

EXHIBIT MM

Stan Lee

CONVERSATIONS



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Stan: Well, what we usually do is, with most of the artists, I usually get a rough plot. By a rough plot, I mean as much as I can write in longhand on the side of one sheet of paper . . . who the villain will be, what the problem will be, and so forth. Then I call that artist in, whoever's going to draw the strip . . . I read it to him . . . what I've written down, these few notes . . . and we discuss it. By the time we're through talking for about twenty minutes, we usually have some plot going.

And we talk it out. Lately, I've had Roy Thomas come in, and he sits and makes notes while we discuss it. Then he types them up which gives us a written synopsis. Originally—I have a little tape recorder—I had tried taping it, but I found that nobody on the staff has time to listen to the tape again. Later . . . so it's just too much of a waste. But this way he makes notes, types it quickly, I get a carbon, the artist, gets a carbon . . . so we don't have to worry that we'll forget what we've said. Then the artist goes home . . . or wherever he goes . . . and he draws the thing out, brings it back, and I put the copy in after he's drawn the story based on the plot I've given him. Now this varies with the different artists. Some artists, of course, need a more detailed plot than others. Some artists, such as Jack Kirby, need no plot at all. I mean I'll just say to Jack, "Let's let the next villain be Dr. Doom" . . . or I may not even say that. He may tell me. And then he goes home and does it. He's so good at plots, I'm sure he's a thousand times better than I. He just about makes up the plots for these stories. All I do is a little editing . . . I may tell him that he's gone too far in one direction or another. Of course, occasionally I'll give him a plot, but we're practically both the writers on the things

Ted: He actually did do a script while you were away on vacation.

Stan: Yes. We had both plotted that out before I left. But he put the copy in on that one. I do a little editing later, but it was his story. Jack is just fantastic. We're lucky. Most of our men are good story men. In fact, they have to be. A fellow who's a good artist, but isn't good at telling a story in this form . . . in continuity form . . . can't really work for us. Unless we get somebody to do the layouts for him and he just follows the layouts. We've done that in the past.

Ted: That's what it means when you have a little note saying "Layouts by Kirby, Art by So-and-So . . . ?"

Stan: Yes. Now that isn't always because of the fact that the artist can't do layouts. There are many extenuating circumstances. For example, an

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artist who hasn't done a certain strip may have to do it because suddenly the other artist who is going to do it is ill or something. He isn't familiar with the story line, and I don't have time to explain it. Now Jack has been in on most of these things with me. I can call Jack down. I can say, "Jack, make it a twelve-page story, and, roughly, this is the plot." Jack can go home, and the next day he has the whole thing broken down. He gives it to the artist, and the artist just has to worry about drawing his work on the breakdowns. It's a lot easier than me spending a whole day discussing the philosophy of the strip with a new artist. Also there are some fellows who are starting a new strip, who are a little unfamiliar. They'd rather have Jack break it down for them once or twice until they get the feeling of it.

Ted: Of course, Jack has a very good sense of action.

Stan: The greatest . . .

Ted: And his perspective . . . things seem to be coming out at you on the page. It seems to me that his layouts are a lot more dynamic, less static than a lot of the other artists who are working on their own.

Stan: Well, we refer to Jack. It started as a gag, calling him Jack "King" Kirby, but actually I mean it. I think that this guy is absolutely . . . in this particular field, he's the master.

Ted: Of course, he's been working with Marvel on and off practically since Marvel started. He did the original *Captain America*, of course but he was doing work back before *Captain America*, back before he had his long collaboration with Joe Simon

Stan: I don't know anything about that because I wasn't here at the time . . . and I think he had been with another company before Marvel.

Ted: He did *Blue Bolt*.

Stan: Yeah . . . I think that was for Fox. They're now out of business. But Jack . . .

Ted: No, actually that was for Curtis.

Stan: That who it was?

Ted: They had a different name for the company.

Stan: Might have been . . .

Thor after leaving; them for four months and for the first time not writing any comics for a period of time?

Stan: No. I think you can compare it to riding a bicycle; no matter how long you stay away, you get on the bike and it's just like you never left it. For example, if I were to go back to writing a book now, I don't think that it would feel odd at all, my problem would be that I haven't carefully read the preceding issues, so I wouldn't know where the hell I was in the storyline. Or I might write a character in such a way that I think is the way to write him, but I wouldn't be aware that three other writers before me had changed the character totally, so I'm now writing it in the wrong way.

Roy: So when you write the *Spider-Man* newspaper strip, you ignore what goes on in the comic books?

Stan: Of course. I couldn't cope with that, because we do the newspaper strip so far in advance, and there's no way that I could make it compatible with the books—impossible.

Roy: Another event in 1970 that had considerable impact at Marvel was Jack Kirby suddenly leaving. Do you remember his phone call?

Stan: No. I know it must have happened, but I don't specifically recall it. I don't know who he called; it may not have been me. Maybe he didn't even call, but I just remember that at one point he just stopped working for me.

Roy: I remember that he called, because you called us in and told us. In light of all that has happened since, do you think that the relationship could have been salvaged at some point?

Stan: I think it certainly could have been salvaged if I knew what was bothering him. He never really told me, nor did Steve Ditko when he left. You can't salvage something if you don't know the cause.

Roy: I remember the day that Steve quit, a few months after I began to work at Marvel. He just came in, dropped off some pages, and left. Sol Brodsky then told me he had suddenly quit. Sol had a memo on his desk to add \$5.00 to Steve's page rate, a considerable raise at that time, so it certainly wasn't over money. He wandered off to do work for Charlton, which paid half of what Marvel was offering.

Stan: As you know, I have the worst memory in the world, but maybe I knew why he left at the time. But right now, I absolutely cannot remember. The one thing I remember and felt bad about when Jack left, was that I had

been thinking about—and maybe I even talked to him about it—that I wanted to make Jack my partner in a sense. I wanted him to be the art director and I thought that he could serve in that function and I would serve as the editor. Maybe this was way earlier, but I was disappointed when he left because I always felt that Jack and I would be working there forever and doing everything.

Roy: For some months when you became publisher, you needed someone to be art director, so Frank Giacoia came in (as "assistant art director"), and, very soon, John Romita succeeded him, becoming art director.

Stan: But I wasn't thinking of Jack being art director because I would be leaving; I just thought that it would be great working with him in that capacity. I was serving as art director and thought that he could take it off my shoulders, so I could just worry about the stories. It probably wouldn't have worked out anyway, because I might have disagreed with him about things—not about his own work, but if we started critiquing other artists' work, Jack and I might have looked at it differently. So it might just be that I never could have worked with any art director who would function the way I did, because I guess no two people see anything the same.

Roy: Also, with Jack being in California, there would have been a geographical problem. I have a memory that, sometime before Jack left, Jack called you up about some new ideas he had for characters. I don't think it went any further than that. Do you recall that at all? I was always curious if those were the same ideas that appeared a year or so later as *The New Gods*, and wondered if they could easily have ended up as Marvel characters.

Stan: I don't know if he told me the ideas and I had said that I didn't like 'em! [Laughs] I just can't remember.

Roy: The last few months Jack was working for Marvel, he ended up doing the writing on a couple of series—*Ka-Zar* and *The Inhumans*. Did you invite him to write at that time?

Stan: I am probably the worst guy in the world for you to interview! (A) I didn't realize he had written them, and (B) I can't remember if I invited him to or not. I don't think that I ever would have specifically said, "Jack, I would like you to write," because I never thought of Jack as a writer (but he was certainly a great plotter). Certainly 90 percent of the

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"Tales of Asgard" stories were Jack's plots, and they were great! He knew more about Norse mythology than I ever did (or at least he enjoyed making it up)! I was busy enough just putting in the copy after he drew it.

Roy: I was always curious about those three buddies, Hogun, Fandral, and of course enormous Volstagg. Were those characters your idea or Jack's? That's one of those ideas that I could see either you or Jack making up.

Stan: I made those up. I specifically remember that I did them because I wanted a Falstaff-type guy, a guy like Errol Flynn, and then I wanted a guy like Charles Bronson who was dire and gloomy, riddled with angst. Those three were mine.

Roy: When Marvel was acquired by Perfect Film, run by Martin Ackerman—because of the *Saturday Evening Post* debacle, where they dismantled the magazine, were you apprehensive about that, or were you thinking mostly about the fact that now you'd be free to put out more books?

Stan: I was just curious to see what was going to happen next. I didn't know what was going to happen. It was the first time that we were owned by a conglomerate and not by Martin Goodman, so it was a whole new experience for me. I was just hoping that I could keep my job, probably—that was the thing I always worried about! Then, of course, Ackerman left after a while and Sheldon Feinberg came in. There was something wrong with Perfect Film—I don't know what it was—but the stockholders or the bank or the board of directors got Martin Ackerman to resign and they put Sheldon Feinberg in his place. Feinberg changed the name of the company from Perfect Film to Cadence Industries, and then he was in charge for quite a while.

Roy: Was it Feinberg's decision to make you president and publisher?

Stan: Yes. But I didn't stay president very long.

Roy: Do you remember when we had problems during the *Wage and Price Freeze* during the Nixon administration, over the fact that we dropped down in size after one month of those giant-size 25¢ comic books? We had to put a slick, color, four-page insert in one issue of *Fantastic Four*, supposedly this was to make up for the fact that the *Wage and Price Control Board* had decided it was right on the cusp of

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whether we had, in a certain way, actually raised prices by charging 20¢ for 32 pages.

Stan: How the hell do you remember that?

Roy: Because I was the guy who had to write that insert! [Laughs]

Stan: That was what was so great about having you there. I let you worry about it. I don't even remember it.

Roy: Do you still have the letter from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare which prompted you to write the narcotics issues of *Spider-Man*?

Stan: There used to be a scrapbook in the office, and if it's still around, the letter would be in there. I haven't seen it in a million years. I got this letter—I don't remember the exact wording—and they were concerned about drug use among kids. Since Marvel had such a great influence with young people, they thought it would be very commendable if we were to put out some sort of anti-drug message in our books.

I felt that the only way to do it was to make it a part of the story, and we made that three-parter of *Spider-Man*. I remember it contained one scene where a kid was going to jump off a roof and thought he could fly. My problem is that I know less about drugs than any living human being! I didn't know what kind of drug it was that would make you think you could fly! I don't think I named anything. I just said that he had "done" something.

Roy: It was just a generic kind of drug. Just the same way we used to make up the names of countries. You made up Latveria.

Stan: You're right! [Laughs] Doesn't Latveria sound authentic?

Roy: I take it that you didn't do a lot of research on drugs, then?

Stan: I have never done research on anything in my life. Out here in Los Angeles, I work with and know so many screenwriters, and it amazes me the amount of research these guys do. I was going to do something about a prison, and I gave up the project because I realized I don't have any idea what the rituals are inside a prison and I just couldn't be bothered to look it up. But these guys would go and spend a week visiting a prison—even talking to the warden! I'm just no good at that.

Roy: Back in 1965 I took a phone call at the office sometime after 5:00 p.m. from somebody who asked me what you and Steve Ditko were on—because you *had* to be taking something in order to do those