Writer Shane Snoke looks at the incredible rise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe over the last decade and how it’s changed the world of movies.
In the early 1990s, as part of Marvel's acquisition by Toy Biz, Avi Arad was a rotten egg by any measure. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the corporate fortunes of Marvel Comics were a thrilling adventure of their own, with multiple acquisitions, bankruptcies, and near-bankruptcy leaving the film rights to all of the company's most popular characters scattered throughout Hollywood.

By 2003, Marvel realized it was enjoying only a fraction of the profits raked in by its partners. Despite its name, Marvel Studios was not a true studio in the sense that it did not finance its own films, which also raked in by their partners. Despite its name, Marvel Studios was not a true studio in the sense that it did not finance its own films, which also raked in by their partners.

In the early 1990s, as part of Marvel's acquisition by Toy Biz, Avi Arad was president and chief operating officer of Marvel Studios, worked with his CFO Ron Horauser and Relativity Media founders Ryan Kavanaugh and Lynwood Spinks to figure out how to get the production funding desired. Coincidentally, David Maisel, a protégé of CAA founder/super-agent Michael Ovitz, had developed an innovative plan of the value of a company like Marvel and promised Arad and Marvel Entertainment CEO Ike Perlmutter that he could help unlock its potential. Maisel, who was hired as president and chief operating officer of Marvel Studios, worked with his CFO Ron Horauser and Relativity Media founders Ryan Kavanaugh and Lynwood Spinks to figure out how to get the production funding desired.

However, Marvel did not wish to increase the amount of risk that it was taking on beyond financing development costs. Kavanaugh and Spinks conceived of a 100% non-recourse debt strategy, and Maisel and Horauser took on beyond financing development costs. Kavanaugh and Spinks hired as president and chief operating officer of Marvel Studios, worked with his CFO Ron Horauser and Relativity Media founders Ryan Kavanaugh and Lynwood Spinks to figure out how to get the production funding desired.

It wasn’t the plan, however, it does seem that the Marvel Studios team had given it some thought. During Q&A, panel attendees quipped Feige addressed the question of “Why Iron Man?”—told the crowd he’s one of the best, and I think if he’s not as well known, he’s had a great impact on Marvel’s other characters. Captain America was one of the best characters and he was created in the ‘60s when Stan was doing all the time, and you put them all together, there’s no coincidence that may someday equal the Avengers.”

2008: Iron Man and The Incredible Hulk

Marvel Studios unveiled two titles and a boxed set of the Marvel Studios panel in 2006. In 2007 he debuted rough footage to an electric crowd at Hall H. Arad and Feige joined him on stage along with cast members. Terrence Howard, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Robert Downey Jr. The movie had completed principal photography and was in the assembly phase.

Iron Man faced the challenge of assembling “packages” combining its IP with screenwriters, directors, and financiers. Starting with 1998’s Blade (New Line Cinema), and soon followed by the X-Men (Fox) and Spider-Man (Sony) franchises, as well as Daredevil (Fox) and Hulk (Universal), Marvel based films generated hundreds of millions of dollars at the global box office and cemented the company’s status as a source of premiere content.

The film was released in May of 2008 and performed marginally better than Hulk. To date, the Iron Man franchise has raked in more than $2.4 billion in global box office.

Most importantly, Iron Man featured a now-legendary post-credits scene in which Samuel L. Jackson appears as Nick Fury. The decision to film the scene was almost an afterthought, with Brian Michael Bendis telling Comic Book Resources that he was called by Feige the day before shooting because they’d written no dialogue for the character. The post-credits scene became a staple of Marvel Studios productions, most of them utilizing as connective tissue between the franchises, often shot by the director of the next film on the release schedule.

There’s some debate about when the plan for a shared universe first germinated, and there’s much debate about how to get the production funding desired. Coincidentally, David Maisel, a protégé of CAA founder/super-agent Michael Ovitz, had developed an innovative plan of the value of a company like Marvel and promised Arad and Marvel Entertainment CEO Ike Perlmutter that he could help unlock its potential. Maisel, who was hired as president and chief operating officer of Marvel Studios, worked with his CFO Ron Horauser and Relativity Media founders Ryan Kavanaugh and Lynwood Spinks to figure out how to get the production funding desired.

In the beginning... The stars of the very first MCU movie, Iron Man, at the Hall H Marvel Studios panel in 2007: (L to R) Robert Downey Jr., director Jon Favreau, Gwyneth Paltrow and Terrence Howard.

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like a relative disappointment when compared to Iron Man’s haul of $634 million from the year before. But it was enough to turn a tidy profit and ensure that a sequel would be ordered to production. Thor: The Dark World was helmed by Frequent Game of Thrones director Alan Taylor, and although it underperformed its predecessor in North America, the global take was huge and paved the way for the 2017 Thor: Ragnarok. Directed by New Zealand indie filmmaker Taika Waititi, Ragnarok went on to become one of the top ten Marvel Studios films in terms of total box office. The 2009 Disney acquisition of Marvel indicated the need for the Marvel-

Lynch backed production fund, but if Marvel had continued to operate as a standalone entity, its first three releases would have retailed all the debt, and then some, and Thor would have been pure profit. Captain America: The First Avenger might never have been if Marvel Entertainment hadn’t settled a lawsuit with Joe Simon in 2003. Simon co-created the character with Jack Kirby in 1941. Development of the film was further delayed by the Writers Guild strike of 2007–2008, but then pre-Disney Marvel joined other indie studios in signing deals with the Guild. Later in 2008, Marvel Studios hired Joe Johnston to direct and the writing team of Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely to pen a new screenplay, which would later be polished by Joss Whedon. Although pre-production had already started on the film, but when Whedon signed on to direct in summer of 2010 he insisted on doing a page one rewrite and was awarded sole screenplay credit (and shared story credit with Penn). Conscious that he was directing a very different kind of movie than his previous efforts, Gunn told Birthmov-
era. Paul Rudd had already been cast in the lead role, and Rudd partnered with writer Adam McKay to help Rudd reshape the script. Marvel rushed the film into production that August with the goal of making its already announced summer 2015 release date.

Reed and cast members Rudd, Michael Douglas, Corey Stoll, and Evangeline Lilly were introduced to the Hall H crowd in 2014. Reed revealed that he was his twentieth time attending SDCC, and that in high school he had drawn a picture of himself as Ant-Man for a band flyer. Ant-Man launched to positive reviews and drew in $519 million at the global box office, an accomplishment given the film’s complicated production history. Ant-Man officially concluded Phase Two of the MCU.

2016: Doctor Strange

At the Marvel Studios SDCC event of 2016, just three months prior to the release of Doctor Strange, Feige introduced the film’s star, Benedict Cumberbatch, director Scott Derrickson, and cast members Tilda Swinton, Rachel McAdams, Mark Ruffalo, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Benedict Wong. Cumberbatch, who had developed a cult following playing the titular character in the BBC’s updated take on Sherlock Holmes, seemed genuinely overwhelmed by the Hall H experience. Like many Marvel characters, Doctor Strange had been in and out of development over the decades. To help dispel rumors about the Marvel Studios version of the then-as-yet-untitled project that’s been around as long as there is sometimes, Ryan Coogler was a rising star in Hollywood, coming off a well-regarded indie film, Fruitvale Station, and the hit update of the Rocky franchise, Creed. The film was astonishingly diverse in front of as well as behind the camera, and although it was expected to be successful, no one could have predicted that it would be one of the top ten films of all time in terms of global box office ($1.3 billion plus, and it’s still in theaters as of this writing).

In 2017, the year before its release, Hall H was treated to a huge panel featuring Coogler, Boseman, and cast members Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira, Daniel Kaluuya, Letitia Wright, Winston Duke, Andy Serkis, and Forest Whitaker. Footage from the film was debuted mid-panel, which even the cast had not seen, and it electrified the panelists and the crowd alike.

The Next Decade

By the time of this year’s Comic Con, Ant-Man and the Wasp will already be in theaters, with Captain Marvel and the untitled conclusion of The Avengers storyline expected in 2019, which will conclude Phase Three. What’s next for Marvel Studios, whether it’s Phase Four or a new organizational structure, is unknown, but we do know that new installments of the Spider-Man and Guardians of the Galaxy franchises have been announced. After the first decade of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, we can predict with some confidence that Kevin Feige has earned a vacation.

Shane Snibbe is a producer, consultant, technologist, and corporate adviser based in Los Angeles.

African-American superheroes to appear in a mainstream comics publication. Co-created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in the pages of Fantastic Four in 1965, Black Panther saw the same level of interest from Hollywood as other Marvel titles and unfortunately had the same excessive development history. Producer Nate Moore, in charge of the Marvel Writers Program, knew that the studio had to figure it out and set screenwriter Joe Robert Cole to the task. The character, and star Chadwick Boseman, had already been introduced to audiences in Captain America: Civil War.

Doctor Strange, Feige brought director Jon Watts to Hall H with new Spider-Man: Homecoming. The film conjured up nearly $678 million in worldwide box office and received mostly strong reviews, with critics and audiences impressed by Derrickson’s mind-bending visual sequences.

2017: Spider-Man: Homecoming

Spider-Man had long been out of reach for Feige and Marvel Studios due to the fact that Sony had the rights to make Spider-Man films indefinitely so long as it released a new movie every five years. But its take on the franchise had been declining both critically and commercially, and star Andrew Garfield chose not to resume the title role after his second stint as the webslinger. Sony had ‘‘been actively pursuing the idea of allowing Marvel Studios to take over as producers of the franchise, and finally a deal was struck where Feige would produce the film alongside former Sony chief Amy Pascal. Ari Aster, who had led Marvel Studios in 2007— but had produced the last two Spider-Man films— was given executive producer status. As part of the deal, Marvel Studios would be allowed to integrate Spider-Man into some of its films, which it did with Captain America: Civil War and Avengers: Infinity War.

At Comic-Con in 2016, Feige brought director Jon Watts to Hall H with Spider-Man: Homecoming. The film was astonishingly diverse in front of as well as behind the camera, and although it was expected to be successful, no one could have predicted that it would be one of the top ten films of all time in terms of global box office ($1.3 billion plus, and it’s still in theaters as of this writing). In 2017, the year before its release, Hall H was treated to a huge panel featuring Coogler, Boseman, and cast members Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira, Daniel Kaluuya, Letitia Wright, Winston Duke, Andy Serkis, and Forest Whitaker. Footage from the film was debuted mid-panel, which even the cast had not seen, and it electrified the panelists and the crowd alike.

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Shane Snibbe is a producer, consultant, technologist, and corporate adviser based in Los Angeles.
SDCC: You’ve been involved with Marvel film projects long before the Marvel Studios era. What do you think has changed from the time before that has unleashed the success of the MCU?

PR: I think really the whole landscape has changed, in terms of the movie landscape—what people are willing to accept and what they want out of a hero movie. I was developing Fantastic Four with Marvel when they were at Fox back in 2003, and that’s where I first met Kevin Feige. And at the time—it was just when X-Men had broken through—X-Men really felt like the first thing to prove that audiences would really take to that kind of a movie. Marvel’s really changed the landscape in terms of a number of things. One is an audience’s willingness to take that genre seriously, and also I think, particular to Marvel, it is the way that they mix these stories that are very true to the comics but also . . . respect the differences between comic books and movies. And that’s everything from costume design to character development, and just how you’re telling a story. I think this will be the 20th movie in the MCU, and nobody wants to tell the same story twice, or no audience member wants to see the same story twice. So it’s about mixing it up, and mixing the genres and the way you tell these stories, and also the incredible richness of the characters in the Marvel Universe. I think it’s something that people really take for granted now—not just the interconnectedness of the Marvel Cinematic Universe but the fact that people have a real appetite for these movies and will accept them. I remember when Iron Man was being developed and there was a huge question as to whether an audience would accept any sort of comedic aspect to one of these movies, and now I think it’s just sort of taken for granted.

SDCC: Since it is an interconnected universe, how do you as a filmmaker handle making it your movie but also making it a Marvel movie?

PR: One thing I was really pleased to find out when I came on Ant-Man was that they really encouraged that. Kevin Feige encourages all the individual filmmakers to have their voice shine through and to find different ways to tell these stories. Because if they’re all the same you’re going to get bored really quickly. What’s great about that Universe is that everyone is not beholden to this one very strict tone; you’re able to explore lots of different tones. I think it was 2014 when they released Captain America: Winter Soldier and Guardians of the Galaxy, and you can’t think of two movies that have really different, divergent tones than those two movies, and it works, and now you’re coming to a movie with Infinity War where all those characters are going to occupy the same space, and that’s what I think is really magical about it.

SDCC: What’s it like being the director of an MCU film and coming to San Diego Comic-Con?

PR: I’m such a huge fan. I’ve been going to Comic-Con since 1994. I love Comic-Con; Comic-Con is something I look forward to all year long. Going there now as a Marvel filmmaker is incredibly gratifying. I thought my way in years ago was going to be Fantastic Four, and it didn’t turn out that way, and now it’s Ant-Man and Ant-Man and the Wasp, and I love it. It’s something that I’ve lived with in my life since I was a kid for so long. I love these stories, and I love these characters, and now to be able to be a filmmaker bringing these characters to life, it’s really gratifying.

SDCC: If you were Kevin Feige, what would you be thinking about for the future?

PR: It’s hard to predict what Kevin is going to do and think about these things. Again, one of the keys to why this has been so successful is that Kevin gets very restless, creatively, which is the best way to be as a creative person—not ever resting on your laurels, even with the biggest critical and financial successes. This long string of successes that he’s had, he’s still restless. And that says a lot to me because there’s still so much that he wants to explore in this vast catalog of characters and stories. So really it’s anyone’s guess, but I think . . . that Kevin doesn’t mind—whether it’s within a particular movie or in the MCU in a larger sense—blowing things up and changing things up. First and foremost, he’s a fan and he’s an audience member, and he knows what he gets to work with. And I think that’s one of the most valuable things you can have in a producer, someone who’s guiding this whole universe.

SDCC: What is the greatest challenge for an MCU filmmaker?

PR: To me the biggest challenge is to not repeat things that we’ve seen before as the audience, to show an audience visuals and situations and scenarios that they haven’t seen before, and to create characters and aspects of those characters that they haven’t experienced before. That to me is the thing. Because if you go to the movie, you know I have very specific things that I love and that I hate in people’s movies, and I really apply those things that I learn as a fan to my directing and storytelling. It’s trying to create a whole new unique experience for the audience.

SDCC: Is there a character that you’re secretly dying to see get their own movie?

PR: I really want to see a Ms. Marvel movie, a Kamala Khan movie. I don’t know if that harks back to my days directing Bring It On, but that perspective on the superhero world and the comic book realm is really interesting and entertaining to me.

SDCC: Do you think there will ever be a musical Marvel film?

PR: I tell you what, it’s certainly talked about a lot. You know this being my second movie with Paul Rudd, Rudd is such a musical fan and it doesn’t take much to get him to sing and dance. It’s something we always talk about and joke about, and it’s a genre that I think every serious filmmaker, no matter what genre they’re in, comedy, drama, action, whatever it is, they all secretly or not-so-secretly want to do a musical. So it would not surprise me if there were a Marvel musical.

SDCC: Is there something you want to say about Ant-Man and the Wasp?

PR: I think it really sort of takes Scott Lang and Hope van Dyne, particularly, to a whole new level, just in terms of their characters. I tend to like sequels that take the starting point of the characters that you’ve seen from the first movie and start from a whole new place, so it’s just not a reset and telling the same story in the sequel, and that’s something we’ve definitely done here. As with all Marvel movies, you don’t quite know what to expect tonally. I don’t even know how to describe our movie yet. Maybe it’s like if Elmore Leonard got to go into science fiction and made a Marvel movie. It’s very much of a crime genre movie mixed with science fiction.