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1986

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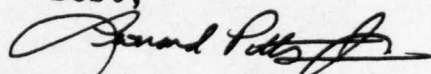
Stan Lee
c/o Marvel Productions
6007 Sepulveda Blvd.
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Dear Stan:

Here at last, as advertised, is the transcript of the interview we did for my book, "Conversations With The Comic Book Creators". Most of the typos and spelling inaccuracies you see on these pages have already been caught and corrected, but don't hesitate to bring my attention to any glaring goofs you see. You can reach me at the address above, or by calling (213) 255-0434 (days) or (818) 337-1756 (evenings).

Also, could you please sign the enclosed release form and mail it in the envelope I've provided at your earliest convenience. Thanks again for all your help and cooperation in putting this project together.

Best,


Leonard Pitts, Jr.

not making fun of yourself. You're having fun with the material.

Mostly, when comics get translated into other media, other media do it with a kind of nudge-nudge, wink-wink mentality..."Hey, isn't this material stupid? Aren't we so much cleverer than this stupid material that we're doing?" And in the end, the only thing you translate to your audience is, "Boy, this is stupid material". In the "Superman" movie, for the most part, the stuff was played very straight. The Smallville sequence, the first night in Metropolis, it was all played very straight. It was amusing. I thought some of it was just as funny as heck. But it was done with a straight face to the audience and I think that's really vital to the material--maybe because the material is so outlandish.

Because superheroes were created by comics, that may give comics and superheroes a kind of unity that just doesn't exist with any other genre you can put into comics. You can watch westerns on TV or go to the movies. You can see all the other stuff elsewhere, but you really don't see superheroes ~~much~~, and that may be one of the reasons superheroes are so successful in comics, but they don't break out of comics very much.

STAN LEE

PITTS: You came to Marvel in 1939. Why?

LEE: I needed a job. I had just graduated high school and I was looking in the papers at the want ads and I saw an ad for a comic book company that needed somebody to help out-- somebody with writing ability to also be a go-fer. ~~And~~ I figure I must've been the only guy who answered the ad, because I got the job.

PITTS: How did you know you had writing ability?

LEE: Oh, I had done a lot of writing in high school. There was a newspaper then called the ^{New York} Herald Tribune, and they had an essay contest ~~there~~ for high school students called the Biggest News Of the Week contest. You had to write a 500 word article about what you thought was the biggest news ^{event} of the week. ~~And~~ I entered it for three weeks running and I won it for the three weeks. The editor called ~~me down~~ and asked me to stop entering the contest and give someone else a chance.

^{Then} ~~And~~ he said, "What do you want to be, when you become a person?" And I said, "I'd like to be an actor", because at that time that's what I thought I wanted. He said, "Don't be crazy. You ought to be a writer." And ~~then~~ ^{previously had} I ~~got myself~~ a job writing for a hospital--writing publicity releases. ^{That} ~~This~~ was spare time stuff while I was in high school. I got a job for one of the news services; I wrote obituaries of famous people who were still alive, so that when they die, the obituary is all ready to put in the paper. ^{But I quit because} ~~I~~ ^I got very depressed writing about living people in the past tense.

PITTS: What did you find when you got to Timely Comics?

LEE: I found a very small staff. It was just me and a few other people, and we only were publishing about three or four magazines a month. I did ^{a little of} everything. I went down and got people their lunches and I filled the inkwells and I did some proofreading and I did some copywriting. Little by little, I began to write stories.

The fella who had been the editor, he quit after awhile, and there was nobody around to replace him, so the publisher asked me if I could hold the job down ^{temporarily} until he got somebody else. At that time, I was 17, and I guess he didn't figure a 17 year old ^{was qualified} ~~ought~~ to be the editor. ~~When you're 17 years old, what do you know?~~ I said, "Sure. I can do it." He gave me a chance at it, and I think he forgot all about me, because he never hired anybody else, so I stayed there ever since.

PITTS: I get the impression that he didn't have a lot of time to pay attention to the comics anyway. Didn't he have other things he was publishing?

LEE: He had other magazines, but he paid quite a bit of attention to the comics, too. He was much more involved in the early days than later on.

PITTS: Okay, so for the next 20 or 30 years you were there turning out monster stories--

LEE: Well, I did everything. We worked according to whatever the trend was. If there was a trend for cowboy books, we did two dozen cowboy titles. When romance books came in, we did two dozen romance books. We were just a

volume publisher. Whatever was trendy at the moment, we published. ~~did~~ We did teenage books, ^{such as} ~~we did~~ "Millie The Model", "Chili And Her Friends"... ~~I don't know~~ ^{my publisher} On and on. We did "Kid Colt", ~~the~~ "Two Gun Kid"--~~we~~ ^{my publisher} loved the name Kid--the "Western Kid", ~~the~~ "Ringo Kid", ~~the~~ "Rawhide Kid", ~~the~~ "Black Rider", ~~the~~ "Apache Kid". We did fantasy books-- "Strange Tales", "Astonishing Tales", "Journey Into Unknown Worlds", "Uncanny Tales", "Adventures Into Terror". We did war stories--"Combat Kelly", "Combat Casey", "Battlefield", "Battlefront", "Battleground", "Combat". We did romance-- ^{And those are just a few examples, the tip of the iceberg.} "My Love", "Your Love", "His Love", "Her Love". ^{Just} whatever was a name, we threw in and did the books. None of them were particularly good, none of them were particularly bad. They were just production jobs.

PITTS: But, you weren't getting your creative jollies at this juncture.

LEE: No, I was just doing what my publisher asked me to do. Being young, I enjoyed the feeling of importance of being editor and art director and head writer. It never occurred ^{to} me that what I was doing wasn't all that great. I mean, it was adequate. We were making money, but nothing that anybody could really brag about.

PITTS: I know you've been asked this next question a million times but I hope you won't mind making it a million and one: what was the event that changed it all around?

LEE: Well, as far as I can remember, I was about to quit. I was really bored with what I was doing. This was about

1960. And my wife said, "Before you leave, just once why don't you try to put out the kind of books ^{you yourself would} ~~you'd~~ like to do?" So I did.

Martin Goodman, ^{my} ~~the~~ publisher at the time, ~~had~~ told me that he had heard that DC Comics had a book called the "Justice League" or the "Justice Society". I can't remember-one of those. And it was selling rather well. He said, "Why don't we ^{also} put out a book with a team of superheroes?" So I said okay, but I decided to do it differently ^{for once} ~~than we~~. ^{That was when} ~~had been doing the books, and~~ I came up with the idea of the "Fantastic Four". I decided to try to make them real personalities and let them react like real people would react to the real world. Jack Kirby drew it and contributed many ideas, too, of course, and it really succeeded far beyond anybody's expectations.

I ^{always thought} ~~realized maybe~~ that ^{was} the way comics should be done. And then we came out with--I forget the order of them. I think the next was the Hulk, then Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, Thor, Daredevil, Iron Man, Sgt. Fury, the Avengers, the X-men. It was like I was on a roll. I couldn't do anything wrong. I don't know that the ideas were so good. I think it was ^{more} the style. I think the readers related to that style of writing and storytelling. I think we could've been doing anything. It could've been Superman, Batman and the Flash, but if we were doing them in ^{our new} ~~that~~ style, they would've been big hits.

PITTS: When you say style, are you talking about the actual mechanics of the writing?

LEE: The mechanics of the writing is all pretty much the same. The style being, trying to humanize the characters as much as possible. The big formula, if you want to think of it as a formula, was just saying to myself, suppose a real, flesh and blood human ~~being~~ had thus and such a super power? What would his life be like anyway? What would happen to him in the real world.

Like Iron Man: okay, so he's got this suit of armor and he can fly and he's very strong, but won't he still have to worry about union trouble at his factory? And won't he still have to worry about women problems, girls who are running after him and so forth, and his weak heart and all the problems he has?

Maybe what I'm saying is: ^{I tried} ~~trying~~ to concentrate more on the characters' personal lives, and not just make the story a case of hero sees a crime being committed, ^{hero} ~~and he~~ goes after the criminal, ^{hero} ~~and~~ fights him and catches him in the end, which had pretty much been the formula up till then.

PITTS: Would you say, in a nutshell, that the key to the early success of your work was that it gave more respect to the reader's intellect?

LEE: Oh, absolutely, because suddenly we found we were getting older readers. Older readers who had never read comics before were picking them up and enjoying them and were staying with us. There were a lot of other things. We

content, also. ^{used}
 were trying to get more story ~~in there~~. We ~~had~~ continued stories, which gave us more room. Instead of telling a whole epic in 20 pages, we had 100 pages, because the stories went on issue after issue. We could get more subplots, we could get more plot development, more character delineation, we could flesh the stories out and make them like little motion pictures. Even the vocabulary: we would use whatever words were necessary for a situation. We didn't say to ourselves, "This word will be too difficult for the young kids."

We tried to have the people talk like real people. We tried to write the stories as though we were ^{screen} ~~real~~ writers, writing screenplays or television shows. The whole idea was to make the stories as adult as possible and still keep them enjoyable ~~and entertaining~~ and understandable for the young kids.

PITTS: If I had walked into the Marvel offices at that point there in the '60s, what would I have found?

LEE: I think you'd have found a small group of guys working like crazy, harrassed and hectic--but happy, enjoying what they were doing and very excited about what we were doing. It was something new. We were creating new characters, ^{a new mythology,} and the public was reacting favorably to them.

We felt rather proud of what we were doing. We even started putting credits in the books, which had never really been done in comics before. I started writing a column, "Stan's Soapbox", and made up this "Bullpen Bulletins" page.

We tried to bring the readers into the whole Marvel world with us so they weren't just fans. They were friends. I tried to talk to the readers as if I was sitting right with them and they were sharing the excitement with me. Tried to keep everything informal and friendly and exciting.

PITTS: You also seemed to enjoy creating, for want of a better phrase, a bunker mentality in which here was little tiny Marvel taking potshots at this huge giant, DC. It was the underdog syndrome.

LEE: That was the case. We were definitely the underdogs. DC was the giant in the field when it came to superheroes. They had I don't know how many superhero titles. We only had the "Fantastic Four" when we started, but we kept adding. DC was owned by Warner Brothers and they were big and wealthy. We were the little outfit, and we were very excited about the fact that we were suddenly starting to compete with ^{D.C.} ~~them~~ and people were noticing us. It was a great feeling.

PITTS: In rubbing shoulders with your fellow professionals, did you get the feeling they saw you guys at Marvel as a contender?

LEE: I never really thought of it that way. I was friends with most of the ^{staff} ~~guys~~ at DC and when we got together, we just kidded around and talked. I didn't think of it in those terms.

PITTS: Let's put it this way: was there an event or a time when you suddenly realized that Marvel would, as you liked to put it back then, take over the world?

LEE: I don't know when that time was, but I began to get a sense of that as time went on. I could tell by the fan mail. I could tell by the reception I got when I went to comic book conventions. I would be there with members of the DC staff and all the questions were directed at me from the ~~guys~~ ^{Fans} in the audience. All the interest seemed to be for Marvel. And little by little, yeah...you'd have to be blind not to realize that Marvel was where the excitement was in those days. I'd like to think it still is.

PITTS: You got a letter once from a woman who thanked you for helping her to raise her son so well. I'm sure that's not the only letter of that type you've received. How does it feel to have helped raise a generation of kids?

LEE: Very good. ~~Very good.~~ ^{Wonderful.} You're right, I've gotten many letters like that and I treasured them and I cannot tell you how ~~good~~ ^{gratified} they made me feel, how warm they made me feel. You know, when you're a writer, you sit at a typewriter alone and you're batting out a lot of words and you have no idea if anybody's reading them or if anybody cares. I guess everybody likes to feel that what he does has some meaning to somebody.

I used to liken it to a disc jockey who has a late night show somewhere and he sits in a little room by himself talking into a microphone. He kind of hopes somebody,

somewhere is listening, but how does he ever know? And suddenly, you start getting this mail, all this feedback. I got letters from kids who said, "Stan, I'm having a Bar Mitzvah. I'd love it if you'd come. My father says he'll pay your fare." I got a letter from a kid saying, "I had to deliver a valedictorian address. I just graduated and for the subject of my address, I used a speech you had the Silver Surfer make in issue # so and so"...or, "My mother said, how come my English grades are improving so and I told her I'd been reading Marvel Comics and she didn't believe me." Sure, it was wonderful receiving mail like that.

PITTS: I'd be remiss if I didn't tell you that I interviewed Kirby for this book and frankly, I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. He's a very bitter man. Very angry. There were a lot of things he said about you that I would like you to have the opportunity to respond to, if you're of a mind to.

LEE: Okay.

PITTS: Let's start with the picture he paints of his contribution to Marvel. As he put it, "I saved Marvel's ass". He says when he walked in for his first meeting with you, you had your head down on the desk crying because Marvel was to be closed. You were in despair, an emotional wreck and he came and told you, "Look, we can do this, we can do that, and we can revolutionize comics".

LEE: Well, that's his remembrance. I don't think there's ever been a time when I've had my head on the desk crying.

You're meeting me now, I don't think I come across as an emotional wreck. I really don't know what he's alluding to at all.

PITTS: Also, he says every character that's credited as a Stan Lee character is a Jack Kirby character, including Spider-Man, which he says he passed to you and you passed to Ditko.

LEE: (SIGH) Jack has his own perception of these things, and I think I understand the way he feels. It's really a semantic difference of opinion, because it depends what you mean by "creating" something. For example, the first book we did was "Fantastic Four". I came up with the idea of the Fantastic Four. I wrote it down. I still have the outline I wrote--the whole idea for the story. And I called Jack and I said, "I'd like you to draw this. Here's the outline, these are the characters I want", and so forth. Jack then took it and drew it. Now, Jack did create the characters in the sense that he drew them. I didn't draw them. I wrote them. He created the way they look.

Jack also contributed quite a lot as the series went on in ideas, in plot. Jack is wonderful at story. He's very imaginative. He's the most talented guy in the business as far as I'm concerned, as far as imagination goes. He contributed a great deal. We worked as partners, but the creation of the characters, it seems to me...like with the Hulk: I said to him one day, "I want to do a hero who will be a monster. I think that would be great. I want to get a

combination of the Frankenstein monster and Jekyll and Hyde. I'd like you to draw it, Jack, and this is what I'd like it to be." And then we would discuss it, and I'm sure Jack contributed a few ideas, too. But it seems to me that the person who says, "I have this idea for a character", that's the person who created it. I could've given it to anybody to draw. Jack was the best. I gave them to Jack.

I have never tried to deny Jack's great contribution in all of these, but for him to say he created them all... He's not the one who came to me and said, "Let's do the 'Fantastic Four' or let's do the 'Hulk'". I came to him and said it. I said, "I want to do a god. Let's do the god of thunder--Thor. ^{stop} Nobody ^{has} ever done Norse mythology before. They've done Roman gods and Greek gods. I want to play with Norse mythology and I think the idea of Thor would be very dramatic." So, if that doesn't give me the right to say I created it, I don't know what does.

As far as Spider-Man is concerned, I came up with the idea of Spider-Man. I wanted a character who could crawl on walls. The name Spider-Man was mine. I called Jack and I said, "Jack, I'd like you to draw this differently than you draw your other characters", because Jack drew characters very heroically. They were all big and noble looking. I said, "I'd like you to make Spider-Man kind of an average guy. Almost nerdy. He's a guy who wears glasses, he's not strong, he's a bookworm, he's not that popular with girls.

Jack came back a little while later and brought me two or three pages and I looked at them and they were nicely drawn, but it wasn't what I wanted. The character looked more like Captain America than the way I wanted Spider-Man to look. I said, "Let's forget it, Jack. I don't think this one is for you." Jack had enough other books to do. It didn't matter. I gave it to Steve Ditko. Now, how Jack can say he created it, I don't know. There's only one thing...and I don't know, my memory isn't that good: Jack, when he gave me the pages, he had probably drawn a picture of Spider-Man. ~~Now~~, Ditko may have taken Kirby's costume and when he did the strip, he may have drawn the costume Jack had done. I do not know for a fact whether Ditko made up his own costume or took Jack's. If Jack wants to say he created the Spider-Man costume, he may have. I don't know. If he wants to say he created the Thor costume, the Fantastic Four costumes, whatever else he did, fine. But I don't think that's the same as saying, "I created this book or this concept or this idea."

PITTS: Jack claims that he did the writing you got all the ~~credit~~ for, and he also said he left Marvel that first time because he felt he was creating in you the kind of character he didn't want to create. Can you tell me what he's talking about?

LEE: No, I really don't know what he's talking about. But I don't know much of what Jack is talking about ^{these days.} I mean, when I listen to these things he says, I just feel I'm

PITTS: Let's move on to happier ground and talk a little more in depth about the creation of some of your better known characters. We can go back to the FF and, if you would, talk about the creation of the individual characters as opposed to the team.

LEE: Well, with the Fantastic Four, I knew we wanted to create a team. So the next problem was to figure out who ~~could~~^{should} comprise the team. I figured we have to have one leader. And for a name, I thought he would modestly call himself Mr. Fantastic. I got a kick out of that. I figured I'd ~~made~~^{make} him the world's greatest scientist, but unlike some other books, because he is a great scientist, I tried to write him as though he was just a little bit stuffy--without too much of a sense of humor, even though he's a hero. He's always pontificating and explaining things to give the other characters, like the Thing and the Torch a chance to say, "Boy, he'll never use a word of two syllables ~~with~~^{when} a 50-syllable word will do", and he kind of bores the others with his longwinded explanations.

Then I decided that it would be fun to have a heroine who's not just the "girl", but who's actually engaged to him. So, we started off the series with Sue Storm, who was his fiancée. Then, for the obligatory teenager, I figured, "Why not let him be Sue Storm's younger brother so he could be the hero's brother-in-law after he married Sue. Because, in superhero comics or in any comics prior to this, you

listening to the mouthings of a very bitter man who I feel quite sorry for. I don't know what his problem is, really.

As far as him doing the stories, ~~and~~ Jack never felt that the script itself, the dialogue I wrote, was part of the story. Very often, Jack would make up the plots. We would discuss a story before it was done, and I'd say, "Let's bring Dr. Doom back. Let's let him capture Reed Richards or do this and that". Jack would say okay, and I left most of the ^{details} ~~story~~ to Jack. It's quite true, a lot of the stories--the plotting of them--he created. I would give him a couple of words and he did the rest. I've never taken that away from him. He was wonderful at that.

Then he would bring me the drawings. I would put in all the dialogue and all the captions. I have a feeling that Jack considers that relatively unimportant. You know, "Anybody can put the dialogue in". I would like to feel that the style I gave the stories by putting the dialogue in ^{After all, the manner of speech is really what gives the characters their personality.} was quite important. ^A As a matter of fact, when Jack left Marvel, his stories never read the same again, the ones he did without me. They may have been better or worse, but they were never the same. The stories I wrote with Jack had a certain style, and I think they are greatly responsible for Marvel's success. I think it is a shame that Jack didn't stay with us. I think he and I could've ^{still} ^A done great things together. I have absolutely no idea why he is so bitter.

never had in-laws or relatives. They were always perfect strangers.

I needed a fourth guy and I figured his power would be the power of strength. I've always liked ^{the injection of tragedy,} ~~tragic things,~~ and I figured, what if he's not only incredibly powerful, but the thing that gives him his power also turns him into a semi-monster. ^{To keep it simple and offbeat,} ~~I always loved the name the Thing, so~~ I decided to call ~~called~~ him the Thing. The one that was totally unoriginal, of course, was the Human Torch, because we'd had a character like the Torch many years ago. I thought we'd give Johnny Storm, the kid brother of Sue, the same power but we'd change him by making him a teenager. The original Torch was an android as I remember. And also, ^{I attempted to give him a personality} ~~by giving him whatever personality we could~~ that would be unique to Johnny Storm.

The one thing I always tried to concentrate on was the dialogue...the way they talked. I tried to have Johnny talk differently than the others--more the way a youngster would. And I tried to have Ben talk like a real tough, surly, angry guy, but yet the reader had to know he had a heart of gold underneath. ~~Ben~~ Ben, of course, was the only one who couldn't become normal at will the way the other three could. So he was always bitter about that.

I knew without any doubt that Ben, the Thing, would be the most popular character and he was. He was the most unique. People always like characters who seem very powerful but yet, you know they are very gentle underneath

~~He was~~ a king, the idea he could come to America and ~~be~~ ^{be safe from} ~~arrest~~ ~~couldn't be arrested~~ because he had diplomatic immunity.

I didn't want him to be that hateful. I thought it would be fun to have a villain you could kind of relate to, in a way. I think one of my favorite stories was when Reed fought Dr. Doom and Doom won. At the end of the story, Doom was very happy because he'd finally defeated the Fantastic Four, but it turned out that Reed had hypnotized him or something. Doom hadn't really won, but Reed felt that's the one way to get him off his back forever. If he thinks he's won, he'll never bother them again.

PITTS: Okay...Galactus.

LEE: He was a semi-god. He, uh...I never was too sure exactly what he was. Or how big he was. Jack drew him different heights many times. He was very much the same as Dr. Doom, except ~~more~~so. I remember I would have Galactus say, "I don't want to hurt anybody, I don't want to kill anybody, but I must survive. It doesn't bother you humans if you step on an anthill and kill thousands of ants. You don't particularly want to kill them, but you can't help walking along. That's the way it is with me. I don't want to harm anybody, but Galactus must survive."

PITTS: The Hulk.

LEE: With the Hulk, I just wanted to create a lovable monster--almost like the Thing, but ~~more~~so. I had always loved Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and I had always loved the Frankenstein monster. I always felt the Frankenstein

and you know they would help you if you needed it. It's almost like having your own genie on your shoulder.

PITTS: With Dr. Doom, you created the runaway most popular villain in comics and easily the most complex. How?

LEE: There again, I wanted to make him a scientist also, because I felt he had to be able to compete with Reed Richards. I thought it would be fun if they had been classmates in school together. The one quality I tried to give him was a quality of...well, he's regal. He's not just the average villain who wants to commit crimes and make money. Doom has all the money he needs. What he wants is to take over the world--to run the world. And I tried to write it as though maybe Doom could. Maybe he could do a better job than is being done now. ^{might be thought of as} ~~He is sort of being like a~~ benevolent despot.

In fact, in later stories and in my newspaper comic strip when I've featured him, I've had him saying things like, "I may rule with an iron hand, but there's no crime in Latveria"--which is his country--"there's no poverty and no unemployment and there aren't many prisoners in jail."

~~Doom, also~~ ^{also} I tried to give him a strong sense of honor. I

seem to remember I wrote some stories ^{where} ~~where~~ Doom would say, "If you do thus and such, I'll set you free." Sue would

say, "How can we trust him?" And Reed would say, "Dr. Doom, for all his faults, has his own code of honor." In his way,

he was the most noble of all the bad men. I loved the idea of him being

Of course, that was because he had most of them shot

monster was really the good guy. I'm talking about the movie, not Mary Shelley's story. In the movie, Frankenstein's monster didn't really want to hurt anybody. He just wanted to be left alone, and everybody was hounding him and hunting him...those idiot policemen ^{always} ~~were~~ chasing him with those torches.

I figured, why don't we create a monster, ^{whom} ~~and~~ the whole human race ^{is always} ~~will be~~ trying to hunt ~~him down~~ and destroy, ~~him~~, ^{but} ~~and~~ he's really a good guy. ^{Then,} ~~But~~ to give it an extra degree of interest, I figured instead of just a monster, we'll ^{borrow a concept} ~~steal the idea~~ from Jekyll and Hyde and let it be a man who turns into a monster unwillingly, ^{who must} ~~and he'll~~ spend his life trying to cure himself of this rather unique affliction.

PITTS: The X-men.

LEE: They were originally called the Mutants, but my publisher at the time thought that the readers wouldn't know what a mutant was, so I changed it to the X-men. We're always looking for new superheroes--not so much for new heroes as for new explanations of how they came about, and I was getting tired of radioactive accidents. I felt, why not get some people who were born the way they are, who had mutant powers. So we created the X-men.

PITTS: Spider-Man.

LEE: I remember, when I was a kid, 10 years old, there ~~were~~ ^{was} a ~~some~~ pulp magazine ^a called 'The Spider--Master Of Men'. And I ~~just~~ ^{always} thought that title was so dramatic. He was nothing like Spider-Man; he was just a detective who ^{were} ~~was~~ a

mask, and he went around punching people. He wore a ring with a spider insignia so when he punched somebody it would leave a little mark of a spider on the person. I figured, "Gee, why not call ^{my} ~~the~~ guy Spider-Man"?

PITTS: Although Spider-Man is arguably the most popular single superhero in comics, legend has it that your publisher, Martin Goodman, took a lot of convincing when you wanted to try the character out.

LEE: He said it was the worst ^{idea} ~~thing~~ he ever heard. He said people hate spiders, and it sounded too much like Superman.

The idea of someone sticking to a wall and stuff, ~~it was~~ he called it grotesque.

PITTS: When you finally talked Goodman into doing Spider-Man, the alter-ego you created for the character was almost the prototypical milquetoast nerd--at least in his earliest incarnation. Where did you get your ideas for the character of Peter Parker?

LEE: More from myself than anybody. In the group, I was always the youngest kid, and I was always the thinnest kid. And, while I was a good athlete--I always played with the other kids; I played baseball, hockey, handball and everything--because I was the youngest and the thinnest, I

was never the captain or the leader and I was always the one getting pushed around. And I figured, ^{kids would relate to a concept like} ~~Jesus, what's wrong~~ ^{that.}

~~with that? I think of myself as a pretty neat guy, though.~~ After all, most kids have had similar experiences. Turns out I was right.

~~I'm not the guy who wins the awards.~~

PITTS: Speaking of Spider-Man characters, Jonah Jameson has to be one of the most inspired supporting players in comics.

LEE: I guess he's my favorite. I don't really know where I got him...maybe a combination of everybody I've ever known. The only thing that has always bothered me about Jonah--you can believe it or not--I came up with the idea of the irascible publisher, and Spidey being a freelance photographer; I loved it and weeks later, I said, "My God! Superman works for an editor, Perry White!" I said, "Oh, how did I get so close?" So, I knocked myself out to make Jonah Jameson as different as possible.

He's much more irascible, he's very reactionary, he thought the last good times we had in America were when Herbert Hoover was president, he hates teenagers, he hated hippies, he hated long hair, he hated guitars. I thought it would be funny to get a guy like that and show he isn't really a villain. He's not a bad guy. He just represents that segment of society that is very arch conservative.

PITTS: The Silver Surfer.

LEE: Silver Surfer really was created by Jack Kirby. After we had decided to do Galactus in a story, when Jack brought the artwork in, I saw there was some funny guy on a flying surfboard. I said, "Who's this?" Jack said, "I figure anybody as important as Galactus ought to have a herald who flies ahead of him and finds planets for him." I loved the idea. I don't remember who made up the name the Silver Surfer--whether it was Jack or me, but I loved the idea and

the drawings were so beautiful, he looked so great that I figured I would try to have him talk differently than any other character--get a quasi Shakespearian/biblical delivery for him.

PITTS: There was something almost Christ-like about the Surfer. Was that in Jack's original conception?

LEE: ^{No. That was the} ~~I believe that was a~~ quality that I gave ^{to} him. As he ^{originally} was drawn, he was just a powerful guy on a flying surfboard.

PITTS: I remember reading in one of your old columns where you said the Surfer was being quoted in pulpits across the country. How did that affect you? Is there a special place in your heart for him?

LEE: ^{Absolutely.} ~~On yeah~~ You know, I used to lecture a lot at colleges and very often during the question and answer period, the kids in the audience would say, "Tell us about the Surfer and how ~~does~~ he relate ^{to} the Judao-Christian concept of religion. Did you have Jesus Christ in mind?" They would discuss various quotations from the Surfer.

Somehow or other, we seem to have struck a nerve there.

People seem to really care about the Surfer.

PITTS: Well, did you have Jesus Christ in mind?

LEE: Maybe subconsciously. I was trying to make the Surfer a pure innocent who is trying to help people and is being misunderstood and persecuted for the very things he is trying to do, which are ^{totally} good and unselfish.

PITTS: I've heard it rumored that you passed down the edict at Marvel that no one will write a Surfer series ^{except} ~~you~~ ~~before you~~.

LEE: I did, and then when I left Marvel physically to move out to the (West) Coast, after a few years there was such a clamor for the Surfer that they're finally putting out some new books, which are being written by someone else. I must say I'm still unhappy about it, but I didn't feel I should make a big fuss about it. I can't insist that nobody else writes it if the world wants more Surfers, and I don't have time to do it. But I was always afraid that whoever wrote it wouldn't write him the ^{correct} ~~right~~ way, because I don't want him treated too much like a normal superhero. ~~Not do I~~ ^{Another fear I have is...} ~~Want~~ sometimes a writer can try to copy your style too much and it comes across as being too corny.

PITTS: Daredevil.

LEE: There again, we were trying for something different, and I figured, why not a blind superhero? Everybody thought it was a crazy idea, but it really worked. He's one of most popular characters today.

PITTS: Finally, your most recent creation and in many ways, the most controversial: the She-Hulk.

LEE: Originally, we thought we might be able to sell ~~as~~ ^{such} ~~an~~ animated cartoon, so I was asked to create a character, ^{another version of the Hulk} ~~called the She-Hulk~~ and write a good story for it, ^{Someone came} ~~and we~~ ^{with the name "She-Hulk" and I thought "Why not?"} ~~might sell it to a network as a cartoon. And I did. I just~~ ^{So I did it. But I only created the character and} ~~wrote that first issue. I didn't have~~ ^{time for any more.}

*Personally, left to myself, I wouldn't have done
the She-Hulk. Even though she's a good character,* 230
^ ~~That was the reason for it. I myself would not~~

~~have~~...it smacked to me too much of Superman and Superboy
and Superdog and Supersneakers and on and on. I felt one
Hulk was all the world really needed.

PITTS: It's been quite a few years since you were actively
writing. Have there been any versions of your characters
since then that you felt were really excellent--that
captured the spirit of what you did and then added something
extra to it?

LEE: Oh, sure. It's hard to remember examples. I don't
really have time to read the books now, but I would read
them a few years ago or at least look through a few of them,
and every so often I'd see a story ^{that would make me} ~~that I'd say~~, "Gee,
that's really terrific." There was one Spider-Man story
about a kid who was dying and Spider-Man came and--

PITTS: "The Kid Who Collected Spider-Man".

LEE: That's it. It was a lovely little story. I thought
it was just great. I had seen a few "Daredevils" that I
thought were good, I saw some "Fantastic Fours" that I
liked.

PITTS: Let's turn it around. Have there been any versions
of your characters that you've been especially unhappy with?
I remember you saying that you were unhappy with the Gwen
Stacy clone story and the whole death of Gwen Stacy in
Spider-Man.

LEE: Well, the clone, I think, ~~that~~ was my suggestion
originally. I was so unhappy she was dead I was trying to

think of a way to bring her back without claiming it had been an imaginary story or something. Didn't seem to work, though, but I never ^{would have killed} ~~wanted to kill~~ Gwen Stacy ^{in the first place,} ~~^~~ When I gave up the strip, he (Gerry Conway) said, "How should I write it?" I said, "You're the writer now, do whatever you want." I don't feel it's right to try to control something if I'm not there anymore.

I had to go to Europe for awhile. When I came back, I found out she had been killed. I said, "^{Sheesh!} ~~Jesus~~ I didn't mean kill off all my characters." But it was done. It was irrevocable.

PITTS: Any other examples like that, where something happened with one of your characters that really incensed you?

LEE: Well, there've been a lot of changes in the books since I left. I can't say I've been incensed. I'm ^{confident that} ~~sure~~ Jim Shooter and his staff know what they're doing. ^{Jim's one of the most innovative talents in comics.} ~~^~~ You can't keep things the same all the time. ^{perhaps} ~~I think~~ There are more changes than I would have made, ~~though~~ because I like things that are a little bit more constant and dependable. ^{it} I would have preferred [^] if the stories and the plots changed a lot, but if the characters remained more constant. And yet, a lot of the things that have been done at Marvel have been very exciting and very stimulating and provocative, like the "Iron Man" series where Tony Stark becomes an alcoholic. A lot of people have talked about it, been interested in it, cared about it. I think it's great that writers

~~people~~ are using their own imaginations and going wherever their own tastes lead them. I think, by and large, the books ^{and the changes} are pretty good.

PITTS: Kirby made an interesting observation that comics are becoming a little too seamy and graphic. Would you go along with that, that there are too many liberties being taken??

LEE: Well, I think there's an effort made to make them more adult and more sophisticated. And of course, the world has changed a lot since I was writing comics. We're living in a different time now. I would not, perhaps, have the stories quite as rough as some of them are. For my own tastes, they're a little too earthy, I think. But I don't know that it's really wrong. It may be that that's what we've come to now in our society. Maybe they're the right kind of stories for this period of time.

PITTS: Why did you stop writing in the first place?

LEE: (PAUSE) I can't remember. I think maybe I got too busy with my publishing duties. I may have also felt, well, ~~perhaps it's time to step aside.~~ ^{perhaps it's} ~~I have other things to do now. How many stories can you write?~~ ^{And now, my work in film keeps me totally occupied.} After awhile, I might have started repeating myself. I don't know. I miss the writing, I must admit. Occasionally, ^{still} I'll write ~~some copy~~ ^{special} for a book at Marvel, ~~that they're if I'm asked.~~ ^{if I'm asked.}

PITTS: What are your current duties?

LEE: Well, I'm working on putting together some motion picture ~~and a series.~~ ^{Headquartered} I'm working at the animated studio here ~~in Van Nuys, California~~

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creation
and

Marvel. I'm ~~senior~~ in charge of the development of new
shows. I work with the artists and writers. ^{y'know,} I ~~almost~~ have the strongest
feeling of déjà vu. It's like the early days of ~~Marvel~~ ^{Marvel Comics,} sixties,
Gaines, where we were building up the studio, and suddenly I'm
back working with artists and writers again and doing all
the things I love.

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LEE: (PAUSE) I'm not sure. I think I probably just got too busy with my publishing duties. I may also have felt that it was time to step aside and try my hand at other things. Now my work in film keeps me fully occupied. Sure, I guess I sometimes miss comicbook writing, but I still do the SPIDER-MAN newspaper strip and I also do an occasional comicbook for Marvel whenever my longtime friend, Jim Galton, Marvel's president, may request me to write some special issue. Jim's one of the greatest guys I know and I'd never turn him down.

PITTS: What are your current duties?

LEE: Right now I'm putting together a number of motion picture projects, both live action and animated, as well as developing some prime time TV series. I've made my headquarters at Marvel's new animated studio here in Van Nuys, California, where I'm in charge of the creation and development of new projects. I work with the creative staff, as well as with lovely Margaret ~~Loesch~~^{Loesch}, the brilliant president of Marvel Productions.

Y'know, I sometimes get the strangest feeling of deja vu. It's as though I'm once again reliving those exciting days of the early sixties when we were building Marvel Comics. Suddenly I'm back in harness again, having the time of my life, working with clever, talented artists and writers, creating characters and concepts at a vital, fast-growing studio, developing movie and tv projects, and keeping busier than ever doing all the things I love.

Subject:

RE: Article - Conversations with the Comic Book Creators question about

I think it was closer to early or middle '80s that I did that. No, it was never published; I interviewed Stan and a number of other people (Jack Kirby, Roy Thomas, Jim Shooter) for a book, but the publishing house changed hands in the interim and the new owners were not interested in the manuscript.

Yours Truly,

Leonard Pitts, Jr.