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Republicans are not wild about antitrust enforcement.The US government’s two biggest antitrust regulators — FTC chair Lina Khan and Justice Department antitrust chief Jonathan Kanter — appeared for a Senate Oversight hearing on Tuesday, and there were two quick takeaways: 1) Republicans still are eager to notch some kind of win against Khan and the Democratic FTC majority 2) They don’t really know how to do it yet.Expect a lot of fireworks here if Republicans take back the Senate majority in November. The only thing that seems to be more popular in the wildly successful film Black Panther than Chadwick Boseman taking on the role of the first black superhero is the world he does it in: Wakanda, a fictional kingdom that has viewers of the film, which has made more than \$700 million at the box office in its first two weekends, captivated. Whether you’ve already seen the film or it’s still on your to-do list, here are five facts you may not know about the land Black Panther rules—and the reasons it has architects, urbanists, and fans of the film in general buzzing about the fictional society.Marvel Studios’ BLACK PANTHER..Black Panther/T’Challa (Chadwick Boseman)..Ph: Film Frame..©Marvel Studios 2018Wakanda was inspired by The Dark Knight’s Gotham.Filmmaker Christopher Nolan made the fictional Gotham City feel like it was in the States, with real-world commentary on privacy and terrorism. Black Panther director Ryan Coogler wanted to create a similar feeling of realism in his movie. According to Empire, Coogler wanted audiences to feel as if Wakanda could actually be somewhere in the world, with realistic commentary on immigration and poverty.Marvel Studios’ BLACK PANTHER..L to R: T’Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman) and W’Kabi (Daniel Kaluuya)..Ph: Film Frame..©Marvel Studios 2018But it’s also inspired by a real place: the African empire of Mutapa, which existed from the 1400s to late 1700s.In an interview with NPR, Coogler explained this is why Wakanda is not full of the sleek modern glass buildings audiences have come to expect when they imagine the future. Instead, it has a variety of architectural styles, many heavily inspired by traditional African architecture, but it also incorporates modern urban technology seamlessly. This is what makes the place, from the buildings to the transportation systems, so appealing (and surprising) to viewers.Marvel Studios’ BLACK PANTHER..T’Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman)..Ph: Film Frame..©Marvel Studios 2018The King of Wakanda (also known as the Black Panther) is a genius, and the wealthiest superhero of all time.The term genius is not being thrown around lightly here: Boseman’s character holds PhDs in engineering, economics, physics, political science, and psychology. According to Time, he’s also the wealthiest superhero ever, with an estimated net worth of \$90.7 trillion. In the Marvel Universe, Tony Stark is the next richest hero.nullThe majority of the world has no idea Wakanda exists.Wait, what? Perhaps this is why, while the rest of the world considers a tiny amount of vibranium, an expensive mineral, to be a luxury, Wakanda still sits on a plethora of it. Regardless, Wakanda has remained a secret civilization hidden away from the rest of the world.Marvel Studios’ BLACK PANTHER..L to R: Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) and T’Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman)..Ph: Matt Kennedy..©Marvel Studios 2018The production designer for Black Panther created a 500-page “Wakandan Bible” for anyone to refer to when they had a question about the country’s 50,000-year history.After eight months of research, production designer Hannah Beachler wasn’t messing around. Her “Wakandan Bible,” as she called it, had references and pictures about everything from the fictional mineral vibranium to Wakandan tribes to Lesotho shepherds and the Basotho blankets they wear. Beachler told Film School Rejects that when anyone on set had a question about the kingdom, they would head to the history book...even if it was one of pure fiction.Marvel Studios’ BLACK PANTHER..Talon Fighter over Wakanda..Ph: Film Frame..©Marvel Studios 2018 When a movie makes \$242 million at the domestic box office in its first four days, it’s not long before we all start dissecting the reasons behind that success. Black Panther obliterated the previous President’s Day weekend record set by Deadpool in 2016 (\$152 million), and the only movie to ever make more money in its first four days is Star Wars: The Force Awakens. Part of this post-opening weekend reflection involves the marketing strategy around the film and its role in fanning the flames of a phenomenon.But those looking for a marketing blueprint to follow for future box office glory won’t find it in things like the New York fashion show, the NBA Finals trailer debut, the College Football National Championship halftime show with a Kendrick Lamar soundtrack tie-in, or even the Lamar-curated, Billboard-topping soundtrack. Impressive, smart marketing moves all, but none stand out as groundbreaking in and of themselves. It’s the movie that’s groundbreaking. The buzz surrounding the film was formed as soon as Disney decided to make the film in the first place—and to make it the way that it did, with the cast and director it chose to work with.By putting Ryan Coogler, one of the most exciting young new directors in Hollywood, at the helm of a story that would be told through a primarily black cast of Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, Angela Bassett, Danai Gurira, Forest Whitaker, and more, the stage was set for what Variety called a “grassroots marketing movement . . . unlike any other Marvel movie.” The kids at Ron Clark Academy weren’t excited to see Black Panther because of a college football halftime concert or a fashion show. They were excited to see people who looked like them in a blockbuster comic book movie. I’ve loved the Black Panther reaction videos, read the reviews/think pieces, swooned over folks lining theaters, tried to teach myself Panther flash mob dance moves, admired all the African threads. But this. This broke me. Our babies. Our young ones. Imagine the seeds planted...pic.twitter.com/Elsjns5gld — Ava DuVernay (@ava) February 19, 2018Now, all that pre-release hype could’ve been watered down had the movie not delivered on its seemingly impossible expectations. But by backing a director like Coogler, along with writer Joe Robert Cole, Disney bet wisely that they’d deliver something unexpected and epic, and that 96% fresh rating confirms the gamble paid out in a massive way.If there is a marketing lesson or blueprint to take from all of this, it’s that marketing success starts with the truth of the product itself. Disney built a fantastically solid foundation, then tapped into the magical Marvel hype machine to amplify the film’s inherent strengths. The single greatest marketing move for Black Panther was T’Challa and the heroes of Wakanda themselves. HowStuffWorks: Black Panthers Return With Artist Brian Stelfreeze Carousel: Brian Stelfreeze; Video: HowStuffWorks Now that “Captain America: Civil War” is in theaters, Black Panther is joining other well-known heroes in Marvel’s modern cinematic universe, and the character is the focus of a great deal of attention. That attention is also due to the 11-issue Black Panther revival comic book series that began publishing in April 2016, written by Ta-Nehisi Coates, drawn by Brian Stelfreeze and colored by Laura Martin. It’s basically a dream team of talent and skill. Taking on the task of bringing a character like that to the comic book page could be daunting, but artist Brian Stelfreeze seems to take the task in stride. He let the HowStuffWorks team visit him at his studio and chatted with us about how his collaboration with Coates works, how he approaches new books with a serious focus on research, and even how he balances art and words in panels. The character Black Panther is the alter ego of king T’Challa from the fictional African country of Wakanda. It’s the most technologically advanced civilization in the world, but is still governed by an ancient tradition of monarchy. The monarch, however, spends a lot of time away from his people in his Black Panther hero persona. Part of the challenge for Stelfreeze was creating visuals that feel believable in the context of the African continent, but that are also unique and bring readers into an alternate reality. He can’t, as he says, “draw people in knit shirts and khakis.” Instead, he used all of his research as a knowledge base to then create Wakanda as an “African mélange.” Reading the Black Panther comic, it feels cinematic. There’s depth and emotional intensity that come from the both the words and the art. Stelfreeze’s approach to the work perfectly explains how that happened — he describes Black Panther’s story as “a drama with action notes,” rather than simply being a superhero action-fest. There is cultural conflict, there is political upheaval, and above all, there is spectacular storytelling. Marvel StudiosIt might seem impossible to imagine now, but there is an alternate timeline out there where the Marvel Cinematic Universe didn’t include iconic characters like T’Challa, Shuri, Killmonger, and Carol Danvers. In his new book The Ride of a Lifetime, Disney CEO Bob Iger recalls the hurdles he had to overcome in bringing more diverse characters to life in the MCU, and the opposition he faced from Marvel Entertainment (of which Marvel Studios was an offshoot) when trying to secure a greenlight for Black Panther and Captain Marvel. In the book, Iger speaks about how the role he played in bringing Black Panther to life is one of his proudest accomplishments, and that he’s glad he fought for the movie. He writes that Marvel Entertainment executives pointed to the historically low box office figures for movies from black creators and starring black actors as a reason not to pursue a superhero movie set in the fictional nation of Wakanda — but Iger was so convinced that Marvel Studios had the ability to make movies that were both diverse and profitable that he got Marvel Entertainment CEO Ike Perlmutter on the phone to convince him.“I’ve been in the business long enough to have heard every old argument in the book, and I’ve learned that old arguments are just that: old, and out of step with where the world is and where it should be,” he writes in The Ride of a Lifetime. “We had a chance to make a great movie and to showcase an underrepresented segment of America, and those goals were not mutually exclusive. I called Ike and told him to tell his team to stop putting up roadblocks and ordered that we put both Black Panther and Captain Marvel into production.”Iger’s optimism was well-founded. Black Panther was a critical and commercial success, thanks in full to its majority black creative team, including director Ryan Coogler and costume designer Ruth E. Carter, whose work on the film earned it an Academy Award — not to mention a wealth of stellar performances by Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, Letitia Wright and Danai Gurira. When Captain Marvel came out a year later, there were similar doubts among certain corners of the internet that a superhero movie about a woman could be a hit. But the movie ended up breaking records, with the biggest opening weekend of any female-fronted project ever. It was also the second biggest weekend for any comic book movie after Avengers: Infinity War (at least, until Endgame came along).Now that both Black Panther 2 and Captain Marvel 2 have been confirmed for Phase Four of the MCU, and LGBTQ+ characters are on their way onto screens via Eternals and Thor: Love & Thunder, it’s safe to say that Iger’s commitment to telling a wider, richer range of superhero stories has paid off.Philip Ellis is a freelance writer and journalist from the United Kingdom covering pop culture, relationships and LGBTQ+ issues. His work has appeared in GQ, Teen Vogue, Man Repeller and MTV.

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