

**In Proximity**  
**Season 3 Episode 10**  
**Todd Harris**  
**Final Transcript**

**Paola Mardo:** So you worked on Sinners as well?

[CLIP: "I Lied To You" From Sinners plays as BTS footage of the surreal montage is shown]

**Todd Harris:** Yes. They asked me to do the scene inside the speakeasy when it was the time transition scene where we get to see all the music and the big oner that happens. And, you know, he let me go as ambitious as I wanted and it kind of turned to what it turned into and was shockingly close to the boards. Ryan had a—you know, he was like, "this is going to be a centerpiece of the movie." And I was just happy enough that he would think of me to help make that possible.

[00:15 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICE OVER]

**Paola Mardo:** You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today we're talking Eyes of Wakanda and Sinners. Todd Harris is the creator, director and showrunner of Eyes of Wakanda produced by Marvel TV, Marvel Animation and Proximity Media. Eyes of Wakanda is a new action adventure series now playing on Disney+ that follows the adventures of brave Wakanda warriors throughout history.

In this globe-trotting adventure, the heroes must carry out dangerous missions to retrieve vibranium artifacts from the enemies of Wakanda. He's also a storyboard artist known for designing action sequences for some of the biggest movies in the world like Avengers, Thor: Ragnarok, John Wick, Deadpool, Spider-Man, Black Panther and Sinners.

On this episode, he talks about what it was like to work with Proximity founder and Sinners' writer, director and producer Ryan Coogler, on designing that iconic music montage sequence and what a storyboard artist does, the work behind creating storyboards for a film, and finally what it was like to pitch Eyes of Wakanda to Kevin Feige and Ryan Coogler and eventually direct it and show run it as well. Here's my conversation with Todd Harris.

[VOICE OVER ENDS]

**Paola Mardo:** Todd Harris, welcome to In Proximity.

**Todd Harris:** Thank you, I appreciate it.

**Paola Mardo:** Thanks for being here. I'm excited to talk to you about your show and so many other parts of your work, but before we start, you said you watched some episodes so maybe you know it's what's about to happen. We have a surprise voice memo question.

**Todd Harris:** Good God.

**Paola Mardo:** From someone you may know I think. So I'll play the question, you'll find out who it is and you'll answer it. You ready?

**Todd Harris:** Let's do it.

**Paola Mardo:** Okay.

**Brad Winderbaum:** Hey Todd, how's it going? Congrats on being a guest on the cool Proximity Podcast. Just want to say it's been such a privilege to collaborate with you over these years. We met on Thor: Ragnarok where you created some of the greatest storyboards I've ever seen in my life and we've been working together through Eyes of Wakanda and hopefully we get to work on many more things together.

So my question for you is every great director has that one piece of advice that lights the way for them early on. What's yours or what was yours and what torch would you pass on young filmmakers following in your footsteps?

**Todd Harris:** Okay. Well, Brad always asking the good questions. If you don't recognize that voice, that's Brad Winderbaum. He was the guy who I guess hired—invited me into the Marvel family. I started working with him on Thor: Rangarock, like you've mentioned, and we had a blast. That was making a movie with all your college buddies.

**Paola Mardo:** Nice. Do you guys go to college?

**Todd Harris:** No, not at all.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh, but together I mean.

**Todd Harris:** It was that comradery. Sometimes you guys—you know, some people just get in the car, go on a road trip and like, oh, we all like the same music and you have a blast. And that was kind of how Thor: Ragnarok with me and Taika and Brad—and it was just big, big fun and it had all my favorite things, lots of laughs and lots of punching.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Love it.

**Todd Harris:** Advice I would give. Now it's interesting, now we're in an era where people come up wanting to be that thing.

I want to be an artist, I want to be a storyboard artist, I want to be a director. I want to be—name it, I want to be a hairdresser, I want to be a lawyer. All of that stuff. I would stress kind of doing different things. If you're going to work in movies, try to work above the line and below the line—well above the line is always difficult, but in many departments, touch as many departments as you can. So if your goal is to eventually direct, you are aware of what you're asking the people who work for you.

And so because you want to create an environment that you would like to work under. And so being informed about what you ask of people and what people's duties are, what their tasks are and how they contribute, you know, so you don't ask the impossible on a regular basis and you don't—you know, you want to respect everybody's expertise. So kind of filling up your cup about what everybody does around you I think is the best advice I can give any aspiring director.

**Paola Mardo:** I think that's really great advice. Because, also, like, you might think—because I feel like this is a trend, I've interviewed several people now for this podcast and some people come into the industry knowing what they want to do already, but some people have one idea, but then it sort of morphs and twists and turns in your career, take you somewhere else.

But I love the advice you give because you won't really know if you want to do the thing unless you try the thing and why not try a couple different things so that you can learn what works and what doesn't for you?

**Todd Harris:** Absolutely. And usually if you do it right, all those other things will feed into the thing you might eventually do.

**Paola Mardo:** Exactly.

**Todd Harris:** I have plenty of lessons I've learned that have come into a greater focus once I learn other things.

**Paola Mardo:** Can you give one example of that?

**Todd Harris:** Man that is—that's a big one. Because I've had the fortune to work on a lot of different movies. I've worked on the better part of 70 or 80 of 'em, something like that. And so, you know, you learn what to do and what not to do. One interesting thing, context matters. So when you're presenting an idea, even if it's the best idea in your mind, if it's only one, it's also the worst idea.

So always deliver—try to deliver a minimum of three because choice is important and people like to contribute to the decision-making process. And I've seen that fall flat when presenting to directors or department heads. So that was a—that was a big lesson because I would scrutinize things and go, “here you go, here's the best one.” And think, “but that's not my job.” It's their job to make the last decision. So it's my job to give them informed choices.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, I like that. And there's also the order of which you present the ideas. Do you pick your—present your best idea first or last or, I dunno, if you have a strategy for that, for presenting?

**Todd Harris:** Usually by the time I present ideas, the last thing you want to do is present an idea you don't want to do. So I'm pretty married to all my options because, you know, historically I've had plenty of times where they'll pick the thing you don't want to do. That was something I learned in my youth. So the solution to that is never present ideas you don't want to do. And so that will get you out of a lot of trouble.

[7:12 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Well, before we jump into your directing career or that part of your career, what is a storyboard artist for someone who doesn't know and how did you get into this job?

**Todd Harris:** One thing becoming a storyboard artist is you do a lot of explaining of what a storyboard artist does because it's kind of a limited shelf life. They're in between the script and the final product. So between those two points, it's an extremely valuable tool.

So it's—and the simplest way to explain it is in a practical sense. It helps limit the amount of explaining you have to do about a script because 10 people could read a script and 10 people have different ideas of what that script looks like. But if you have an image you can point to, then the conversation gets a lot more direct. So it's the first visual substantiation of the script because language by definition is abstract. And so, knowing that three people in front of a car on the city street that's not busy, everyone can see that.

And now we can budget it, we can talk about casting, we can talk about camera and all these different things. So it clarifies the conversation about things before everyone's roaming the streets and trying to find a location to shoot at. So it's—that's the best way to explain storyboards.

**Paola Mardo:** That's awesome. So how did you end up in this line of work?

**Todd Harris:** There was a thousand different roads to Rome in terms of becoming a storyboard artist. Everybody from people who grew up loving film, some people who love comic books, some people who love animation, some people transfer from those different fields into film. But I was trained to be an animator. But when you hang around a bunch of animators, you realize I realized it was something I can do, but I'm not an animator.

**Paola Mardo:** Wait, why were you hanging out with animators—did you want to be an animator?

**Todd Harris:** Went to school for animation.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh, okay.

**Todd Harris:** And so back when 2D animation was a viable career. Now it's coming back, but feature film, 2D animation when that was a viable career. But uh...

**Paola Mardo:** Was there a particular film that made you interested in that career? Like an animated film or something?

**Todd Harris:** Well, as a career—because I loved animation growing up, anime, American animation, all of it all the time. Loved it. But Lion King was—that was the lightning rod that made you go, “wow, there is a whole world here.” Because it was—and it made the entire world do that, because due the success of Lion King, a plethora of different animated studios all popped up trying to chase that lightning in a bottle. So it was a practical decision combined with a passion.

So anyway, I fell into storyboarding because I love drawing and I love telling stories, and storyboarding has just the right fidelity of the amount of art I want to contribute to my story. So animation is very close for lack—no pun intended, the proximity to the story is very close for animation. And writing is 30,000 feet. So storyboarding—same thing with comic books. You've got to put a lot of effort, concept art, there's a lot of effort. Storyboards, the drawings kind of flow out of you in order to tell the story because the art isn't the product, it's the road to get to the story.

So, that's why I kind of gravitate to storyboards because it kind of does everything. It's a little bit more impressionistic, it's fluid, it communicates, and it does all the things I like about storytelling.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, that's really cool. So just when you get a script, what's your process? How do you break it down I guess?

**Todd Harris:** Well, storyboarding is kind of like—like every category—so you have TV animation, you have tv, live action, you have feature film, animation—all of 'em have their kind of accent in terms of—they use slightly different vocabulary to describe things and they have slightly different approaches. Live action film is a lot more establishing ideas more so than acting out the entire scene.

Whereas like TV animation, it is shoot from the hip, you have to act out the entire scene. Whereas feature film animation is much more exploratory. So depending on which project we're working on, that process can change. A lot of times I don't thumbnail. A lot of people love thumbnails, but usually—

**Paola Mardo:** But what do you mean by thumbnail?

**Todd Harris:** Thumbnails? So thumbnails are very small, very simple initial sketches to kind of put you on a path of where you want to go. It's usually the first step before you commit too much time to any particular drawing.

**Paola Mardo:** So it's like a rough cut

**Todd Harris:** Of extremely rough. So by definition, a thumbnail is—could potentially be the size of a thumb.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh like literally a thumb size.

**Todd Harris:** Yeah, like tiny post-Its a very small drawing. But what I usually like to do is I like to get into the scene, find out what the spine of the story is, and I've had enough experience where I can usually kind of hit my tent pole beats and then connect the pieces. But I like to really soak in the script and really get an idea, because you're the first directorial choice.

Once you get out of the scripting phase, you know, you're going to choose the viewpoint of whatever character or whatever moment that you're going to be illustrating. So it's mostly getting into the story and getting into the character and hitting those beats in a very definitive way. So it has a voice. I would get a lot of questions. How long would it take you to storyboard five pages? And if it's five pages of me and you talking in this room, it wouldn't take very long, but if one of those pages says “epic battle ensues,” that can be months. So—

**Paola Mardo:** “Cut to.”

[LAUGHTER]

**Todd Harris:** Exactly. So the opening, just imagine the opening of saving Private Ryan. That's a lot to figure out.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh yeah.

**Todd Harris:** So it just all depends. It's very project dependent and also too budget dependent.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, that's so cool. I mean, I've never thought about storyboard artistry because I just don't—my brain doesn't operate that way. I'm curious, I mean you've worked on so many films, I mean Black Panther and Sinners of course, but also John Wick, Deadpool, Avengers. Can you name a couple I guess scenes that you, I dunno are most proud of in that?

Because my understanding is in what you do, you're not just translating a script, sometimes you get to also pitch some ideas.

**Todd Harris:** Absolutely.

**Paola Mardo:** So, are there any ideas you pitched for any of those projects that made it to the final product?

**Todd Harris:** Um, no absolutely. There's times where I pitch ideas and they make it through. The real success is when they make it to—when you pitch an idea to make it all the way to the trailer. One idea, this was a long time ago, John Wick one, and I was around from the very beginning of that one, and there's a scene in there where there was a car chase and it's a

shootout because it's John Wick, on the Brooklyn Docks and John, he hits—he hits a bad guy and the bad guy rolls over the front of the car over the window.

'Cause I always use the joke when we're doing, everybody gets two bullets in John Wick.

**Paola Mardo:** Mm hm.

**Todd Harris:** Because he's a professional! So that professionalism will never not be realized. So John shoots somebody and as the guy rolls over the car, pap pap, shoots the guy twice as he rolls over the roof of the car. And the director, both of them, they were like, "I like that!" And it made it all the way to the trailer and it got a big laugh. So—

**Paola Mardo:** Awesome.

**Todd Harris:** But there's quite a few stories and that's kind of how my career started blossoming is because a lot of my pitches would carry through to show up on camera.

**Paola Mardo:** That's so cool. And what's the feeling when you're watching that scene in a theater with people? You know what I mean? How does that feel?

**Todd Harris:** Oh, it's fun. Now, you know, there's a bunch of grumpy storyboard artists out there as well, but the best thing about being a storyboard artist is you can take as much credit as you want and have no responsibility. So it's like, "Yeah, I did that scene and this and that," and it's like, "Oh, I didn't like that movie." "Well, I didn't direct it!"

[LAUGHTER]

**Todd Harris:** So you get a chance to vicariously live through that.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. That's awesome.

[15:47 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** So you worked on Sinners as well.

**Todd Harris:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** Can you share a little bit? Because I actually didn't know that until we first met because you talked about it, and I was like, "What! Why didn't I know this?" So can you talk a little bit about what was your role on Sinners and what was the scene or—

**Todd Harris:** I wish it was bigger. They called me the Tail End of Eyes, Wakanda. I was deep in post and, you know, I was juggling four chainsaws. And for some reason Zinzi called me up, that's Ryan's wife.

**Paola Mardo:** And producer on the film.

**Todd Harris:** And producer. And I was like, “Why is she calling me?” And she was so sweet. She was like, “Listen, I know you’re busy.” And I was like, “Yeah, what’s going on?” And it’s like, “Ryan really wants you to work on this movie or specifically a scene.” And I was like, “Sure!” ‘Cause I can’t be that busy. Of course I’m going to help Ryan out. But Ryan’s such a nice guy. He forgets, he’s a boss sometimes.

And I was like, yeah, he could have called me and he’d be like, “Listen man, I need you to storyboard this scene and do some hair.” Like, I would’ve done it because Ryan’s ACEs. And so they called me up and they asked me to do the scene inside the speakeasy when it was the time transition scene where we get to see all the music and the big oner that happens. And Ryan had some ideas, I pitched back some ideas and he let me go as ambitious as I wanted.

And it kind of turned to what it turned into. And it was, you know, it was shockingly close to the boards because it was very early on in production.

**Todd Harris:** But Ryan had a very—he was like, “This is going to be a centerpiece of the movie.” And I was just happy enough that he would think of me to help make that possible. So...

**Paola Mardo:** I mean, it’s such a iconic—so many iconic moments in film, but that one I think stood out to a lot of people for a lot of reasons. And honestly, I think you’ve just never seen that done ever before.

**Todd Harris:** Oh, he was—he was anxious. He was so—when I delivered the first storyboard, he was audibly happy about it because you could tell how much it meant to him to communicate that.

**Paola Mardo:** So yeah. Can you talk a little bit about the ideas you guys were pitching or what were the conversations and how to choreograph or draw it out, I guess?

**Todd Harris:** Well, that’s the illusion of language. Because you can be abstract and the thought experiment in your head is crystal clear, but once you start to put it on paper, the things, the parts of your imagination that kind of propped it up quickly fall apart. And so I’m the first one to deal with what’s falling through the cracks.

And so I try to solve the problem as much as I can, send it over to Ryan and I’m like, “Listen man, this is my stab at it.” I was able to kind of—because also knowing your director’s taste is a big part of it too, because you’re an extension of that taste. So kind of absorbing Ryan’s pitch and contributing to it in a way that I thought forwarded his agenda in terms of what he wanted to communicate was—that’s kind of what I led with. And I got pretty close to the mark and it was a lot of high fives and “Could we do this and that?”

And I’m like, “Yeah, no problem.” And by the end of it, it only took maybe two or three passes—



**Paola Mardo:** Wow.

**Todd Harris:** And we were off to the races.

**Paola Mardo:** Did he tell you specifically what to include? Because there's so many kinds of music genres? You know what I mean, through history? Was there a list?

**Todd Harris:** Some of were in there.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, yeah.

**Todd Harris:** I like to keep everything I do as simple as possible. So I draw, like, a really broad brush to give more of an impressionistic—lots of shadows and shapes and strong composition. One of the things you can play with it more is a foreground middle ground background when you're just using pen and ink. So, like, having a B-Boy kind of passing the foreground on top of a bar, have things and wash past lights, and trying to find ways to keep that camera involved in the abstractness of the sequence.

So that was the big thing about it. So—because also a continuous camera is very hard to communicate in static drawings. So for their purposes, I gave them a little animatic. I gave them boards you can print out and I gave them, you can click through so you can control the time.

**Paola Mardo:** That's awesome. That's awesome. I remember seeing the iPhone rehearsals where they shot it with an iPhone.

**Todd Harris:** Oh, that was great.

**Paola Mardo:** And yeah, it's so cool to see the transition of that and what it ended up being. Well, you talked about a storyboard artist—you want to also be an extension of the director's taste. You had worked with Ryan on Black Panther and Black Panther: Wakanda Forever?

**Todd Harris:** Yeah, I worked on both of 'em. Ironically enough, I was never able to work full time on 'em because when I met Ryan he was in a deep—this was a long walk, but uh...

**Paola Mardo:** No, share some of the lore. How'd you guys meet and what was it like to work with each other for the first time?

**Todd Harris:** Well, I got called onto Avengers: Infinity War, and I was like, "Oh man, I wanted to work on Black Panther."

[LAUGHTER]

**Todd Harris:** And so I was on Avengers, but I just realized that like, I think every black person in Hollywood was working on Black Panther. I think they're full. And so...

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** You're were FOMO. You were like, "Where's my call?"

[LAUGHTER]

**Todd Harris:** So... but I was working on Avengers and Kevin was like, "I think Todd can help them out." And so I got called to help out and it was a very—they were doing reshoots, so it was a very interesting experience. I went over there and the first thing they did is they sat me in a room, in the editorial room, and said, "Hey, you watch this cut of Black Panther and give us your thoughts." And so I'm like, "Okay."

I hadn't even met Ryan at that point. So they were interested in ideas that would help them out. So some of the sequences I worked on were the last battle sequence, and there was the last battle sequence in Wakanda where the rhinos came out the Dora were doing Dora stuff, Jabari doing Jabari stuff.

**Paola Mardo:** I'm seeing it all happen right now.

**Todd Harris:** Black Panther's doing Black Panther stuff. And I was pitching different ways to use vibranium, which I still got in my back pocket. And, you know, really that and then also too, there was some post credited scenes that I did where he goes to Oakland. I did those. I remember when I met Ryan, the thing I appreciated most about him was he's such a film academic. He has such a studied sense of how to block out a scene and accomplish it.

So, because as I'm boarding, he's like, "All right, put the cameras here, do that. Can we move the shot over this way?" Because he's constantly thinking about not only themes he's pursuing, but achievability. So, which you gotta be super aware of once you're doing additional photography.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Very cool.

[22:44 - "'Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson"]

**Paola Mardo:** Let's talk about Eyes of Wakanda.

**Todd Harris:** Okay, I know something about that.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, yeah. So you pitched this to Kevin Feige or Ryan Coogler first?

**Todd Harris:** I think it was Kevin first. There was two parts. So I had a whole bunch of scenarios, but one of the ones was I was saying that Wakandans are kind of like MIT students who are also Spartans. Everyone's super smart. Everybody in Wakanda has a six pack. They do not, you know, you don't not get conquered for 10,000 years and not everybody not be able to handle themselves.

**Paola Mardo:** True.

**Todd Harris:** So they are ACEs all the way through. And historically, if you have a 14-year-old Wakandan in a room full of grown men, that 14-year-old is the most dangerous person in that room. That's who they are. And so with that, one of the stories I really wanted to tell was the story of Memnon and, you know, in the Homeric Greek Epic, Memnon was an Ethiopian king who came to the aid of Troy to help defend—defend Troy against the Greek army.

And he was the equal of Achilles, and so much so that Zeus favored him, but you know, the way things work, Achilles was able to—he got the favor of another deity and he was able to win that war. But Memnon was the only person that ever draw blood from Achilles in the—in the Homer story. And I was like, “Well, what if the world has always been cosmopolitan?” We've mingled for a long time. We're not as isolated as we think, especially around the Mediterranean. And also too, part of Black history is world history. World history is also Black history.

And so showing that because, if it's a story that's true—well, as true as Homer can be—but I thought those kind of interesting looks on where Wakanda has intersected with history, familiar or unfamiliar, I thought was the place I really wanted to go. Those are things that interest me.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, I think you said that the show is “Real history meets Wakandans.”

**Todd Harris:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** Was that part of your early pitch for this?

**Todd Harris:** Yes. Yeah. There was a couple other scenarios that didn't quite make into the final product, but the Homer—the Homeric Epic one was a big one.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Interesting you bring up Memnon because when the show came out, I think people thought it was Agamemnon like the Greek character? But it was—he was an Ethiopian king.

**Todd Harris:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** So yeah, I liked that the show sort of decentered history from Western history and showed this other side to it. But what did you think of the sort of, I dunno, reactions to fans sort of digging into the history? 'Cause they got deep.

**Todd Harris:** Some of them did. Some of them didn't. Some of them were like, “Agamemnon!” And I'm just like, “Two more minutes on Wikipedia?”

**Paola Mardo:** Just scroll down a little bit.

[LAUGHTER]

**Todd Harris:** So there was definitely that, but that was the point of it, is to allow people—like The Sea People for instance, The Sea People was—it was kind of like a blank check from Ryan. So Ryan, I think he saw something about The Sea People and he was all about it.

And so, The Sea People, slightly contested, not a whole lot of information about them. So it just allowed me to do kind of whatever I wanted. And so that was kind of a love letter to the movie Conan the Barbarian. Thulsa Doom—big shout out to James Earl Jones—was the inspiration for The Lion.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh wow.

**Todd Harris:** Because, he was a character who was from a much older race, like Atlantians in Conan, and he ruled over like a deity, a bunch of ancient humans. So that's kind of like the idea behind that. So kind of translating The Sea People from that lore, from the hyperborean lore of Conan to Wakandan lore was the kind of interesting thing for me in the show.

**Paola Mardo:** And you had worked with Marvel for how long at that, how many years before you started Eyes of Wakanda?

**Todd Harris:** You don't really do it by years, you do it by movies.

**Paola Mardo:** Okay.

**Todd Harris:** And by that time I had, you know, maybe five or seven projects?

**Paola Mardo:** Okay.

**Todd Harris:** Because it was Ragnarok, Endgame, Infinity War, the Black Panther, Hawkeye Black Widow, like, there's a few I'm missing. It all turns into a long blur.

**Paola Mardo:** Right. Yeah, but I guess I bring this up because you came up and came through this Marvel system and really the storyboard artist's career focusing on storyboard artistry. Right? And so what was that transition to director like for you?

**Todd Harris:** Story—you know, being board artist is kind of like being a director with no responsibility, but I've been fortunate enough to be mentored by a lot of really amazing directors. Some people who went from being stunt coordinators to directors and seeing that career and helping them get that career, get off the ground. And I've seen people who couldn't get arrested by Hollywood all of a sudden turn into rock stars and being part of that process and old school Hollywood directors. And so I've been able to see how that soup gets churned.

And so there's no clear transition, there's no—being a storyboarder, especially for feature films, live action feature films, you kind of show up and you are who you are. It's—and it's weird because you get a chance to work very close to the main mechanisms of the machine: the

director, the producer, the stunt choreographer, the cinematographer, all the second unit guys, all of those people, you're kind of in the room with them.

But as a storyboard artist, it is like being in a large vehicle with someone. I'm kind of riding the flatbed, leaned into the cabin, talking to these people, and they're actually in the car with the air conditioning, all this other stuff. So they are the main principles and I am just there to help them out. So I'm next to them, but I'm not really as entrenched in them. I'm just there to support them. But I get to hear all the interesting conversations, all the struggles, all these different things. So that kind of helped inform me on a path to take towards directing.

**Paola Mardo:** That's great. I love that all your metaphors are super visual.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Naturally. I could picture that car metaphor. So now that you're in the driver's seat, right? Can you name some of the, I dunno, just working on this particular show, it's technically your baby, you pitched it. So what were some of the challenges and how did you learn from them?

**Todd Harris:** So many challenges. One of the biggest challenges was it was during COVID. So COVID was, there was a boom of production during that era. So trying to find people to work on the show was really hard. Everyone was busy or scared of dying. Because we were all spraying disinfectant on bread or whatever we were doing back then. And so—

**Paola Mardo:** You had to manage this production remotely?

**Todd Harris:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** Wow.

**Todd Harris:** And then also too, trying to find people, you're begging for work and then once you're in charge, you're begging people to work for you. But first and foremost, you have your pitch, you have your idea, you have a direction where you want to go, and now you got to convince everybody else to go in that same direction. So you populate your writer's room and I was able to get some amazing writers.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah.

**Todd Harris:** I was lucky enough, Geoffrey Thorne who's a writer and he showran his own Black Panther series for old Marvel animation. And he's a TV, you know, veteran TV writer, Marc Bernardin from, I mean, he's written a bunch of stuff, comic book writer, comic book, animation writer, tv writer, and does a podcast with Kevin Smith. And Nosipho who—brilliant woman, she was a showrunner as well as a writer and a director for her own television show for Netflix. And somehow I convinced her to help me work on this show.

**Paola Mardo:** Incredible.

**Todd Harris:** So in every one of these, every step of the way you kind of create a family. Because you guys—everyone's putting their ideas in this mixer and trying to make a new recipe out of it. And so fostering those relationships was probably the most important thing in building those departments. So not only could they talk to each other, but they can also talk through me and to make a show that felt like it had a singular voice.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Can you talk about some of the—whether it's storylines or even characters, because you guys developed new characters, right? Absolutely. Like Noni and The Lion, Jorani. Can you talk about some of those characters and sort of how they came to be? How you worked with the writers to create them?

**Todd Harris:** Well, I had themes I was always pursuing, and one of the things—you know we're always trying to find ways to break story and do something different. And I will say, *Eyes of Wakanda*, by far is the most original production that Marvel—the MCU, has put out because there's no comic book it's based on. So I was lucky enough to create all these new and exciting characters. I kind of empanted on myself to make Wakanda feel bigger.

And so you can have the cocky Wakandan, the serious Wakandan, the rebellious Wakandan, the introspective Wakandan. So we were just pursuing those themes and the characters are manifestations of those themes. What do you have with someone like Prince Tafari who is searching for a sense of identity from a place that is full of identity?

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. I feel like Noni was the same, right? She was a Dora, and there's so much pressure, I think, to be this perfect soldier warrior woman, and then she kind of breaks free from that in her own way, or questions it.

**Todd Harris:** And there's so much backstory with Noni. Noni was one of my favorite characters because she is competent in all the wrong ways to be a Dora. So...but sometimes you find out that just because the things you do aren't valued here doesn't mean they don't work very well over there.

And that's like Noni was not only—she had a voice, she just needed to find her audience. And her audience were the War Dogs. And that was a—so that kind of journey of finding Wakandans searching, that's the things you just don't have time to do in a feature film.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting. In the TV show, you have time to stretch that out a little bit more. How did Iron Fist get into the mix? I know folks got pretty excited about that.

**Todd Harris:** Well, it's weird. I love a cool character who talks all the smack in the world and does all the fun stuff and is highly skilled. So we had different ways. We had—the only thing is we have so many different story ideas that we kind of cherry picked, so if the season two ever happens, I don't want to say like, “Oh man, we had this awesome thing with this character!”

**Paola Mardo:** Right, right. Saving for season two!

**Todd Harris:** Yes. So—but Iron Fist seemed like ripe fruit for us to do because it was of all—because we wanted to do a “Marvel intersection.” Kevin loves that. He loves Marvel characters bumping into other Marvel characters. And Iron Fist just seemed like the best place because we have two secret, highly competent countries that have elite warriors that are totems for their magical avatars.

**Paola Mardo:** Mm hm.

**Todd Harris:** So it just made sense that the living embodiment of the immortal dragon Shou-Lao and the avatar of Bast meet each other in the ancient world.

[34:40 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** All right. So now's the part of the show where we start to talk a little bit about your process, and we ask guests to bring visual examples of this. So you brought physical items, can you share what they are? And also for the listeners, if you just say what it is and describe it a little bit?

**Todd Harris:** Well, process wise, I always try to keep everything simple. The more simple your process is, it could stand up underneath the weight of problems or unforeseen circumstances. So one thing I like to do is now I don't draw on paper too often, but when I do, I like to just keep a Moleskine around. So usually either a smaller one that lets me jot down ideas, and then also to keep a iPad around.

Now, it might not be my primary workplace, but it does allow me to get ideas down, and more importantly, the advantage of this is that I can be anywhere and I don't need too much technical support.

**Paola Mardo:** You're talking about the Moleskine notebook?

**Todd Harris:** The Moleskine. So the good thing about having the traditional material for professional work is that you can—you don't need any electricity. The only thing you need is a lap and a little bit of light. And I can get my ideas down, get my notes down. But more importantly for me is I need to get into a computer for searchability.

Because we go through ideas, we go through iterations, and you want to make sure that you can go back and find them easily. Going back to book number 13 from five years ago to find one idea that might be on page whatever turns into a problem. So...

**Paola Mardo:** Those are for quick scribbles or something?

**Todd Harris:** Absolutely. So—and then at that point, you know, I either take a picture of it, bring it into my iPad, or I might just reproduce it in my iPad and then at that point I can upload it to a computer to do final work. But it's always, I like to keep as few things around me as possible.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. So you say Moleskine and iPad, but then you have one more piece right there in your other hand.

**Todd Harris:** So yeah, this particular weapon is my Bic pen. Four colors. It allows you to kind of get images down. It allows you to get writing down and kind of keep things separate. You can prioritize by color, not only shape. So—and it is an easy tool that is—I can carry it around and it has a bunch of versatility also to a fun fact about Bic pens, because I love drawing in pen, is that you can shade like it's a pencil. So the versatility in one of these is just phenomenal.

**Paola Mardo:** What about when you have to erase? What do you do? Scratch it out, or...

**Todd Harris:** I erase when I'm dead!

[COMEDIC POP SOUND EFFECT AS TODD DISAPPEARS FROM THE VISUAL FOR A MOMENT]

[LAUGHTER]

**Todd Harris:** No, it's...I've been doing this long enough that I can kind of commit to my drawings. That's one of the things I do. Like, I do the painting and a bunch of different types of art, but I love drawing because it gets you to the idea very quickly and the pen gets you there even faster.

[37:44 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** I guess for my final question, I wanted to ask, I mean, even before you worked with Marvel, I'm told you were also just a fan of Marvel and comics.

**Todd Harris:** Oh Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** And so you were literally a lifelong Marvel fan who then went on to direct and create your own Marvel show.

**Todd Harris:** It's crazy.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. I mean, looking back, I mean, how does that feel? Like, you've done it. You've done the dream, I guess.

**Todd Harris:** Listen, it vindicates all those trips to the comic book shop, to my parents. You know, dropping me off at the Comic-Con with all the stuff that I'm like, "See? It paid off!" So it's—it's very gratifying. And also too, when you have a useless but specific warehouse of



information about a very specific topic, which is, like, how strong the Incredible Hulk is compared to the Juggernaut, and now you can apply it, you're like, "Man, I've been waiting for this my entire life!" So it's kind of an interesting place to find yourself that, you know, it's like being able to do the ollie on a skateboard and you're like, "Nah, now I'm getting paid for it."

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** That's amazing. But now you have to tell us, like, how strong is—or, who's stronger? The Incredible Hulk or the Juggernaut?

**Todd Harris:** Oh, it's the Hulk. Hulk every day. Juggernaut is no slouch, but by definition the Hulk's strength is unlimited.

**Paola Mardo:** I was going to ask, is there anyone stronger than him?

**Todd Harris:** There might be people more powerful than him. Thor is more powerful than the Hulk, but he's not stronger than the Hulk.

**Paola Mardo:** But physical strength, it's the Hulk.

**Todd Harris:** No. If there was going to be a bench pressing contest, you better bring a lunch.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh yeah. Oh man. And what keeps you—because you still work with Marvel?

**Todd Harris:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** What keeps you coming back and still working on Marvel stories? What keeps you excited and motivated?

**Todd Harris:** Well, one, they invite me, which is like, I don't know how I convinced 'em to do that. And two, it's, I mean, it's kind of like, what's fun about cake? The good thing about Marvel is it has so many different flavors of chocolate that you'll always find someplace you'd like to be in. And ironically enough, now, I haven't read every comic book that has ever been made, but the comic books that I tend to like and Marvel tend to adapt, we kind of agree on, and it was an unwritten agreement that just kind of happened.

So when they start pitching me ideas, I'm like, "Oh, you mean like that?" And so it's ultimately, it just comes down to it turns out you found your tribe of people who like talking about the same thing you like. That's one thing I really appreciate about Kevin. If Kevin wasn't running Marvel Studios, he would probably be talking about who would win in a fight between RoboCop and Terminator in front of the comic bookstore on Wednesdays when comic books come out, like the rest of us.

[LAUGHTER]

[40:29 - “Prox Recs Theme” with Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

**Paola Mardo:** Okay, so Prox Rec is where our guest recommends anything really to our listeners or viewers. Tends to be along the lines of what you do. So is there anything you would recommend to our audience?

**Todd Harris:** Art-wise there's—I mean, there's so many good books on art and there's so much good information. I feel like I can't contribute to the conversation, but books I love, it's like an old school book that you can never go wrong in getting is Bridgman's Anatomy. Some people learn Bridge's anatomy and didn't have to learn a shtick else after that and had amazing careers.

It's just a great foundation for the building blocks on how to do figurative art. Contemporary books—I don't know these people from a can of paint, I don't get any money for this, but Tuesday Tips by GRIZandNORM. Great practical information for anyone who wants to get into animation storyboarding or design. It's fantastic.

And for story-wise, Paul Guyot's book on Kill the Dog, which is about, ironically enough, it kind of uses the metaphor of John Wick, but it's a book on screenwriting from an actual screenwriter and it's very good.

**Paola Mardo:** So cool. Thank you, Todd, for being on In Proximity.

**Todd Harris:** Oh, thank you for having me. I will go off into my cave again.

**Paola Mardo:** Yes, and we'll see you there.

[41:56 - “In Proximity Theme” by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

**Paola Mardo:** In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media.

The show is hosted, directed, and produced by Paola Mardo.

Executive producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, and Sev Ohanian.

Theme song and additional music by Ludwig Göransson.

Patrick Epino is our co-director and director of photography.

Ken Nana is our sound designer and mix engineer.

The production team includes Brittani Brown, Isabella Miller, and Alexandria Santana.

Follow us on social media @proximitymedia.

For transcripts and more information, head to [proximitymedia.com](http://proximitymedia.com).

[VOICEOVER ENDS]