



Marvel's 616 explores Marvel's rich legacy of pioneering characters, creators and storytelling to reflect the world outside your window. Each documentary, helmed by a unique filmmaker, showcases the intersections of storytelling, pop culture, and fandom within the Marvel Universe. Episodes in this anthology series will cover topics including Marvel's world- spanning artists, the trailblazing women of Marvel Comics, discovering the "forgotten" characters of Marvel, and much more.

Marvel's 616 is produced by Marvel New Media with Supper Club. The series is executive produced by Joe Quesada, Shane Rahmani, Stephen Wacker, John Cerilli, Harry Go, and Sarah Amos for Marvel; and Jason Sterman, Brian McGinn, and David Gelb for Supper Club.

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Q&A with Executive Producer Sarah Amos, VP of Development & Production for Marvel New Media

First with *Marvel's Hero Project* and now *Marvel's 616*, Marvel is establishing a presence in the non-fiction space. Why?

SARAH AMOS: Marvel has an 81-year legacy across comics, film, television, video games and all these areas where we have been known as the premiere storyteller. The whole ethos of Marvel started with Stan Lee's concept of the world outside your window. He wanted our superheroes and stories to reflect our readers and their lives — both what they were going through and what was going on in society at the time. As the company has evolved and our stories have gotten bigger and more elaborate, that philosophy has still been at the core of what we do.

So starting to tell the stories that influenced Marvel and showing how Marvel has influenced the world is, in a lot of ways, the most natural output of what Marvel is. Everything we do should be reflective of the world that we all live in.

What are the origins of this series, and how did Marvel New Media decide that Supper Club would be a valuable partner?

Marvel's 616 has been in the works as long as I have been at Marvel, which is just over three years. Marvel New Media had worked in non-fiction before with specials and shorter projects, but making a big series at this level was obviously something that everyone on the team was very excited about.

We got lucky from a timing perspective in that it was right around the same time that Jason Sterman and Brian McGinn and David Gelb were forming Supper Club. They bring a pedigree in documentary filmmaking, but also an understanding of how episodic non-fiction content works best on a streaming platform. They also had a passion for finding the hidden gems within Marvel's past, for helping us unearth our stories and tell them in unexpected ways. Supper Club was really great about challenging Marvel and the

filmmakers we were working with to push the envelope visually, try different things and explore the impact of Marvel on the real world.

What's the meaning behind the title, *Marvel's 616*?

A lot of people understand the concept of a Marvel multiverse from such things as the Oscar-winning film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. But the multiverse plays into the future of where our storytelling will go. The multiverse has always existed within Marvel.

The main universe where all our superheroes live has been deemed Earth-616. Since it's a reflection of our reality, it always made sense to us to call this series *Marvel's 616*. It's something that hardcore Marvel fans will get right away, and will help everyone else become a bit more of a Marvel expert.

Have you had a lifelong relationship with comics?

I grew up watching the *X-Men* animated series religiously — that was my first foray into Marvel. I was never an intense comic book reader, but knew the characters, knew the films, knew the stories and always really appreciated the level of care that went into anything that was being done for Marvel, even though my career path first went in a news direction. Marvel is always this striving for the highest level of creativity and innovation.

One of the most rewarding parts about getting to come and work here was suddenly having the access to learn: reading scores of comics in a month, diving into our creators and grasping the intricacies of the Marvel legacy. No matter how much I try, I will never even have a fraction of the expertise of some of the people I work with — or many of the people you get to meet in these documentaries. You can always, always learn something more about Marvel. It's such a wonderful quality about the company.

Marvel fans can feel protective of characters who they've spent so much time studying and celebrating. When choosing directors, Marvel New Media and Supper Club did not select eight people with encyclopedic comic book knowledge. Why was it beneficial to have a mix of very experienced documentarians and first-timers, plus Marvel buffs and those just coming to the comics?

When I started working at Marvel, a phrase I heard a lot was, “Every comic is someone’s first.” We have to assume every piece of content we put out will be the entry-point for some new Marvel fan. The beauty of that is two-fold: everything has to be the best possible execution, and Marvel fandom can begin at any stage of life. You can start reading comics when you are a three-year-old like my daughter is now, or you can start loving the brand when you’re 80, like my grandma did when she was dragged to a Marvel film. Marvel’s stories can appeal to anyone. We wanted that reflected in our directors.

What do you think Marvel stands for?

Marvel is massive, it is blockbusters, it is comic books, it is epic battles, it is humor, it is emotion, it is saga, it is truly being at the bottom of the barrel and figuring out how to get back up. But really, what makes Marvel special is our characters — their personal struggles and stories.

Joe Quesada always tells a story about talking with Stan about what makes Spider-Man great. Stan told Joe that at the end of the day, it’s not actually a Spider-Man story, but a Peter Parker story. That’s why you root for him. Yes, it’s a guy in a suit swinging across buildings, and that’s awesome. But it’s also a teenager just trying to navigate high school and take care of his Aunt May.

Marvel has always tried to reflect a wide array of fans. It’s a big passion point for me and others in the organization — retaining that part of our legacy. People do need to see themselves reflected in our characters, in our stories.

In the episode “Higher, Further, Faster,” Marvel writer and artist Nilah Magruder says, “We could still do more to see more disability, more open queerness, more Asian and Latinx characters and writers.” Among Marvel leadership, would you say it’s a priority to make increasingly representative content?

Across the board, Marvel is always thinking about how to bring in more diversity and inclusion into our work: How do we ensure that we are truly representing the world outside all of our windows in the stories we’re telling and the characters we create and the creatives we work with? It is a really important part of what we do, and some days we do it better than others. We’re all looking internally and externally to see how we can

continue increasing representation, so that the Marvel we present to the next generations is reflective of the life they are leading.

Q&A with EP Jason Serman, Partner/Founder of Supper Club

What drew Supper Club to *Marvel's 616*?

JASON STERMAN: At Supper Club, we saw an opportunity to do something we hadn't done before: tell stories with existing IP. In the documentary format, almost no one had gotten the opportunity with Marvel since it's usually a playground for the scripted world. So the concept of producing an anthology documentary series in a world that's relatively untouched by documentary filmmakers immediately intrigued us.

Were the filmmakers steered towards particular topics to explore in their episodes?

It truly depended on the filmmaker. Gillian Jacobs, the first director we worked with, had previously directed a short documentary on women who are coders ("The Queen of Code"). Finding stories about women who haven't always gotten their due is a passion of Gillian's, so that was her entry-point to her episode. The entry-point that Andrew Rossi found really interesting was the design and fashion component of cosplay. Paul Scheer's a comic book/pop culture obsessive, and he came with a very clear goal that comes from being so entrenched in the comedy space. While there are a lot of mockumentary-type elements in his episode, there is still a huge element of discovery.

In some cases we pre-developed certain concepts; an example was "Marvel Spotlight," where we documented high schoolers mounting performances of the Marvel Spotlight plays. As an actor who grew up doing theater, Alison Brie lived through experiences like the ones you see onscreen, so she naturally responded to the concept and made it her own.

Why did you utilize established documentarians and filmmakers who had never made a documentary?

Sometimes, when you work with traditional documentary filmmakers, you know exactly what you're going to get. That's not a bad thing, but we wanted to bring in filmmakers who had a unique voice and a distinct vision, and let them find stories that they wanted

to explore and discover more of within this universe. Sometimes that was working with seasoned documentary filmmakers like David Gelb or Andrew Rossi, but covering topics that were new to them. Other times that was working with first-time documentary directors like Paul, Alison or Sarah Ramos. No matter the director, each was free to think about their episodes purely from a creative standpoint, and then we built bespoke teams around whatever their vision was. That's why Paul Scheer's director of photography, Jason Oldak, has a background in half-hour comedies, but Alison Brie and Andrew Rossi's director of photography, Wolfgang Held, is a master of vérité filming.

In the best way, each episode acts as its own individual film. Directors would always ask, "What are the other episodes?" and we would give as little detail as possible. Each of the eight episodes take a distinctly different approach — whether it's the genre, the theme, the tone — so there's going to be a little something for everyone.

As a creative person newly-immersed in storytelling and craftsmanship of Marvel Comics, what revelations excited you most?

I loved learning that people who work in comics have their own specialized skills. It's not just the editors, the writers, the artists — when I found out that lettering the text was its own job, that was mind-blowing. And also seeing how many of these people live in different parts of the world. When you read a comic book or see a finished piece of work, you don't know any of that. It reminded me so much of the filmmaking process.

What did the daily partnership look like between Supper Club and Marvel?

It was a continuous growth process in the best way. In the beginning we both understood our own mediums of work. We were very upfront in the beginning in stating our goal of making this series as unexpected as possible, and Marvel really responded to that motivation. So we would find ideas in the most random places. I'd call them up and say, "I saw this article. Seems like a potentially interesting way to tell this story — can we do this?" And Sarah would reply, "I'll find out!" and she'd go talk to the right stakeholders and then find a way to make it happen. So it was always a true partnership and through the journey of making the series, we've really learned to understand and appreciate each other's mediums of work. Sarah's now become one of my closest friends.

How was the production impacted by the pandemic?

We, like so many productions, shifted to a work-from-home approach. Luckily we had already filmed the majority of the episodes, so this new way of working wasn't too much of a burden. What's been most interesting is seeing how the world around us has continued to evolve and deal with the ongoing pandemic. Just recently, the teams behind the Marvel Spotlight program — which Brandon High School performed in the episode "Marvel Spotlight" before we all went remote — announced they've made the rights to those Marvel Spotlight plays available now for livestream and digital streaming performances. You see in the episode how impactful that program is for teenagers going through the process of exploring their identity, and it's great to see how committed Marvel is to ensuring there's still going to be a way for them to participate this year.

Ultimately, the stories in this series are all timeless and universal regardless of what's happening around us, and I think we captured a lot of that spirit in the films.

Do you think parents and kids will want to watch these episodes together?

That's definitely the goal. We have found that there is a desire from a younger audience to watch elevated documentary content. That's something we've found on other series like *Chef's Table*. I think when you present amazing stories and characters that can inspire, resonate and draw emotion, there's no age limit on who can enjoy them.

Why does now feel like an ideal time to release the show?

There's a lot of heart in so much of this series. One of the beauties of the documentary format is introducing audiences to real people. There are episodes the tried and true Marvel fan base will love — "Lost and Found," "The Marvel Method," "Japanese Spider-Man." But if you've never read a Marvel comic book, you'll still be able to take something away from "Marvel Spotlight" or "Suit Up!" I'm excited for viewers to find out which episodes they gravitate towards.

EPISODE 1) *MARVEL'S 616*: JAPANESE SPIDER-MAN

When a UFO descent brings tragedy into the life of young racer Takuya Yamashiro, he fights back by trading his motorcycle for a giant battle robot to challenge the sinister forces of Professor Monster. This is the Japanese origin story of Marvel's most popular character, Spider-Man.



In 1978, Marvel Comics and Japanese distributor TOEI signed a historic deal to bring Marvel characters to Japanese television. Their first collaboration, Spider-Man (Supaidāman), was a massive hit that revolutionized an entire genre of popular Japanese entertainment. This documentary from David Gelb (Jiro Dreams of Sushi, Chef's Table) uncovers how such an incredible cultural crossover occurred — with insights from the cast and crew who narrowly pulled it off.

“These are all things you learn throughout the years working inside the House of Ideas,” said Harry Go, Producer at Marvel Entertainment and an executive producer on this series. “When we set out to make *Marvel's 616*, we were aware that there were all these wonderful ‘stories behind the stories’ that hadn’t been told. The story of Japanese Spider-Man was a pearl waiting to be found.”

Laying the groundwork for the episode was a formidable task. “I very vividly remember the production research coming back and being like, ‘Turns out X,Y and Z are all still alive,’ and us being like, ‘What?!?’” said executive producer Sarah Amos. “Just the fact that we had enough to go and film was really, really, thrilling.”

Supper Club's David Gelb was asked to direct — and return to the country where he filmed the spellbinding *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* a decade prior. Whether he's following a Michelin three-starred chef or appraising a stuntman's tactics for free climbing Tokyo Tower, Gelb always responds to creative people who care deeply about their work.

“I’m always inspired as a filmmaker by people who bring passion to everything they do, and have a remarkable discipline when it comes to specialization,” said Gelb, a four-time Emmy nominee. “I’ve been lucky enough to meet so many artisans in Japan, and I admire the patience and dedication that they bring to their arts and crafts, cooking, architecture, you name it. It’s given me an immense love and respect for Japan.”

Unbeknownst to Gelb, he was prepping to direct “Japanese Spider-Man” back before he could tie his shoes. “I basically learned to read from reading *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Web of Spider-Man* and *The Spectacular Spider-Man*,” he said.

Actor Shinji Tôdô only had onset experience as an extra before landing the lead role of Takuya Yamashiro/Spider-Man in the late 1970s. “In the documentary, as he recalls playing the Japanese version of Spider-Man, you can see the same expression a kid has reading his first issue of *Amazing Spider-Man*,” said Go. “As we got into the material, we found that Japanese Spider-Man wasn’t just an obscure part of Marvel’s history; it was also a perfect example of how Spider-Man resonates across geographic and cultural lines.”

More than 40 episodes of the series were made, and they aired exclusively in Japan from 1978-1979. Thirty years later, Marvel finally began releasing the show online and through DVDs outside of Japan. Still, “Very few have seen Spider-Man like this,” said Gelb. “Campy and low-budget as it was, the show is extremely entertaining and quite well-made, pushing boundaries and setting new standards for stunts and special effects that shows that follow it would aspire to. It’s a story of ground-breaking cinema craft as well. There is a strong argument to be made that Japanese Spider-Man paved the way, directly or indirectly, for shows like *Power Rangers*, *The Transformers*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and others.”

Those who most associate Spider-Man with Peter Parker or Miles Morales will soon recognize how the character’s sense of purpose was preserved in the Japanese version.

“Marvel has led the way in showing comic fans that anyone can wear the mask,” said Gelb. “This philosophy is core to Spider-Man. Being a hero is not something you are born into. It’s about rising to the moment, assuming responsibility, and helping others, no matter who you are or where you come from. Being a hero is a test of character, and definitely not specific to any one race or gender. It’s an important message to send, and a theme that is addressed throughout *Marvel’s 616*. We want to show young people that

comics are for everyone, and hopefully this will help inspire a new generation of diverse comic book fans and creators.”

EPISODE 2) MARVEL’S 616: HIGHER, FURTHER, FASTER

“Higher, Further, Faster” recognizes the trailblazing women who have helped build the Marvel Universe. Helmed by actor and director Gillian Jacobs (Community, Love), the episode spans generations and gives audiences a rare peek inside Marvel’s storied history. Get to know the women who helped pioneer representative, inclusive storytelling at the House of Ideas, plus modern creators empowered to craft Marvel’s next generation of heroes, one page at a time.



Q&A with Director Gillian Jacobs

How does your original pitch for “Higher, Further, Faster” compare with the final episode?

GILLIAN JACOBS: Initially, my focus was going to be on women who worked at Marvel Comics over previous decades. But I had the awesome opportunity to interview women who either work there now or have worked there in the very recent past. We felt like Sana Amanat and Nilah Magruder represent the present and also the future of Marvel Comics. Their stories felt very compelling, and we had the chance to follow them in their day-to-day lives.

And then the documentary grew even larger in scope because, by default, we had to tell a mini-history of the comic book industry. Which I wasn’t anticipating going in. I got to discover a lot of these early female comic book creators, going back to the 1940s. I didn’t know about Marie Severin, Louise Simonson and Ann Nocenti, even though they’re very famous Marvel personalities. I got so into it that I was starstruck when we

got some of these women back in the same room interacting. It was really wonderful to be able to acknowledge the long history of women in the comics industry.

During a 2020 San Diego Comic Con panel, you mentioned that you never read a comic book cover to cover before joining this series. Were you aware of the public excitement that surrounded Carol Danvers' emergence as Captain Marvel, and Kamala Khan's new role as Ms. Marvel?

No. I came to this series knowing nothing about comics, beyond an introduction to the *X-Men* cartoon as a kid. My journey as a director might parallel what's in store for casual fans of Marvel who don't know a lot about its legacy.

Describe the first steps you took after accepting this assignment.

At Supper Club, they're such skilled storytellers that they were incredibly helpful in terms of shaping the episode and giving me great notes throughout. They were able to introduce me to so many people in the documentary world, like Juliette Eisner, who produced the episode. Juliette, like myself, did not come from a comic book fandom background, so we were both equally new to this world.

Essentially, Juliette and I sat in an office in Hollywood and read as many comics as we could — stacks — as well as books about the comic book industry. We did a lot of research into the history of Marvel, identifying as many women as we could. We were printing out pictures and tacking them up on a cork board, and writing out index cards and taping them on the wall.

The Marvel team and Jason were very patient in answering all of our questions and digging up old issues. I feel very lucky that I got to work with them. Marvel Comics made some introductions, and others we reached out by cold-calling. Juliette and I conducted a lot of preliminary interviews over the phone, and then narrowed the list down to the women you see featured on screen.

When hiring a crew, was it important to you to hire female department heads whenever possible?

Yes! It was also important to Supper Club; I was not persuading anyone. Happily, I was already working with a production company that works with a lot of women.

As you were learning about so many creators and characters, which ones had the most personal impact on you?

Kamala Khan's Ms. Marvel. Juliette and I both went, "This is totally a comic that I would have been reading already had I known about it earlier." That one is so cool.

And *Power Pack* from the mid 1980s is a comic I could have seen myself loving as a kid. The documentary includes recollections from Louise Simonson and June Brigman, the respective writer and artist who created the comic. Louise was a longtime Marvel editor before she started writing for them. She's a mom and I think she wanted to create a comic that was aimed at a younger audience, around her daughter's age. It's a comic about four siblings who get super powers and, initially, they try hiding them from their parents.

I hope audiences love these women as much as I do and get excited about their comics, whether it's reading *Power Pack* or buying Nilah's work. I hope anyone who feels inspired by the comic art form feels like they can go for it, too.

There's a *Mother Jones* interview where you recalled writing a sixth-grade paper about equal pay. Would you agree that increasing visibility for women has been a theme throughout your career?

I think it's been more organic than that. I don't want to claim more credit than I deserve. I think you can see a strong continuity between Grace Hopper's documentary and this one for Disney+. What has excited me in the last few years is looking at industries that have been very male-dominated, but finding women who were there at the beginning, whose stories aren't necessarily remembered or told.

It was the same case in Hollywood. I wrote a Lenny Letter article about Anita Loos, who wrote the source material for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and was one of the most successful screenwriters of the silent movie era. She created iconic characters and nobody knows about her today. There was a pretty substantial group of women working as writers and directors back then.

What was your approach to the documentary's musical landscape?

My great editor, Oona Flaherty, put in a lot of temp tracks and we just became obsessed with Maggie Rogers. We had some of her songs in there, thinking we'd never actually

get the rights to them, especially after she received a “Best New Artist” Grammy Award nomination earlier this year. I am so thrilled that we do have her and all of the artists who agreed to be part of this episode.

Your former *Community* co-star Alison Brie directed another episode, “Marvel Spotlight.” Did your work on this docuseries overlap?

I had finished my episode before she had started hers. But I was really excited to hear that she was doing an episode as well. *Community* is definitely a show where we, as a cast, are going to be connected for the rest of our lives.

EPISODE 3) MARVEL’S 616: AMAZING ARTISANS

You know and love the Marvel characters — now see how they’re brought to life with talent and tablets. Visual storytellers draw inspiration from their environments, and few fans realize how many Marvel artists live and work around the world, far from the Marvel Bullpen in New York. While illustrating comics for universal audiences, native Spanish artists Javier Garrón (Miles Morales: Spider-Man) and Natacha Bustos (Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur) study the light and shadows of Barcelona. Director Clay Jeter (Chef’s Table, Unsolved Mysteries) chronicles how both Javier and Natacha infuse their experiences into their art.



Q&A with Director Clay Jeter

How did you first get to know the *Supper Club* team?

CLAY JETER: David Gelb and I went to college together at USC. Once you’re in that film production program, people start aligning in terms of their creative sensibilities. A whole group of us found each other, including myself, David and Hiro Murai (*Atlanta*). Out of school, David and I lived together for years in a house of five or six people. We all struggled through making whatever little things that we could.

I made a super indie narrative movie that premiered at Sundance (*Jess + Moss*), and at the same time in the same house, David was making *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. He turned *Jiro* into the series that became *Chef's Table*. When that happened, he asked me if I'd be interested in directing an episode of the first season. Of course I was, but I grew up in small-town Tennessee eating Pop-Tarts. I didn't know if I was the right person to work on a show about the best chefs in the world. David said the storytelling was much more important than the food. The show is not mere shop talk.

David met Brian McGinn when they started making *Chef's Table*, and Brian had a relationship with Jason Sterman from the documentary film they made (*Amanda Knox*). Those three created *Supper Club* a little over three years ago.

Were you as new to comics as you were to world-class dining?

I grew up in a rural area, so my thing was pretending to be Indiana Jones and running around in the woods. When I was approached about *Marvel's 616*, a big part of what interested me is the people involved. I knew *Supper Club* was committed to making something that was executed at a high level. With this episode, there was also a cool life experience to be had.

The producers wanted to structure the episode around artists Javier Garrón (*Miles Morales: Spider-Man*) and Natacha Bustos (*Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*), who both live in Barcelona: "Do you want to go try talking to these people and wrapping your head around how this could coalesce into a little movie?" I got on the phone with Natacha and Javier and basically fell in love with both of them. What I found so interesting was how completely different the two of them are — in terms of their personalities, energies and approaches — to get to the same end.

Not so long ago, they were both architecture students in Spain. Today, Javier is extremely disciplined about his work, whereas Natacha will sleep in before heading to a coffee shop to draw alongside her friends.

Totally, and that informed all our decisions. I immediately started brainstorming ideas with cinematographer David Bolen — who I had never worked with — about how we could juxtapose two characters with contradictory workstyles. When you shoot film, a lot of times you think, I'll use different film stocks to help differentiate storylines, but that

doesn't really happen with digital cameras. So we thought about what lensing we could use to serve the story. It's very uncommon to mix spherical and anamorphic lenses on the same project, because they create such different aesthetics. It's also expensive to take two very nice sets of lenses with you on a shoot — it's just unheard of on a documentary — but we did that.

For Natacha, we used these old Canon K-35 lenses; they're these pretty, vintage, spherical lenses that have a very loose, organic, play-it-by-ear feeling. We shot her mostly handheld. Javier is regimented like clockwork, so we used Cook anamorphic lenses and center-punch framing so that the shots are very balanced, very precise. Mostly, the camera moved either on a dolly or on a steady-cam. So we jump back and forth between Javier's meticulous precision and Natacha's go-with-the-flow nature.

There's also a dichotomy in their paths to Marvel. Natacha, who seems like she could have felt fulfilled making various kinds of art, obtained high-profile comic assignments early in her career. Javier had the singular goal of working in comics, and his breakthrough into the industry took a decade.

After doing super simple sketches, Natacha can go to her tablet and create her pages digitally. Meanwhile, Javier will use 3D figure modeling/animation, plus architecture programs to create spaces that he can fly a camera through, looking at angles before he makes computer-generated drafts of his frames.

As someone who knew nothing about how comic books get made, I was blown away to see that these two people who essentially do the same job have such varying techniques. It's a challenge to tell separate biographical narratives and weave them together in a way that flows and takes you on an emotional ride without resetting over and over again. I banged my head up against that wall constantly. But it felt really fun and exciting to figure out ways to visually support these two wildly different people.

Do they know each other?

I don't think they've ever actually met. They know of each other.

What was your vision for the episode's music?

Duncan Thum and his buddy Tyler Sabbag are people that I went to school with and knew when they were playing in indie garage bands. I asked Duncan to do music for a

Chef's Table episode about Argentine chef Francis Mallmann, who cooks with fire and is this poetic, romantic character. He and Tyler did amazing work, and the only Emmy nomination we received in the first season was for that episode's music. I immediately reached out to them — I don't think they'd been able to play into the bombastic, dramatic tropes of superhero movie music.

We wanted to balance that with slice-of-life stuff that was authentic to the characters. It's wall-to-wall music in this episode. We had to figure out Natacha's vibe and Javier's vibe. And we definitely wanted to be sensitive to the cultural differences of the culture of the Catalan community versus the rest of Spain.

Normally, a lot of the score is written while we're still in the editing process. This time, the music portion started when the episode was essentially picture locked, which felt great. Of course, all of this is happening remotely because of the pandemic.

Why are you excited for people all around the world to start watching the series?

As Natacha and Javier tell their stories, you realize that they weren't necessarily destined to become these superstar artists at Marvel, the biggest comic book company in the world, which happens to be based in New York, on the other side of the world. What they achieved feels so impossible. They were passionate, and they went for it.

The other thing is that we're all now spending so much time in our homes. It's fascinating to watch how Javier and Natacha are able to work from home and collaborate with writers and colorists and editors who live in different cities. I'm not saying that people need to be spending this time being creators. But if you are so inclined, technology has already made it possible to be in your own space and still be a key creative contributor to something that millions of people connect with.

EPISODE 4) *MARVEL'S 616: LOST AND FOUND*

Actor and comedian Paul Scheer (Black Monday, The League) is on the hunt to discover the "forgotten" characters of Marvel Comics. With everyone from writing legends to toy designers chiming in, "Lost and Found" takes a hilariously untraditional approach to unearthing wild and obscure Marvel characters. During Paul's odyssey, he discovers

what makes an iconic Marvel character, and then prepares a pitch with input from Jon Hamm, Rachel Bloom, Nicole Byer and others.

Q&A with Director Paul Scheer

Why do you love comics?

PAUL SCHEER: I go to comics to read the biggest ideas from the freshest voices without any limitations. Everything we love onscreen in the sci-fi/action-adventure space was born from comics. Reading them is like being in a secret club that once was deemed nerdy or niche. Marvel Comics specifically have played such a large part in the development of many creators. People who may have been reading comics privately or small groups have now taken over the creative landscape, like Phil Lord and Damon Lindelof.



Comics is an arena where budget is no limit — your imagination is the only thing that can possibly hold you back. In my career, I’m constantly told, “You can’t do that,” and “You have to pare down.” Whenever I get a chance to write a comic book, it’s incredibly freeing. The artist and writer supply the plot, direction, acting, editing and production design. It’s just two people, and their singular vision pushes the storytelling forward.

What milestones stand out most when you reflect on your personal path with Marvel?

I got involved with Marvel the same way that many kids do. Where I grew up, there was a comic book shop near my house that I could bike to. You could hang out and leaf through things — it was like a cooler version of the library, a safe haven where your parents weren’t worried about you. Back in the day, two comics weren’t that expensive, so you could go home with an armful and really experiment.

In high school, I felt like I was the only person that was into comic books, so they went away in a closet. While I was studying at NYU, on my way home from class one day I walked by this really awesome comic book shop, Forbidden Planet. I was new to the

city, and this comic book shop was just massive. I found myself walking the aisles once again and grabbing books.

That's when this idea of what comics could be really struck me. I started reading a wide range of amazing authors — Ed Brubaker, Kurt Busiek, Garth Ennis — and getting so pulled into the adult stories that they could tell. Comics became part of my life.

Today I'm a dad and it's a little bit harder to get to the comic book shop. The birth of the digital reader has been great for me; with the Marvel and Marvel Unlimited apps, I can have my books with me at all times. When I'm in bed or on a plane I can queue one up.

I had written a sci-fi movie and put it on the shelf. Then I met with this guy at Boom Comics, and he was like, "You should do a comic book," and I thought that was a great idea; I wrote it with my partner, Nick Giovannetti. Then my friend Gerry Duggan — who was writing *Deadpool* at the time — was like "I loved your book. Would you want to write a Marvel book, maybe a *Deadpool* annual?" I never thought that could even be possible, and the experience opened up a whole world to us. Nick and I are both very busy in our day jobs, but we just did a six-issue run of *Cosmic Ghost Rider Destroys Marvel History*, featuring Spider-Man and Guardians of the Galaxy. Being able to interact with these characters by writing them has been one of the best experiences of my life.

Supper Club approached me, and I started talking about Marvel characters that I fell in love with growing up that aren't getting as much love now. Almost everyone in America knows who the marquee characters are. What constantly surprises me is the outsiders and underdogs that people have a firm connection to. On *Marvel Presents: The World's Greatest Book Club*, the YouTube show I did with Marvel VP Steve Wacker, we would pull out old issues and find the surprising side characters. They almost feel like friends, like your first friend you made in kindergarten.

I got excited thinking about what else was in the Marvel world.

You are the audience's onscreen guide into this excavation through Marvel history, where you also highlight plenty of documentary tropes. Audiences ultimately watch you pitch an animated series based on a largely-forgotten team of crime-fighting creatures, Brute Force. Were you serious in your efforts to revive Brute Force, or did you regard the exercise as an extended comedy bit?

In the Marvel Universe, anything can work. Guardians of the Galaxy weren't always premiere characters, and now we have kids who play with dancing trees and raccoon combat experts.

The Hulk is a wonderfully poetic rock monster. Sometimes you can find real beauty in absurdity.

If I was to get very heady about it, I do think the humanity of these animal cyborgs is worth examining. We all wonder, What would my dog say if he could talk? The comics gave these animals that ability, and the themes that are universal: What is my purpose? What do I stand for? What do I believe in? On the surface, this team is incredibly comical, but I think it shares so much DNA with the Marvel characters fans love most.

How did you structure your episode?

I'd never directed a documentary. I started with a question: What is an untapped Marvel character that would be worthy of rebooting? That forges a dialogue with Marvel creators, where I pick their brains. Their insights helped me articulate a point of view; it was a natural progression.

You give a behind-the-scenes introduction to the many people providing counsel when a comic entity is revamped for the screen, from executives and animators to actors and toy designers. One of your key interviews is with director and Oscar-nominated producer Reggie Hudlin, who wrote some of the most influential *Black Panther* comics from the past 15 years. For those who met T'Challa/Black Panther through the film, how did Reggie infuse his point of view into the character, making him a superhero with global resonance?

Reggie Hudlin is the world-class director behind movies like *Boomerang* and *House Party*. He ran BET, and this year he became the first Black producer of the Emmy Awards. He has been at the forefront of entertainment for almost three decades. Like me, he is a nerd who loves comic books.

As his directing career blossomed, he was approached by Marvel to consider characters that he might want to write. He chose Black Panther, which at that point, was probably

a C-list character. Black Panther had never really lived up to his potential. Reggie completely reinvigorated the series and made *Black Panther* cool.

T'Challa's sister, Shuri, is a creation of Reggie and artist John Romita Jr. Reggie had Black Panther and Blade working together during the floods in New Orleans. He ignited a flame behind the character that people really grew to love. In the documentary, he says he wanted to write "the comic book equivalent of a Public Enemy record," with the same energy and vibrance.

Marvel knows that the right creator and the right partnership can make a character pop while telling stories that feel organic. Look at what Sana Amanat brought to *Ms. Marvel*.

Tell me about the dynamic you had with your producing team.

Before we started making this documentary, Jason Stermann and I spent maybe a year pitching ideas back and forth, looking for our through line. Supper Club allowed the story to morph and change.

As somebody who has created television shows, worked on scripts and casted, I had nerves about how to handle this project. I knew I was going to be on camera, so I couldn't be off camera watching myself. How would I know I was getting the right stuff? There's an artistry in how Supper Club's shows look. Sometimes taking you across the country, sometimes across the world, but the result is always gorgeous. Supper Club has such a streamlined system to walk you into the documentary world, and they do a wonderful job at helping filmmakers get their voices out there.

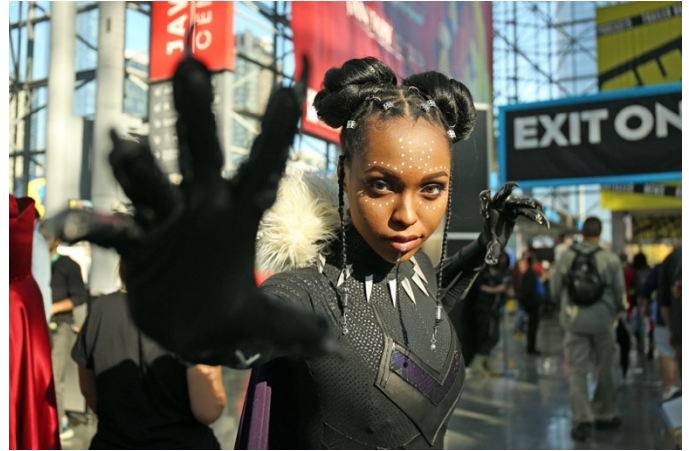
Marvel New Media's Sarah Amos is amazing in the sense that once you're on track, you're firing on all cylinders. In she and Jason, it was really valuable to have collaborators that, at certain points, let me worry about the creative while they did their work. That takes a huge level of trust.

EPISODE 5) MARVEL'S 616: SUIT UP!

The cosplay community is overflowing with creativity and dedication to the craft of costume building. And many individuals have found inner confidence — and lifelong friends — by embodying the Marvel characters who inspire them. Directed by Andrew Rossi (Page One: Inside the New York Times, The First Monday in May), "Suit Up!"

takes an intimate look at four cosplayers from across the country, each readying a design for New York Comic Con.

New York Comic Con 2019 was visited by more than a quarter of a million fans. “Suit Up!” invites viewers homes with five cosplayers as they plan, construct, tailor and test one-of-a-kind outfits bound for the Javits Center spectacle.



“There are no height/weight/race/gender restrictions when it comes to cosplay,” said Jasmine, a Black woman featured in the documentary. A video game concept artist from Atlanta, Jasmine is also a sewing maven whose custom ensembles endear her to 280,000 Instagram followers.

“As long as you’re being respectful, you can cosplay [as] anyone,” said Marcy, a Brooklyn toy designer who uses the personal pronouns “they/them. They combed through the Garment District to locate a ruby cape fabric to channel Doctor Strange.

Acclaimed director Andrew Rossi previously kept pace with the style elite at the Met Gala (*The First Monday in May*) and a Karl Lagerfeld haute couture show (*7 Days Out*). “Meeting the incredibly earnest and sincere cosplayers of our episode was a high point in my journey of understanding how fashion can be a vehicle for identity and change,” said Rossi. “Andrew Bolton, the curator of the Met’s Costume Institute, does beautiful and important work analyzing how clothes can telegraph politics and meaning. Cosplayers are living those abstract ideals in a very physically real way. I hope that the episode honors their courage and artistry.”

Like any artistic expression, cosplaying demands vulnerability. “There’s a fear sometimes when you work on things that you know YOU love, that others may not share the same opinion,” said executive producer Harry Go. Yet the open-hearted cosplayers in this episode quickly bond with strangers who have put similar effort into embodying one of the over 8,000 characters populating Marvel comics.

“Marvel is — and always has been — for everyone,” said series executive producer Stephen Wacker, Vice President and Head of Content at Marvel New Media. “Going back to the early days of our comics universe, creators like Jack Kirby, Stan Lee and

Marie Severin were bringing a diverse world to you with ink, color and yellowed paper. For many of us, Marvel was almost like a travelogue where we'd see new, exotic locales like mythologically-advanced African countries, secret underground kingdoms and even massive American cities where heroes swung from webs!" The array of creations on the page foreshadowed the brand's current era of "bring[ing] creators in to not only authentically tell their own stories, but to also help build the next generation of Marvel heroes."

When cosplayers convene, expectations are defied. Another "Suit Up!" personality — a Texan small business owner named Amanda — was first spotted by executive producers Jason Stermann and Sarah Amos at San Diego Comic Con. "She was competing onstage and her dog, Merly, was dressed in a Spider-Man outfit," Stermann said. "I'm a big dog lover, and I told Judy Stephens" — a Marvel New Media producer who oversees the cosplay competitions — "There's got to be an episode to do on just the dogs of cosplay." Stephens responded by explaining that many of the pets at Comic Con were service animals.

Stermann and Amos introduced themselves to Amanda, who confided that she was recently diagnosed with autism, and Merly is a service dog. "It really hit me when I learned about the service animals and cosplaying. I realized that it's one of the few times where someone can be with their animal in a public place without people looking at their and immediately thinking that there's something wrong with them," Stermann continued. "When they're dressed up in costume together, no one ever thinks that."

Ramos added, "'Suit Up!' does such a good job of capturing the sense of community, true love and acceptance that comes with cosplay. Practicing cosplay means a lot to fans who partake, impacting how they think about themselves and their place in the world."

EPISODE 6) MARVEL'S 616: UNBOXED

Action figures once dwelled only in toy chests, but today, they are treasured and preserved by collectors of all ages. "Unboxed" muses on the symbiotic relationship between toys and comics, plus the imaginative professionals melding the two. Scouting Hasbro, Funko and New York Toy Fair, actor and director Sarah Ramos (Parenthood) pinpoints artists with infinite passion for Marvel, nostalgia and play.

Sarah Ramos loves to embrace her inner child. When she met Jason Sterman circa 2018, she recapped her recent trip to the National Confectioners Association's Sweets & Snacks Expo. “For whatever reason, that stayed in the back of my mind,” Sterman said. “When ‘Unboxed’ came up, after having success with Gillian, Paul and Alison — who had never directed before but really latched onto their concepts — we floated the idea of directing to Sarah.”



In the words of executive producer Stephen Wacker, Ramos immediately jumped at the idea of “showing longtime and brand-new Marvel fans how we got to a place where even your grandmother knows who Groot is!”

The ensuing adventure took Ramos to the doorsteps of some of the biggest names in toys. “We got to visit Hasbro Rhode Island, which is super top secret, and Funko’s Washington state headquarters, to meet the artists who illustrate these toys and sculpt them on a computer and 3D print them,” she said. Her cross-country trek brought her into the homes of toy photographer Mitchel Wu and toy designer Ann Jasperson, who estimates she’s drawn art for at least 200 Marvel action figures.

“Unboxed” culminates at North America’s largest trade show, American International Toy Fair, an annual tradition since 1903. Ramos explained, “Toy Fair is a convention for toymakers, and it’s really high-stakes and serious” — partly due to the demand of always debuting an original line. “That was an incredible place to see how the toy industry works, on a massive scale.”

Several of the toy designers and executives reflect on how childhood pursuits shaped their eventual career paths. Long before he was a toy designer, David Vonner anticipated his mom’s nightly bedtime stories about Thor and fellow gods from Norse mythology. Ryan Ting, the Senior Manager of Global Brand Development & Marketing at Hasbro, gave a third-grade presentation on the X-Men. His colleague Dwight Stall — Senior Design Manager for Hasbro Marvel Legends — became immersed in drawing to cope with the hardships of middle school.

“All of the subjects in this documentary were really seeking that sense of inner wonder and imagination and play that can sometimes get lost as we get older,” said Ramos. “I love that the toy industry and Marvel really value that. It’s inspiring to see how much care and effort is being put into these little plastic figures so people can experience joy.

EPISODE 7) MARVEL’S 616: THE MARVEL METHOD

Comic book veteran Dan Slott is among the last remaining writers to collaborate using the storied “Marvel Method,” an approach where a writer develops and passes a plot summary to an artist to construct the visual action and story beats. Separated by thousands of miles as they work on Marvel’s new Iron Man 2020 comic book series, co-creators Slott and Pete Woods, along with Marvel editor Tom Brevoort, to meet the first issue’s print deadline and debut one of the first Marvel comics of the decade. Directed by Brian Oakes (Jim: The James Foley Story, Abstract: The Art of Design).



“There is something so magical about going on the journey from a conversation in someone’s office to the final comic book rolling of the presses, so fans can interact with it,” said executive producer Sarah Amos.

The penultimate episode of *Marvel’s 616* discloses the mind meld that resurrected Iron Man 2020 for modern audiences. “The stories told in *Marvel’s 616* are basically a map to our universe and a perfect introduction guide to some of the people who helped build and maintain it,” said executive producer Stephen Wacker.

Working together across time zones, *Iron Man 2020*’s core collaborators were writers Dan Slott and Christos Gage, artist Pete Woods, letterer Joe Caramagna, assistant editor Shannon Ballesteros and Tom Brevoort, Executive Editor and Senior Vice President of Publishing at Marvel Comics. Whereas the vast majority of Marvel writers submit scripts for exactly how they want comics to read and look, veteran Slott begins with a story outline, inviting his colleagues to enhance the material and share

ownership. For example, Woods can use his imagination to fashion superhero gadgets and determine pacing, setting up Christos Gage to pepper the pages with dialogue. This creative process is known as “The Marvel Method.”

Slott has sounding boards from the outset, but that doesn’t make his job easy. “Here’s a realization I didn’t make until I saw Dan in action,” said director Brian Oakes. “The writer needs to conceive the story structure for the entire run of the comic book series. This episode is just about the first issue, but Dan is thinking much bigger because there are six books to make. That’s six different plot lines all with act and scene structure, twists, climactic moments, and all the narrative moments in between. Quite an undertaking.”

“The Marvel Method” is applicable beyond comic books. “The Marvel Method is the secret sauce to Marvel’s storytelling identity,” said executive producer Harry Go. “It’s really the idea of conversation. The coming together of diverse ideas and viewpoints to create a bridge where we can all visit each other’s worlds.”

Technology now gives that bridge its bearings. “Back in the Stan Lee and Steve Ditko days, ‘The Marvel Method’ originated out of the necessity to create more comics in a shorter amount of time,” Oakes said. “But it also originated in an era where artists and writers were working together under the same roof, in the Marvel offices. Over the decades it evolved and today, writers and artists work together out of their homes (or Airstreams), spread out over the entire world.” Wacker confirms, “There’s no place on Earth that is so remote that the Marvel Universe can’t reach.”

Early in his career, Oakes worked as a designer and animator. The motion graphics he created for Wordplay — a 2006 documentary centered on crossword puzzles — led to related assignments for filmmakers like Ken Burns (*The Vietnam War*) and Liz Garbus (*Bobby Fischer Against the World*). Following his solo directorial debut for the Oscar-nominated and Sundance Audience Award-winning *Jim: The James Foley Story*, Oakes helmed a trio of *Abstract: The Art of Design* episodes, including one on typeface designer Jonathan Hoefler.

“My background in motion graphics design absolutely allowed me to relate to the subjects,” he said. “Motion graphics is visual problem solving through the means of storytelling. Dan, Pete, Shannon, Christos and Joe are in the same game, but instead of graphics, photos and animation, they use words, plot and illustration. When you allow people to bring their talents into whatever process you’re a part of, I believe it always

creates a more gratifying experience. It was both impressive and inspiring to watch this team work so efficiently.”

Footage of “The Marvel Method” in action gains a new significance during a global pandemic. Oakes concluded, “We want to make sure we continue to communicate with our friends, family and colleagues, stay connected, have conversations, laugh, and maybe at the end of the day, if there’s still time, read a comic book together.”

EPISODE 8) MARVEL’S 616: MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

The Marvel Spotlight program delivers Marvel’s stories of heroism and hope to a fresh medium: the stage! Marvel has created a series of one-act plays to challenge teenagers to explore the humans behind their favorite Marvel Super Heroes, including Ms. Marvel and Squirrel Girl, and examine universal challenges facing young adults today. This episode, directed by Golden Globe nominee Alison Brie



(GLOW, Community), introduces a group of students at Florida’s Brandon High School as they delve into a whirlwind of auditions, blocking and rehearsals. While the classmates forge bonds and thrive off their teacher’s encouragement, they grasp the moral of the plays — ordinary people can do extraordinary things.

Q&A with Director Alison Brie

Were you a comics person before you started working on *Marvel’s 616*?

ALISON BRIE: Not really. These days I don’t know that you have to be a comic book person to be a Marvel fan. I’ve seen all the movies. As I was directing the episode, it was kind of helpful to learn about these characters in the Marvel Spotlight program alongside students. We were all delving into something new.

What is the Marvel Spotlight program?

The Marvel Spotlight program is a collection of three one-act plays that are about characters from the Marvel Universe — as teenagers! The plays are *Mirror of Most Value: A Ms. Marvel Play*, *Squirrel Girl Goes to College: A Squirrel Girl Play* and *Hammered: A Thor and Loki Play*. My episode highlights productions of the first two at Brandon High School in Brandon, Florida. All three plays were written specifically for teen actors and any high school can get the rights to perform them.

You had previously directed *GLOW* but not a documentary. Why did you want to take part in this series?

I was approached by Supper Club about directing this specific episode about the Marvel Spotlight program and Brandon High School's theater department. I was once a very passionate high school theater nerd. I had a very intense drama teacher, which was actually great because I already knew I wanted to make a living as an actor. So going back to my roots and being surrounded by high school theater students sounded really fun. And the more that I read about Marvel Spotlight, I thought it was a cool way to bring theater into high schools, by having relatable characters that the students love.

What were your first impressions of Brandon High School?

The students were incredible. Brandon High School was the perfect setting because the school is very culturally and socio-economically diverse. It was a nice petri dish to showcase a wide range of students and the struggles that they're going through.

What kind of rapport did you observe between these students and the theater department's director, Courtney Kyle?

Courtney single-handedly re-invented the theater program at Brandon High, which used to be just an after-school program. She feels so passionate about teaching. We really try to show how much the students have responded to her enthusiasm about theater, and also her creativity in encouraging enrollment through the Marvel plays. Her work is tireless with these kids, she happily gives up her after-school time for them. Her whole approach is inclusive and enthusiastic. What I found endearing was watching Courtney make theater really inviting, even to kids who don't want to be actors. Ultimately, high

school theater is a safe space to conquer fears, to come out of your shell. I think a lot of the kids were surprising themselves.

Honestly, the students at Brandon High are so fantastic that we probably could have made a whole season just following what they were going through as they were putting on these plays. The hardest part was deciding whose stories we had time to really honor. We focused on kids whose roles in the play were also affecting their lives. A strong through line became the kids who were really relating to their characters.

You were filming really close to when Covid-19 emerged as a devastating worldwide pandemic. How did the virus impact your post-production work on the episode?

The final trip to shoot in Florida took place right before everything shut down. The kids almost missed the chance to do their final performances. Luckily, we were able to complete all filming and the kids were able to perform. However, we had to do all of our post-production remotely, so that meant a lot of Zoom meetings with our editor, James Long, and our supervising producer, Claire Daggess, whose boots were on the ground throughout. With my first documentary directorial experience, it was really difficult not to be in the edit bay. Everything required painstaking patience. They were both so great at their jobs that it helped streamline the process.

I couldn't have done this without Claire. Working with her and working with these kids really made me fall in love with the documentary format. I was like, "I wish we could just stay here forever and be at school with these kids!"

While making an episode for an anthology, did you feel you were able to put personal creative touches on your storytelling?

Definitely. Each episode is truly a stand-alone episode. Marvel, Disney+ and Supper Club gave lots of freedom. In asking me to do the episode, I'm so honored that they were willing to take a risk on me. That really empowered me to take the reins.

I chose my DP, Wolfgang Held, and our composers, Stephanie Economou and Jon Monroe. I got to have these great collaborators, and truly set the tone I wanted to and explore the themes that revealed themselves while we were shooting.

Such as?

There's the prevalent theme of believing in yourself and not caring what others think of you, this idea of self-empowerment. Each student we profiled makes that same realization in different ways. They're facing everything from shyness and lack of self-confidence to battles with perfectionism and body image. And certainly navigating challenges at home. I found that the kids were way harder on themselves than any teachers.

High school today is obviously so different from what I remember. Everybody has a smartphone and is on Instagram and Twitter. I expected the pressures and themes to be so specific that maybe I wouldn't even be able to relate. When in actuality, they were so universal, generationally and culturally.

I cried as I was editing the episode, thinking about the fact that I still struggle with the things that these kids are talking about, like not being so hard on yourself. And Madi's struggle with body image, and Bri's understanding that she didn't need to have a big freak-out — she could do her part all along. Whether you're a kid or an adult, sometimes we forget that any power you need is always inside of you. I have to continually learn that all the time! It's an idea that rings throughout these Marvel Spotlight plays, where young superheroes are working through their issues.

With Disney+, much of the audience of this will be parents watching alongside their children. How do you feel about bringing your work to the family-friendly space?

I'm excited by it! I'm very proud that the messages in this episode are going to reach other high school age kids and families. I have three nephews; they're seven and six and four. I thought about them a lot while I was making the episode. Soon enough, maybe they'll be able to watch this and be excited and learn from it. That makes me really proud.