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Stan Lee's name invokes a grandfatherly image that was well known for creating beloved super heroes such as Spiderman, Iron Man, and a plethora of characters from the X-men series. Lee, credited in 4,728 issues, was the very public, friendly face of Marvel Comics and could be considered the "Godfather" of the comic book world. However, not unlike Bill Gates in the world of computers, Stan Lee has been a subterfuge of controversy within the comic book world.

Stan "The Man" Lee, born Stanley Martin Lieber in 1922, first came into the comic world in 1939 when he was hired by Timely Comics publisher Martin Goodman. Lee's first published works came in 1941 when he produced text filler for *Captain America #3*, a superhero comic series co-created by writer Joe Simon and artist Jack Kirby. Lee wrote his first published comic two months later, which was followed by his first co-creation, *Destroyer*, in August of the same year. Toward the end of 1941, Lee was given the position of interim editor of Timely Comics following the departure of Joe Simon (Blackheart, <http://www.comicvine.com/stan-lee/4040-40467/>, 2013).

However, during the 1950's, the superhero novelty had worn out, and under Mark Goodman's branch Atlas Comics, Lee dabbled in various genres such as horror, Westerns, humor, adventure-drama, romance, espionage, medieval, and Bible stories ("Atlas Comics", [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlas\\_Comics\\_%281950s%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlas_Comics_%281950s%29), 2013). In 1956 Atlas began to run into distribution trouble as Goodman had tried to use American News Company, the nation's largest distributor at the time to distribute Atlas' products. American News Company had been found guilty of restraint of trade and ordered to divest itself of the newsstands it owned. Atlas had to turn to Independent News, owned by rival DC Comics which limited Atlas Comics to 8 titles a month. In a 1988 interview, Stan Lee was asked if he knew the collapse of Atlas/Timely was coming. Lee responded, "Absolutely not. The only thing I did know was that Martin had given up his own distribution company and had gone with the American News Company. I remember saying to him, "Gee, why did you do that? I thought that we had a good distribution company." He recalled that Atlas had been churning out "40, 50, 60" a month and suddenly went to 8 to 12 books a month (Thomas, <http://twomorrows.com/comic-bookartist/articles/02stanroy.html>, 2009).

With Atlas/Timely in turmoil and feeling bored with his job, Stan Lee wanted to quite comics. He desired to write more "realistic-fantasy" stories, but Goodman would not let him. Lee felt he was too old to do "stupid comic

books” and he had become complacent in the literary genre. Martin Goodman came to Lee and requested that he start working on a new super-hero group, as DC Comics’ Jack Liebowitz confided to Goodman that DC’s Justice League had been selling successfully. According to Roy Thomas’ interview with Lee, Stan Lee stated, “If Martin hadn't come in to me and said, ‘Liebowitz said the Justice League is selling well, so why don't we do a comic book about super-heroes?’. If he hadn't said that to me, I might've—in the next day or two, I might've just quit” (Thomas, <http://twomorrows.com/comic-bookartist/articles/02stanroy.html>, 2009).

Reluctantly, in 1961, Stan Lee with Jack Kirby, who had returned to Marvel in 1958 from working with DC Comics, co-created Fantastic Four which set Marvel Comics apart from DC Comics, a major rival comic book, by creating rounded characters who had more self awareness and differences in opinion. The human personalities and flawed characters that led to bickering with amongst the characters generated a realism in which the readers could more acutely identify; whereas DC Comics contained characters that were presented with systematic rolls and dialogue that came across as super “goody-goody” heroes (“Marvel Comics”, <http://www.cracked.com/funny-55-marvel-comics/>, 2013).

With the first edition of Fantastic Four came what would be known as “the Marvel Style.” Stan Lee had originally written full scripts for his books, but found out how good Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, an artist who first debuted in *Journey Into Mystery* 33, were just creating their own little sequence of pictures. When Lee discovered how interesting the story style was, he realized that he didn’t have to write a full script for the books. He would get a better story by just letting the story “run free” (Thomas, <http://twomorrows.com/comic-bookartist/articles/02stanroy.html>, 2009). When *Journey Into Mystery* #69 and teen humor *Patsy Walker* #95 came out in June 1960 under the new brand Marvel Comic, the trio Lee, Kirby, and Ditko began establishing the Marvel Comic’s reputation with The Fantastic Four (“Marvel Comics”, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marvel\\_Comics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marvel_Comics), 2013). However, the issue of credit and ownership of work cracked the partnership of the three and left cracks in the face of a growing comic empire.

In 1966, Stan Lee’s and Steve Ditko’s work relationship had become tumultuous. Ditko felt that leaving the full-time grind at Marvel in 1966 was the best way he could relieve some of the deadline and other pressures he'd been building up over the years. A falling out reportedly took place between Lee and Ditko, which according to most industry office lore has it that Lee wanted the Green Goblin to be Harry Osborne, while Ditko felt that it

should not be so obvious and contrived as that, preferring that the master criminal be a complete stranger instead (“The Amazing”, <http://steveditko.com/>, 2012).

By 1970, Jack “The King” Kirby’s relationship with the company had become tempestuous, as well as with Lee, fighting over credits, royalties and ownership of his artwork. Kirby described Stan Lee as a very rigid type and that he would get what he wanted when the advantage was his. Jack Kirby stated of Lee that he could never see Stan Lee as being creative. “I think Stan has a God complex. Right now, he’s the father of the Marvel Universe. He’s a guy with a God complex.” Kirby claimed that he would get a vague concept of Stan Lee’s ideas, go home, and draw the storyboard for the idea. Kirby also claimed that he would write the dialogue in the speech bubbles, sometime in the margin, hand it to Lee and find Lee taking the credit in writing the story, as well as creating the characters (Groth, <http://www.tci.com/jack-kirby-interview/7/>, 2011). The hazed development between the founders of Marvel have brought many questions to the authenticity of what accolades should be awarded to Stan Lee and which go to Kirby.

With the recent movie release of The Avengers, Jack Kirby's co-creator credit appears nowhere in the promotion of "The Avengers." Kirby’s fans have expressed outrage over the way his contributions to the movie's very existence are being swept under the rug. In 2012, Stan Lee responded to reporter’s question about whether Lee had any concerns as to why Kirby’s name did not appear on the credits of the movie. Lee replied, “I don't know how to answer that because in what way would his name appear?” Lee continued the interview stating the Kirby’s name is mentioned in every comic book. In what seemed a passive move, Lee directed the reporter to ask the producer of the movie. “You're talking to the wrong guy because I have nothing to do with the credits on the movies. I'm credited as one of the executive producers because that's in my contract. But Jack was not an executive producer. So I don't know what he'd be credited as.”(Larnick, [http://news.moviefone.com/2012/04/24/stan-lee-jack-kirby-avengers-credit\\_n\\_1450146.html](http://news.moviefone.com/2012/04/24/stan-lee-jack-kirby-avengers-credit_n_1450146.html), 2012). It left reader to wonder if the claims about Lee’s selfishness held validity. Lee could have placed Kirby as an equal, and yet he chose to pass on the opportunity.

Furthermore, Stan Lee’s writing had been criticized by fans concerning his process of putting together a given book from concept to page was incredibly slapdash, leading to gaping plot holes, inconsistent characters and buildings being fired into space; whereas Kirby was, in the eyes of many fans, the true author of the more novel and creative developments at Marvel and seemed to draw about a thousand pages a month at any given time. Lee and

Kirby created some 100 issues of Fantastic Four alone (Blackheart, <http://www.comicvine.com/stan-lee/4040-40467/>, 2013). No matter how the fans viewed the individual's contributions, it was Lee's publicity that drew a critic's eye. Lee being the identifiable face of Marvel created the famous "No-Prizes." Lee developed a cynical reprise that dismissed fans who had come up with logical explanations for a gaffe in a Marvel comic. Lee would award the fan a "No-Prize" where Marvel would mail the fan an envelope containing absolutely nothing, a gesture that showed little to no gratitude for those who idolized the Marvel's reputation. Lee's fiery tenacity with critics surged forth as he stepped into a world of litigations that started in the late 1990's.

Marvel filed for bankruptcy protection in 1996. When Marvel emerged from bankruptcy in 1998 it avoided its most costly liability, a lifetime annual salary of One Million Dollars to Stan Lee. In voiding the contract Stan Lee's property rights reverted back to him. Marvel made a take it or leave it offer of \$500,000.00 per year to Lee. Marvel's offer insulted Lee who then formed Stan Lee Entertainment, the predecessor of Stan Lee Media Incorporation, an internet-based studio that was to be a Web-based production and marketing company that controlled Lee's intellectual property (Fritz, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/oct/10/entertainment/la-et-ct-stan-lee-disney-lawsuit-20121010>, 2012).

On 15 October 1998, Stan Lee signed a contract that assigned the rights to all characters he had created or would create to Stan Lee Media. Just two weeks later, Lee signed a contract with Marvel that assigned the same rights to the then-independent comic book company (Fritz, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/oct/10/entertainment/la-et-ct-stan-lee-disney-lawsuit-20121010>, 2012). Stan Lee Media claimed that its rights supersede Marvel's because its contract was signed first. In addition, Stan Lee Media claimed Disney never publicly recorded Marvel's agreement with Lee with the U.S. Copyright Office (Gardner, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/stan-lee-disney-comic-book-426908>, 2012).

However, people who invested in Stan Lee Media sited that Stan Lee had not only signed an agreement conveying his co-creator rights, but also caused this conveyance to be published with the SEC and Copyright office. In 2000 Stan Lee Media Incorporated filed bankruptcy in Colorado when Lee's co-founder was discovered to be carrying out illegal stock manipulation (Blackheart, <http://www.comicvine.com/stan-lee/4040-40467/>, 2013). While the stockholder attempted to get Stan Lee Media out of financial trouble, the bankruptcy court ordered Lee to form a California company to hold Stan Lee Media Incorporated assets. Lee did not form a California company and transferred the assets to QED, a Delaware company formed and wholly owned by Lee that had been formed prior to

the Court's order. The bankruptcy judge never approved the sale of the assets to QED (Hernandez, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/stan-lee-disney-comic-book-426908>, 2013).

Meanwhile, United States federal judge Stephen Wilson dismissed a ten-year-old lawsuit brought by Stan Lee Media Incorporated which claimed that Lee had signed a contract in 1998 which gave his rights to all of his comic book creations, including Spider-Man, the X-Men and most members of super-team Avengers, to Stan Lee Media. The lawsuit's allegations also charged its founder of collusion to divert Stan Lee Media Incorporated's assets to his other companies, QED Prods and Pow! Stock holders in Stan Lee Media Incorporated were left abandoned by its founder. In 2001 more litigation stirred in the stew as Lee proceeded to sue Marvel for reneging on his employment contract where he had been receiving one million dollars a year. A settlement was reached, with Marvel regaining control over Lee's properties (Gardner, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/stan-lee-disney-comic-book-426908>, 2012).

On 4 February 2009 a lawsuit was pended against Stan Lee and Marvel from aborted internet startup Stan Lee Media. The lawsuit claimed Marvel and Stan owed them a substantial portion of Marvel movie money. Because Lee had no partial ownership of the characters and received only royalties, which he had to sue Marvel to get, Lee could never explicitly or implicitly sign over rights he did not have ("Marvel Comics", <http://www.cracked.com/funny-55-marvel-comics/>, 2013). Then Stan Lee was deposed in a billion-dollar lawsuit against Disney in March of 2013. The lawsuit aimed to prove that Disney had committed copyright infringement on valuable characters since 2009 that allegedly were raided when Stan Lee Media filed for bankruptcy. The plaintiffs questioned Lee about whether he ever owned copyrights to his valuable characters or whether his work was done as a "work for hire." Under U.S. Copyright law, when artists and writers work for studios under "work for hire" agreements, the studio is deemed to be the "author" with control over the copyright (Gardner, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/stan-lee-disney-comic-book-426908>, 2012).

With all of the litigation and squabbling in the last decade, it would seem that the term Godfather fits the oldest living pop-culture icon in that of Stan Lee, the grandfather of the comic book world. Recent reports of health issues and acknowledgement of having a pacemaker implanted in September 2012 conjure images of Marlon Brando's character playing chase with his grandchild in the garden scene of the Godfather. Yet, within his own words, one can identify with another side of Lee. Not one of greed but one of compromise; the side that becomes

buried in allegations of a god complexes or swindler in business methods which somehow finds a way out of the negativity and into our child like hearts where everyone wins. “The thing I loved about writing was having our heroes fight, and for me to figure a way to end the story without denigrating either one or making one seem stronger than the other. The best example of this was in one issue of Daredevil, where DD was fighting Sub-Mariner. Oh, I loved the way that story turned out! That was just so perfectly done. Daredevil was beaten, but he was just as heroic as Sub-Mariner”~Stan Lee.

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