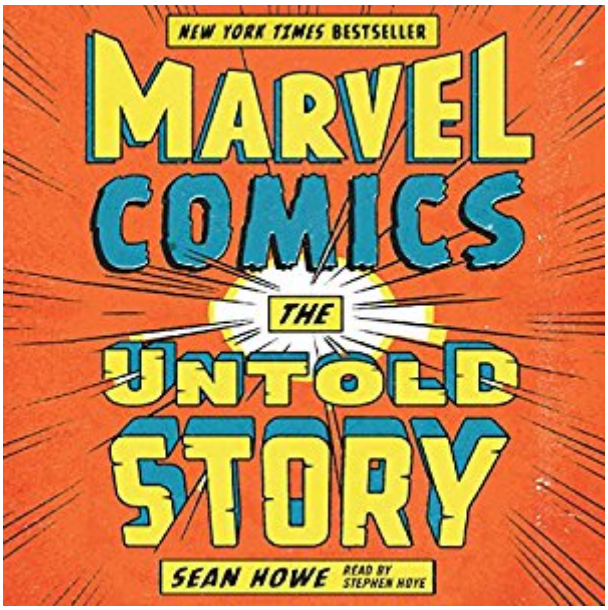
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Marvel Comics: The Untold Story



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Synopsis

Throughout this decades-long journey to becoming a multibillion-dollar enterprise, Marvel’s identity has continually shifted, careening between scrappy underdog and corporate behemoth. As the company has weathered Wall Street machinations, Hollywood failures, and the collapse of the comic book market, its characters have been passed along among generations of editors, artists, and writers - also known as the celebrated Marvel "Bullpen". Entrusted to carry on tradition, Marvel’s contributors - impoverished child prodigies, hallucinating peaceniks, and mercenary careerists among them - struggled with commercial mandates, a fickle audience, and, over matters of credit and control, one another. For the first time, Marvel Comics reveals the outsized personalities behind the scenes, including Martin Goodman, the self-made publisher who forayed into comics after a get-rich-quick tip in 1939; Stan Lee, the energetic editor who would shepherd the company through thick and thin for decades; and Jack Kirby, the World War II veteran who’d co-created Captain America in 1940 and, 20 years later, developed with Lee the bulk of the company’s marquee characters in a three-year frenzy of creativity that would be the grounds for future legal battles and endless debates. Drawing on more than 100 original interviews with Marvel insiders then and now, Marvel Comics is a story of fertile imaginations, lifelong friendships, action-packed fistfights, reformed criminals, unlikely alliances, and third-act betrayals - a narrative of one of the most extraordinary, beloved, and beleaguered pop-cultural entities in America’s history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was unaware that Marvel had such a toxic work environment and culture. This book highlights this

and is worth the read for any individual who enjoyed reading their comics or, more recently watching the movies about their characters.The first ten percent of the book tells the story of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko and others in the early 1960s and the massive surge of creativity that resulted in Spiderman, Fantastic Four, Thor, Iron Man, X-Men, Daredevil, the Hulk and others. From their the creativity and the story goes down hill.From the start their were problems with who created these characters and the book keeps coming back to that. Marvel recognized that Stan Lee created them and, because of that, Stan apparently currently gets 10% of the movie proceeds (and as anyone who sees one of these movies an ability to be shown in a short cameo role).However, the book questions that, and after reading the back and forth throughout the book, it is apparent to me that Jack Kirby (all but Spiderman) and Steve Ditko (Spiderman) did co-create the characters. But, they lost in court and it will never be proven.From there, the book continues with the stories about creative individuals who were screwed by company management time and time again - the list of corporate jerks, monsters and raiders is legion in this book, ending with Issac Perlmutter who was able to take over the company in the midst of a legal fight between Carl Icahn and another individual. Issac Perlmutter who never wrote a comic story in his life, and screwed the people who did, ended up with about $1.3 billion from the sale of the company to Disney.The creative folks got less, much less, including the individual who died at this desk working under deadlines from a heart attack at the age of 31. And, then there is the individual who died at his desk of a stroke (again working under deadlines) in his early 40s.Reading this book, left me with a wholly new understading of why all the craziness in the stories and character twists were occuring from the late 1960s through the mid-1990s when the company finally imploded with lay-offs to hundreds. This was not a nice place to work at even in its hey-day. It was a company with a nasty, toxic environment.If you are up for that reading, the other side of Marvel, then I recommend this book. At least today, under Disney, a company with a much better environment and culture, maybe things will turn around - it looks like it.

I started reading Marvel Comics in the mid-1960s, and comics histories in the late sixties. This may be the best overall history of Marvel Comics (and its predecessors, Timely and Atlas) to date.Unlike many, it’s NOT told from the vantage point of Stan Lee or Jack Kirby, and does not advocate on behalf of any individual or agenda. Instead, Howe pulls together information from dozens of sources and weaves it into a chronological narrative unlike any I’ve previously encountered--one that tells the STORY of Marvel. He relies heavily on anecdotes--often shared by the participants in the events being described--and mostly avoids taking sides in some of the long-simmering controversies that

are so much a part of the Marvel's history. He chronicles the events as the players remember them, in the order they unfolded, and lets the reader decide.WARNING: If you're looking for an art book, this is not it. Howe eschews the pretty pictures for 400+ pages of carefully footnoted information. If you want to ooh and ahh over vintage Kirby and Ditko pages, there are plenty of places to find them. But if you want to read about how Kirby, Ditko and Marvel came together and set the world of comics on fire (along with how their successors tried to carry that flame forward), this is the book for you.BTW, I bought the Kindle version, and the footnotes are seamlessly hyperlinked into the text, so you can bounce back and forth, effortlessly referring to them whenever you choose as you work your way through the book.

This is a fast-paced book that chronicles the turbulent, up-and-down history of Marvel comics. Having been an avid comic reader throughout the 1970s, I enjoyed this behind-the-scenes look at the company that sparked my youthful imagination. Familiar names from the comic pages became actual people, and it was interesting to read about their lives, struggles, feuds, and triumphs.The writing is crisp and the pages fly. Sean Howe does a good job of hitting most of the historical bases, but the text mainly lands glancing blows in each era. Granted, when covering the company's history from the 1940s to the present, it's hard to include everything. However, there were certain passages where I wished for more depth. Since the book has no illustrations, I would often pause my reading to search online for examples of covers and artwork.The only time the book bogs down is in the sections dealing with the convoluted legal and corporate maneuvering that occurred as the company changed hands. It's hard to keep track of the revolving door of greedy executives that exploited the company for personal gain. Surprisingly, for a book that talks so much about Marvel's distribution woes over the years, the author doesn't address at all the advent or impact of digital comics.As you might expect, the figures who stand out in the narrative are those who caused the most waves--Starlin, Gerber, McFarlane, Miller, Liefeld. These were the creators who pushed Marvel's boundaries before jumping ship. Unfortunately, loyal workhorses who didn't rock the boat (like John Buscema and Gil Kane) receive little mention. Even though they contributed a lot to the company, apparently they don't make good copy.Of course, the thread that runs through every decade is Stan Lee. He kept the company alive early on when the entire staff was depleted and his magnificent run through the 60s with Jack Kirby will never be equaled. Stan is and always will be synonymous with Marvel.So, would non-comic readers enjoy this book? I doubt it. I can't see them wanting to read about a bunch of artists and writers they've never heard of. But for those of us who spent time in the Marvel Universe, it's a nostalgic and fun ride.

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