WAKANDA FOREVER: THE OFFICIAL BLACK PANTHER PODCAST
"Chapter 1: Ryan Coogler"
Final Transcript

[Wakanda A from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: In 1986, Marvel Comics celebrated its 25th anniversary. To commemorate the date, every comic from November of that year featured a portrait of its protagonist, framed by Spider-Man, Wolverine, Phoenix and assorted champions of the House that Kirby, Lee, and Ditko built. I collected a lot of things when I was a kid -- football cards, coins, stamps, bad grades.

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

But nothing meant more to me than my comics, and, in that collection, nothing meant more to me than those 25th anniversary covers. I've spent too much time trying to understand why. Certainly part of it was trying to imagine myself out of the inner city of my youth. But there was also the thing I was imagining myself into. Invocations of a "connected universe" are now cliché. But I am asking you to imagine the world before Tik-Tok and Twitter, before Angelfire and Earthlink, before Tumblrs and wikis, before everything and everyone were linked in.

[Royal Talon Fighter from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Back then, Marvel Comics didn't just feel like a connected universe, but also a secret universe, a pocket dimension where all your amazing, incredible, and uncanny heroes regaled, fought, lived and died.

T'Challa, the Black Panther, is the oldest character of African descent in mainstream comics. But he is not among that 25th anniversary gallery. He isn't even in the frame. Indeed, in the '80s when I was obsessed with Marvel comics, T'Challa was a spotty presence, making only occasional appearances in the Fantastic Four or in anthology titles like Marvel Fanfare. That the character has come to be so central in the Marvel Universe reflects the labor of a diverse group of creators ranging from Reginald Hudlin to Christopher Priest to Roxane Gay to Billy Graham. Those comic creators laid a foundation, and on that foundation, Ryan Coogler built Black Panther the movie, which in turn pushed T'Challa out of the pocket universe and into the mainstream consciousness.

[Is This Wakanda from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Ryan's T'Challa was a conflicted hero, a "good man" struggling to be a great king, one who sought to both protect Wakanda while redefining some of the country's core tenets. And still the film gave us all the set pieces we needed – the car chases, the ritual combat, the futuristic fighter jets.

[Royal Talon Fighter from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

It was the combination of moments, both big and small, the eye for both the spectacular and the intimate, that made Black Panther a great film.

Of course, it was also more than that. I'm thinking of the crowds of Black fans going to the theaters in traditional African garb. I'm thinking of the time I saw Black Panther at the Magic Johnson Theater in Harlem, and the crowd cheering and yelling at the screen.

[Crowd cheering, applause, and announcer yelling from Soundsnap.com with Foley by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

The show in the audience rivaled the show onscreen. I'm thinking of Victor Oladipo competing in the dunk contest on All-Star Weekend wearing a Black Panther mask.

Black Panther wasn't just a film. It was a phenomenon.

[Bass instrumentation by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

But when Black Panther's lead actor Chadwick Boseman passed two years later, the phenomenon became a tragedy. Chad was one of the great actors of our generation, and those of us who knew him understood that his ambitions extended well beyond that. It would always be a challenge to follow up Black Panther. But when Chad transitioned, the labor of making a sequel to Black Panther went from merely formidable to Herculean.

[Glory to Bast from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

And yet, as I told Ryan at the time, I could think of no one better suited for the labor than him. The film he has co-written and directed, Wakanda Forever, is something that pushes the genre of the superhero narrative to its extremities. Perhaps most importantly, it honors the legacy of the man who is now an ancestor and pulls from an immeasurable loss something meaningful and profound.

My name is Ta-Nehisi Coates. I spent a few years writing the Black Panther comic book. I'm a friend of Ryan's. And I had the privilege of talking to him about the journey from Black Panther to Wakanda Forever before the latter film debuts. I talked to Ryan on a break from editing Wakanda Forever while he was still clearly knee-deep in an expansive epic.

The conversation ultimately centered around something much more personal, the loss of Ryan's lead actor and friend, Chadwick Boseman. I found Ryan's thoughts funny, bracing, and sad. But, above all, I found them enlightening. I hope you do too.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Hey, Coog, I want to start by just congratulating you on a hell of an achievement, man. I don't know how you follow up that first film. And, you know, with everything that happened, which we're going to talk about, I think the best thing I can say is you did follow up on it. And so I just wanted to start by congratulating you, man.

Ryan Coogler: Man, that's kind of you to say, bro. Thank you, bro.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. With that in mind, though, I just -- I want you to do me a favor. Can you set the scene and just give us some sense of where you actually were coming off of that first film? I wonder what your expectations were going in and how you felt on the other side of it after it came out, seeing the reception, seeing how it was, all the hard work you put in. Can you set the scene for us a little bit?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah. Like, I -- Black Panther, at that point, it was the craziest thing I had ever done professionally, and at times, it felt -- it felt like I wasn't going to survive going through it because it was so hard and intense and different from things that I had done before. Like, I forget how much pressure was on us while we were making that film because there hadn't been -- you know, there was no Black Panther before it. There were other Marvel movies and, and everything that they made before had, like, worked really well, and I think before us, it was like Spider-Man and maybe like Guardians of the Galaxy II and stuff, like, you know, these movies that, that -- you know, Thor: Ragnarok, these movies that were just really, really working. So it was a lot of pressure.

Strangely, Chad was always very confident. Chad kind of always knew what we had and, in a way, that was bizarre, you know, but, but -- you know, getting to know -- like, thinking about him more, you know, he was always, like, kind of like ahead of things, you know, and had a lot of clarity as a guy. But, you know, I was a mess. You know what I mean? Like, like going into the release of that film. And when it came out, and it worked, like, as a piece of business and, like, it worked as, like, a piece of art, once we realized, like, "Oh, okay, we kind of did what we set out to do," it was like a big breath of like, "Man, that was cool." You know? Yeah. My bad for rambling, but --

Ta-Nehisi Coates: No, no, you're not rambling. I just -- I feel -- You're not rambling at all. I feel like you understating, though, a little bit because it, it didn't just work, right? Like, it went -- I guess what I'm trying to see -- could you foresee how far it actually went? Because it's not like, "Oh, yeah. Well, we were profitable. It did well," you know what I'm saying? "People said it was a good movie." You know what I mean? It went a little further than that.

Ryan Coogler: No, no, I couldn't. I couldn't. But what I will say, it wasn't as if we weren't trying to, like, do our best. Like, every day, we was trying to knock it out the park. So that was the fear. It was like, yo, either we're going to homer this or we're going to strike out, you know what I'm saying? Like, there was very much, for me, the feeling of either this is going to work, or it's not. And if it works, man, it might work big, but if it doesn't, it's going to bomb big, you know what I'm saying? It was that kind of thing. So that's what I mean, like, when I say, okay, it worked. You know, your hope, as an artist, is, like, if the audience can feel how important something is to you, and it was everything to us. So, like, the only way it was ever going to work was it was going to have to work big.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. It did work big. It worked huge. I mean, it was and is a historic film. You're going -- you're going to keep -- you're going to try to prevent me from saying this, but I'm going to go ahead and say it. It really was you. I mean, it really, really was you, and I strongly, strongly believe that, in the hands of, you know, somebody else -- you don't want to hear this, but I'm going to say it. In the hands of somebody else, there's no guarantee this would happen. And, quite frankly, when things went the way they went going into the second one, and Chad passed, you know, I know we had, you know, a bunch of conversations about how heavy that was. But, again, I feel very strongly that no one else, no one, like, there was nobody else to carry it. You know what I mean?

Like, you were the one, you know, to really, really, really carry it. And while that's my opinion, I mean, I recognize that you live with yourself every day, you know what I mean? You wake up in the morning with yourself, all your doubts, your fears, and, you know, everything. And so I'm just curious, like, how you felt even before Chad passed, knowing that, "Oh, wow, that was great.

We hit the homerun. Actually, we hit a grand slam. Now we got to run it back." Did you want to run it back? Did you know you were doing a sequel? Like, where was it in your head?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, I did, man. Like, I knew I wanted to make another one. And, you know, when I was doing my deep-dive in all of his stories, there were, like, a few characters that he would interact with. I thought, man, this is just, like, this will be -- this will be awesome. And I knew that, like, it would be Klaue and Killmonger for the first one, but Namor was, like, all over these books, and it was always really interesting. So we would talk about -- we would say, "Man, like, could we ever do Namor?" And they had, like, contractual things going on with him as a character at the time. It was, like, something that could free up down the road. But it was something that, like, if we ran it back, it would be about him and Namor, and then we would introduce Marvel's Atlantis to the fold. And this is before Aquaman came out, and, and, you know, like, this was before a lot of things. But we would talk about it from time to time.

So I was, I was excited to come back, knowing what it was, and that, that excited me quite a bit. And the second script was like -- you know, it was like a T'Challa vehicle -- it was like, okay, we set the world up. Now we're, like, going to do the deepest dive into this guy that you could imagine, you know what I mean? And that was what excited me even more because I knew Chad better as a performer and as a -- I knew him better as a guy, you know what I'm saying? I feel like I had a better attack on T'Challa as a character after making that first film. But, yeah, I got into writing that thing immediately.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: When you say "immediately," do you mean like -- so film comes out -- Like, when do you start taking notes for yourself?

Ryan Coogler: I was thinking about Wakanda and Atlantis often. Like, before we finished the movie, I would think about it. And we had our first, like, real meeting, I think it was in 2018. It was like late 2018, I want to say.

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So can you give us some sense of -- I know you and I have talked about this, but what was, what was Chad's role not just in the film, but what did he mean as a participant, as a player on the team?

Ryan Coogler: Right. Right.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What was Chad to the Black Panther franchise from the perspective of things that those of us who were not there day-to-day wouldn't necessarily see? We know he's a star. He was the star, but what else?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. It's so much deeper than that. Like, his significance to it, it can't be overstated, and there -- there really isn't anything like it, like in the industry because he was cast before a director was hired for Black Panther. Chadwick was hired for a movie called Civil War, way before they knew for sure Black Panther was going to be a movie. You know what I'm saying? And he was hired, you know, onto a white movie, you know what I'm saying, with white directors, you know what I'm saying, and white writers. Fortunately, Nate Moore was the creative executive that was, like, assigned to Civil War. So there was Nate there on set every day, but he was basically hired to play this African king, this super iconic character from the comics.

And he was basically there to bring life to the character, but what Chad was also doing was he was protecting us before us was even a thing, you know what I'm saying? Like, like, he was on set, advocating for what Wakanda should be. And he was having very, very difficult conversations, man, conversations that are not easy to have. What is T'Challa going to sound like? You know. And he's having these conversations, man. I mean, on Civil War, he had to be, like, number 10 on the call sheet you know what I mean? It was maybe even lower.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So you're saying he's not -- it's not like he's the star of Civil War.

Ryan Coogler: No, he's not Robert Downey. He's not Chris Evans, at the time, you know what I'm saying? He's a big deal. Like, he's Chadwick Boseman, and he's playing T'Challa. But he was so good in that movie, and the decisions that he made were so amazing that it seemed like T'Challa was always a thing, like, when you watch that movie. It's almost like he took the movie over in a way but you got to realize that wasn't the case. Like, he was in there having very difficult conversations with the most prolific, most powerful studio in the world. He was having hard conversations about what Wakanda was going to be, you know? And those conversations relied on his talent.

You know, Chadwick was -- you talk about Marvel being 10 steps ahead of the game. Chadwick was 30 steps ahead of the game. In many ways, he was, like, ahead of the studio, you know, like, in terms of being confident in what was going to work. So he does that, you know, and it works. And now it's like, all right, man, now that studio can feel confident about making this movie, right? And, he was a -- team player's not the word.

He came to every audition that I needed him at. Like, he gave feedback on what it was like to play across from these people, read every script, gave feedback. And it's not like personal feedback like, "Oh, this is what my character thinks." Man, you know, Chad was a writer. He was a writer. He was a director. He was an African cultural historian, you know what I'm saying? Like, like, he knew Shakespeare. He knew, he knew it all. So, these was deep-dive nose sessions. You know, it was like, "Pack your lunch," you know what I'm saying?

[TA-NEHISI COATES LAUGHS]

Ryan Coogler: "We going to really -- we going to really get into it." I was 29 when I was making that movie. Chad was like 40. He looked young, but he was a grown man. And, like, he brought a level of seriousness and earnestness, and he was more confident in me than I was in myself at the time. Like, he would come on set and proclaim, "Hey, man, this is Star Wars. Look at these ships. Kids are going to love this, man. Let's go today, people!" You know what I mean? Like, "Come on, come on, Coog, you got this." Like, on days when I'm like, "Yo, I don't even know how we going to get 16 shots in 10 hours, you know what I'm saying? Chad, you talking about Star Wars. Bro, I don't know what you talking about," you know what I'm saying?

[TA-NEHISI COATES LAUGHS]

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Ryan Coogler: But, you know, he was all these things.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: He sounds like, like he was, like, the steward basically even before there was a movie. Like, he was a steward of the character, steward of Wakanda before there was even a movie.

Ryan Coogler: That's correct. But he believed he was, like, ordained to get that role. Like, he would -- we would talk about that. Like, he'd be like, "Yeah," he'd be like, "I had it, like, in my vision journals, and I wanted to do this role if they ever did it. And I felt like I could do it." Like, it was -- he was T'Challa before Civil War, in a way, you know what I'm saying, in his mind. And I'm sure there's a lot of actors out there like that, but they wasn't Chad, you know what I'm saying? So, for us, he was like a trailblazer --

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right.

Ryan Coogler: -- and a pace car. And he made the shit real, and everybody else kind of fell in line.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So you're writing the sequel.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You obviously are picturing him. You're thinking about him as you write it. Where were you in the --

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah. It was his movie, man. Like, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. Where were you in the script when you found out he passed?

Ryan Coogler: I had just finished it, man. My last conversation with him was calling him, asking him if he wanted to read it before I got notes from the studio. That was the last time we spoke. And, yeah, so I -- you know, he passed maybe a couple weeks after I finished.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What'd he say when you asked him?

Ryan Coogler: Man, you know, give me a sec.

[RYAN COOGLER PAUSES]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: My bad, bro. My bad.

Ryan Coogler: What did he -- It's all good. What did he say when I asked him? He was tired, bro. I could tell he was tired.

I'd been trying to get ahold of him, like, for a few days, and Denzel had been trying to get ahold of him, too. So I texted him and told him, "Hey, man, Denzel said he'd been looking for you, too," because he had just did Ma Rainey for Denzel. So he called me, and I could tell he was laying down when we was talking. And Simone was with him, and he kicked Simone out because he told her he didn't want her to hear nothing that could get him in trouble with his NDA.

And she didn't want to leave him. So I could tell something was up, you know? But they was joking and laughing. And he talked about how they was planning they wedding in South Carolina and, like, how many people they was going to invite and, you know -- And he asked about my kid because he had missed the baby shower. And, and then he was like -- yeah, he didn't want to, he said he didn't want to read it because he didn't -- he didn't want to get in the way of whatever notes the studio might have or what have you. So he was like, it's better for him

to read it later. But I found out -- I found out later that he was -- he was too tired to read anything.

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: How long after that conversation did you find out he passed?

Ryan Coogler: I, I have to do the math on it, bro. Like, it was, it was maybe a couple weeks. Yeah, maybe a couple weeks. I probably could check if I ran through my calendar, but, yeah, it was probably a couple weeks.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Do you remember how you found out?

Ryan Coogler: I do. Yeah, I do. Yeah, I was at the house, and I got the call from -- I got the call from Charles King and, and Craig Kestel. Charles King is my manager, and Craig Kestel is my agent at WME. So they call because they heard because I guess all of the big agencies and managers kind of found out before it broke in the press. And they called and told me that, and, you know, I didn't want to believe it.

So I called Denzel and spoke with him, and he -- I was like, "You know, maybe it's a rumor." You know, so I was texting Chad, you know what I'm saying? You know you go through that denial, and, and with technology, I think it -- it makes it kind of easier to deny things, you know what I'm saying? Like you think, like, maybe it's a hoax or somebody saying X, Y, or Z. Let me text him, let me call him, you know what I'm saying?

So I texted him, and then I told Denzel, "Man, hey, check and see if it's a rumor."

You know, he was like, "I should do that." So he checked. He called me back. He was like, "Yo, it's not a rumor." And then my agents called back and said that the release had just been posted, you know? So that was how, that was how I found out.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So, you know, I think one of the difficult things about this film, and you can feel it when you see it, is it's very real, or I should say the thing the public sees, which is that you had to make a product that has to be consumed. But there's a real thing going on. There's a director, there's a crew, the actors, you know, mourning. And so I just want to start with you. How do you go from mourning what you just described as, you know, the steward of the franchise, a friend, to writing another script? Did you consider leaving? Did you consider not -- Did you say, "I'm out. That's it"? Did you think about that?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. Yeah, of course. Yeah, I thought about all of that. I think everybody did, bro. Like, you know? Yeah, I think everybody did. But, I mean, when you, when you -- I'm not going to lie to you, Coates, that was relatively short-lived. Everything about Chad was unique. How he lived and how he died was also unique. I realized that he was like an expert at withholding information. Like, I found out in the release that he had been sick since I'd known him.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So he was sick on the film?

Ryan Coogler: He was sick when I met him. I mean, he might've been diagnosed shortly after we met but was struggling with it when we met, you know what I mean? Like, the first time I met him was 2015. And when he passed, bro, like, I found out, like, oh, man, he was -- like, I just

went back to, like, all the things that I asked him to do, like, in the movie, you know what I'm saying? Like, you know, "Fight this dude," or, "Hang off of this thing. Jump on this pad. Jump onto this."

And, like, some days, when I would find him, doing things that were kind of inexplicable, like, we would do these things in the water where -- you know, the waterfall stuff. But it would take him, like, a long time to warm back up. Like, he would have to be, like, in a warming tent for, like, a long time. You know, I'd be like -- I'd be like, "Man, that's --" I'd be like, "That's odd," you know, you know what I'm saying? Things like that or, or, you know, some days, I would find him just, like, incredibly sad. But looking back, I'm like, "Oh, man, my mans was dying."

It's a shocking thing to realize, and it's also a thing where it's like, oh, yeah, I can't quit, if he did all of that while he was going through that. You know, this is just grief. So it's like, yeah, we got to push through.

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I met Chad, back in the mid-90s, at Howard University. We would hang out at our friend Kamilah Forbes' crib, with a raft of young artists, rappers, and dancers. Chad was kind, charismatic, self-determined, and kind of mystical. I can see him now walking across the Yard with a chew-stick in his mouth and incense in his Afro.

In 1998, he was among a group of student leaders who sought to stop the University from closing its College of Fine Arts. I covered Chad and the protest for the student newspaper, The Hilltop. A few months later, when our friend Kamilah cast him in her first student play, I wrote the liner notes for the playbill. When I was offered the chance to write the Black Panther comic book for Marvel, Chad had already been cast in the movie to play T'Challa.

And then when he died in 2020, I was asked to write a short obit to appear in the comic.

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

After Chad passed, I attended a private ceremony for him in California. There was drumming. There was singing. There was a laying of hands on the casket. There was a lot of sadness and a lot of crying.

But there was something beautiful in seeing these two families he'd pulled together – one from his days at the Mecca of Howard University and then another at this Mecca that he'd made out of Black Panther. The weight of it all was born by both families, but the weight of the latter, those who had to go on and make Wakanda Forever, was different. They would have to mourn Chad, while telling a story which had been defined by him.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So I think, like, this leads to something, and that is -- and this will kind of -- I wanted you to talk about that. Like, you're talking about somebody that was a steward of a character, a steward of a world, a steward of a franchise. You're talking about somebody that had a very particular relationship that actually went beyond lead actor both with you as the

director and writer, Joe as the writer also, with the cast and crew. It was more than that. You just made the point about how if there wasn't some real feeling of family, the movie doesn't work.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And so I just want you to just talk a little bit about whether you even considered the possibility of recasting a T'Challa, what that would've meant to ask an actor to come in to fill that role, which, as you described, is a little bit more than a -- a lot more than just a role as a lead actor.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. It's a great question, man. I mean, like, you consider everything. Like, you know, like, when something like that happens, it's like -- I was like, "I don't know. I don't think I can come back and make another one. I don't think I can do this. Like, I don't think there should be another one," you know? You know, you go through all, like, the -- you go through all of the extremes, I would say.

And, yeah, for me to say that, like, we considered recasting as an option is, like -- that's a complicated thing to even say because, because, like, with these movies, just like my job as a director, you know, I don't think people fully appreciate any job that's not their own.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. Right.

Ryan Coogler: But, like, the true day-to-day of my job is, like, you know, several hundred days of long days of getting other professionals to believe in ideas that I find truthful, you know what I'm saying? Like, that's, that's what my --. what my job is. I have to believe something enough to go convince other professionals to believe in it, as well, for an extended period of time. And the moment that I stop believing in what I'm doing, whatever end product that I'm putting out is cooked. Like, it's done. It has to be truthful for me.

And if there's any element of nope, for me, like, you know what I'm saying, like, in the process, it's my job to weed that out so that I have a fighting chance of putting something out in front of the audience that the audience can believe and not be taken out of for two hours, you know what I'm saying? While they're eating their popcorn and -- next to strangers or, or while they are at the house, and their kids are doing X, Y, and Z. They have to believe in some kernel of truth that's happening on that screen, you know what I'm saying?

And my truth is Chad was gone from the physical sense. He wasn't walking through that door. And, in the world that we created over the years, he was the guy. And for somebody else to be him, you know what I mean, for us, in the, in the world that we created, we wouldn't have believed it. No matter how good the actor was, no matter how -- you know what I'm saying? It just -- it would've been lacking the necessary truth for us to do a good job.

And the truth -- truth is the well that we pull from as artists. You know, our truth was -- our truth was loss, you know? Which is a fact of life. It's the gift and the curse of life. Heroes, great men die, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

[Ancestral Plane Intro from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I wonder --

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, what did you say to people? What'd you tell them? Because you're the captain, you know what I mean? Like, you're, head coach. I mean, it's your team.

Ryan Coogler: You talking about, like, how to move forward with the work?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes, exactly, because, I mean, you're having your thoughts, but they having them, too, you know what I'm saying?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah. What I would say to people is, like, "This is what I'm thinking we going to do, you know? What do you think about that?" Yeah, we had a -- we had a unique relationship, you know? Like, I'm not on every movie. I can't tell you what every movie is like, you know what I'm saying? I'm only on my own movies.

But I can tell you that this one was special. I can tell you that the way that the audience reacted to this was special. I think that, like, in movies where, like, world-building is involved -- because, at the time, I had made three movies. Fruitvale was based on some real stuff and based on real lives and real people, real loss in a real place. You know, with the Bay Area, you know, you turn the camera on, and the work is done for you in terms of building the world. You know what I'm saying? You just got to get the things you can control right, but everything is there. And the same with Philly and Creed, you know what I'm saying? Like, Philly's there, you know what I'm saying? Like, it's like, you know, wall, Liberty Bell, steps, you know, you know what I mean? Like, you know, we turn the cameras on, we rock.

But Wakanda's not real, you know what I'm saying? And if Wakanda didn't feel like a real place, if the people didn't feel like a real family, if Chad's character and Mike's character didn't feel like distant cousins, or Tish's character and Chad's character didn't feel like siblings, that movie don't work, you know what I mean?

And I think the reason that it works is because the relationships was real. It was real love. Chad believed in it. Therefore it caused other people to believe in it, you know what I'm saying? Therefore, when you see them acting, yeah, it's make-believe, but there's also, like, a level of, like, real commitment that's happening between the characters and happening behind the scenes between the crew.

And Chadwick was like the battery for that. But he was also, at the same time, he was selfless. Like, at the same time, he was about everybody else. And so I think when we thought about it for long enough, it was like, "Oh, yeah, we got to keep it rocking for him. We have to." Like, you know, this dude made this shit while he was dying. And did it better than everybody. Had the best accent. Had the best fight scenes. You know, while he -- while he was was trying to survive. And we knew how he felt about us, and he left it in his -- he left it in his relationships with us, in his text messages to us, you know what I'm saying, in the emails and the conversations, and also, like, in the interviews.

Like, I went back while I was going through, like, the heavy mourning process. You know, I was sitting in bed, man, watching interviews I did with him that I couldn't even remember doing because we was doing so many back-to-back.

It's like a lot of players who play with Jordan, you know what I'm saying? Like, you play an 82-game season with him, you know what I mean? And, you know, how it works is they just trying to play ball. They trying to just win games. They just trying to play with they teammate. But then, in retrospect, it's like, goddamn, you know what I'm saying? Like, I was like -- you know, I was passing the ball to Jordan, you know what I mean? Like, I sent him that screen when he hit the -- you know what I mean, when he hit the thing. Like, I had those moments.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right.

Ryan Coogler: I was the guy for six months walking up to this dude and saying, "Hey, man, maybe try it like this."

[TA-NEHISI COATES LAUGHS]

Ryan Coogler: You know what I'm saying? Like, you know, and, and having, like, the long conversations of, like, what this comic book character is thinking. And it's like, man, isn't this crazy that we get to goof off and play while, at the same time, leaving a mark that may possibly be everlasting? You know, it was a lot.

But, like, you know, he would say it in his speeches. Man, he'd be like, "Man, we got to keep going."

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Like, he would accept awards and say, hey, man, there's got to be a number two. And it was very clear for everybody who knew him that we had to -- you know, we had to keep it rocking, you know what I'm saying, but in a way that we could do it in a way we could believe, you know what I'm -- you know what I'm saying?

[T'Challa Low from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Ryan, thank you. Thank you for the time. Thank you for going to a very, very difficult place just to recall, you know, what, what this meant to you and how we got here.

Ryan Coogler: Oh, no, it's all good, bro. I mean, it's there, bruh, all the time. So, yeah, it's there all the time, Coates, so --

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: Hey, Coates, bruh. I love you, bro.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Hey, I love you, man. Good luck, man. Appreciate that, brother.

Ryan Coogler: You know, I'm looking forward to talking again.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, definitely, definitely.

[Music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Over the summer, my wife and I saw a cut of Wakanda Forever. About five minutes in, we asked the projectionist to pause the film. I don't want to spoil anything. Suffice to say it was a little overwhelming.

I thought about that moment Ryan mentioned in his interview about "truth," about Chad being gone in the physical sense. And you can feel that in Wakanda Forever, the mourning imbuing the fiction with truth. I don't think I've ever seen a movie set in a world so absurd and fantastic, that felt so very real and so very haunting.

[Glory to Bast from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

On this podcast, we'll explore all the many elements and players that helped Wakanda Forever ascend to new heights. We're still in the thick of production working on interviews we recorded with Ryan, the cast, and crew as they themselves worked to finish the film. We're following their journey, in real time, through theatrical release and beyond.

So if you want to join us and hear more, follow, rate, and review Wakanda Forever: The Official Black Panther Podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app. And tell your friends and loved ones to do the same.

To learn more about this podcast visit ProximityMedia.com. And follow @ProximityMedia @Marvel and @MarvelStudios on Twitter and Instagram.

The film will be in theaters soon. See it. I think you'll feel something like I did. And then you can meet me back here on this podcast early next year.

It'll be five years since Black Panther changed the world. I look forward to sharing what I learned about this new chapter of the amazing, incredible, uncanny Wakanda Forever with you.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[Throne Room from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Angela Bassett: Coming to the throne room on the first day, and I literally had to sit in the place where he sat, on the throne, and I had to get used to that. And what would that feel like as a mother, and why am I, as an actress, here, and can I fill, you know, fill this moment, fill these shoes?

Ludwig Göransson: How can you tie score and songs together in the world-building of the movie and tie them together as one unit and not make them feel like they're two separate things? Not making it feel like, "Oh, here's a needle drop here. Here's the song coming on. Here's --" you know? It's all flowing together as one emotion. And I think that was something that we were able, for the first time, to achieve with this movie.

Hannah Beachler: The level of research, I think, was deeper than what I did with Wakanda. There was a certain feeling, even though I'm American. I'm not African, but I understood a certain thing, right? That's my people. It's in my DNA. And so I did not have that here, and I needed to do three times as much to make sure that I was at least hitting the most basic of things and making sure that I was doing right by this culture and by the people that inspire Talocan.

Kevin Feige: You know, people who read the comics know that there's 80 years of stories with Namor that we can tap into. Where and when, we'll keep to ourselves for now, but we think that this is an incredibly iconic character that's being introduced, probably to most people, most moviegoers, for the first time, and we very much expect them to want to see more.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER TRAILER CLIP]

Queen Ramonda: We know what you whisper. "They have lost their protector. Now is our time to strike."

Riri: Let's go!

Queen Ramonda: Show them who we are.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER TRAILER CLIP ENDS]

[Glory to Bast from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Wakanda Forever: The Official Black Panther Podcast is a production of Proximity Media in partnership with Marvel Studios, Marvel Entertainment, and The Walt Disney Studios.

The series is written and hosted by me, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and produced by Paola Mardo.

Executive Producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, Sev Ohanian, and Paola Mardo. The film score is composed by Ludwig Göransson.

James Kim is our Story Editor. Our Audio Editors are Cameron Kell and Cedric Wilson. Sound design and additional music is by Pat Mesiti-Miller. Lauryn Newson is our Audio Engineer. Polina Cherezova is our Production Assistant.

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The character of the Black Panther was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever is co-written and directed by Ryan Coogler.

It is produced by Kevin Feige and Nate Moore.

I'm Ta-Nehisi Coates. Thanks for listening. Enjoy the film. I'll meet you back here soon.