

WAKANDA FOREVER: THE OFFICIAL BLACK PANTHER PODCAST
“Chapter 2: Kevin Feige, Nate Moore, Ryan Coogler, Joe Robert Cole”
Final Transcript

[FBI Bridge from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: The Black Panther first appeared in comics back in 1966. This was Marvel’s heyday – Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four, Ironman, the Incredible Hulk, the Avengers, Daredevil – all of them are products of the 1960s. You can kind of feel it, too. When I was kid, it was widely held that if you were a Black comic book fan, you read Marvel. Marvel was the real world. It was the street. It made perfect sense to Black comic book fans that cops would always try to arrest Spider-Man, that the X-Men were hated and feared, that Tony Stark would be an alcoholic, that Bruce Banner’s rage would be world-breaking.

So there was always something appropriate about the fact that the first superhero of African descent in mainstream comics would be in Marvel comics because Marvel felt real, and, in any real world, there had to be Black superheroes.

I don’t want to overstate this. The fact is that until Christopher Priest took over the title in the early aughts, there really was no definitive Black Panther run and thus no defining events which rang out across the Marvel Universe – no Phoenix saga, no Death of Gwen Stacey, no Secret Wars, no Scourge of the Underworld.

For a writer, this presents a problem. Comics are a heritage. Creators take over a title and bring their own ideas all while deepening the older and more familiar stories. So Ed Brubaker and Steve Epting bring Bucky back from the dead but as the Winter Soldier. Jonathan Hickman takes the X-Men’s outcast tradition and pushes it to its separatist extremes. Brian Michael Bendis creates Miles Morales all the while building on the legacy of Peter Parker. This is as true in the movies as it is in the comics.

[T’Challa in Heaven from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

But when director Ryan Coogler began writing the first Black Panther film with co-writer Joe Robert Cole, they didn’t have that same deep well of stories. The result is that what you see in the first Black Panther film and in Wakanda Forever are characters – Nakia, M’Baku, Namor, for instance – whose names are the same as in the comics, but whose narratives are very different.

Nowhere was this more true than in the case of T’Challa. I said earlier, Marvel felt so very real to me as a Black kid. How tragic it is that Wakanda Forever would emerge out of the very real death of Chadwick Boseman, who played T’Challa.

Wakanda Forever begins there, in death. But there was an earlier version, one written when no one involved in the movie knew that Chad was gravely ill, that was very different. We’ll hear about that later in this episode with Ryan and Joe. But first, we’ll start with the very earliest efforts to bring T’Challa to the screen.

[T’Challa in Heaven from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

This is Wakanda Forever: The Official Black Panther Podcast. I’m Ta-Nehisi Coates.

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

Heads up: this is the second episode of our show. I don't want to tell you how to listen. But if I were you, I'd hit pause right here, and go back and listen to Chapter 1. The Ryan Coogler you hear in that episode contextualizes what you'll hear in this episode, and, frankly, the rest of the show.

You can pick up right here when you're done listening. Hopefully by now you've seen the movie, too. Multiple times, even. Because we're going to talk all about the making of that movie in its entirety, spoilers and all. You've been warned.

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

Now let's meet the producers responsible for bringing Black Panther and other Marvel superheroes to the movies: Kevin Feige, President of Marvel Studios, and Nate Moore, Executive of Production and Development. I talked to Kevin and Nate remotely from their offices at Marvel Studios in Los Angeles, California.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Kevin Feige: Black Panther was one of the characters that was on a longstanding wish list when I started 22 years ago at Marvel. And, to a certain extent, I look back on that and think how happy I was and excited I was that we had reached that point on the list that we could begin to delve into -- people who watch our movies and track our movies know that we had a Wakanda Easter egg in the tag of Iron Man 2, and, by the way, a Namor Easter egg in the tag of Iron Man 2. And that, at the time, was not just us laying Easter eggs for audiences to find. It was us marking time and sort of pinning promises to ourselves of where we wanted this to go if it -- if it all worked out.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Mm. How'd you feel, Nate, when Black Panther was about to hit? How'd you feel?

Nate Moore: It was exciting. I mean, I shared Ryan's -- well, we talked a lot in even preproduction about what the movie would or wouldn't do and what that would or wouldn't mean for other movies that were cast in a similar way, obviously. There was a lot about the movie that was undiscovered country, at least in the traditional business model of Hollywood. But I do remember that Comic-Con when we showed the trailer for the first time and the reaction both from the audience and the cast, honestly, who hadn't seen anything, and the electricity in that room. And we've had some great rooms, but that was kind of a special moment of, "Wait a second. We're on to something here."

But you still got to finish the movie, which is always a longer process than you think it's going to be, and you still got to release the movie. And it was hopeful. There was good talk-back, and people seemed excited, but it wasn't until that first weekend where you really realized there was something special about that specific movie.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Kevin, where does -- where does -- like, when you think about the experience of, of what you guys went through in making Black Panther, where does that stand given all of your years working in the MCU? Can you just situate us emotionally on how you feel about that whole process from the, you know, moment of conception, you know, all the way up to the

moment that it becomes this huge, huge, massive success that, I think it's fair to say, certainly exceeded many of our expectations?

Kevin Feige: No. I mean, it's a high point. It's a high point for many reasons. We got to meet and work with Ryan Coogler, who's just one of the best individuals we've ever had the honor of working with on a movie and in this town. The incredible cast – Chad, of course, getting to, to encounter him in his brief time here on the planet. And, most importantly, of course, and something that was not necessarily the only -- I was not thinking about it from purely a political or, you know, making a statement point of view. I was looking at it as continuing to bring to screen all the aspects of the Marvel comics.

But seeing audiences around the world respond to a hero that looked like them for one of the first times and maybe, you know, the first time in the MCU in a title kind of way, was overwhelming. And we -- I don't know. One that sticks out is the early viral video when the poster came out, and a group of men looking at it and just being so excited and saying, "Is this what white people feel like all the time looking at a poster with all, you know, representations of yourselves on it?" And that became something that was incredibly -- there were all sorts of reasons that it was -- that it was a very meaningful experience for us.

And that all started in a room not far from where we're sitting now where we were developing Captain America 3 and what would become Civil War, and Nate Moore saying, "What if we add Black Panther to it? What if we use this as a way to begin to introduce the idea of Black Panther and Wakanda to the world?" And that was exciting not just because we thought it would be a great addition to Civil War but also because it would be, again, us setting the stage, making yet another promise to ourselves that we would start heading towards a standalone Panther feature.

[On The Beach from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Kevin, you mentioned earlier... you were talking about laying down these Easter eggs for Namor, and now you have Namor. And, you know, I think one of the cool things about this film is, whereas you saw this expansive experience in the first Black Panther for people of African descent, there's been this choice now by Ryan to open that up, you know, even more and to root Namor in a Mesoamerican culture, which is not canon in the comic books. Maybe it will be after this. But what did you think when you saw that take from Ryan?

Kevin Feige: I thought it was brilliant and the reason to do it. You know, there are a number of underwater heroes nowadays who've done a very spectacular job of presenting underwater kingdoms. So, yes, the reason to do it was Namor is a classic OG Marvel character and somebody that Ryan used to talk about during the production of the first Black Panther.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Mm-hmm.

Nate Moore: Yeah, I mean, you know, Panther and Namor have a very complicated history in publishing that Ryan was a fan of, that I'm a fan of, that Kevin's a fan of. And the way that Ryan approaches filmmaking, I would argue, is always finding the organic reason for that to be true, and part of that was then, okay, figuring out the reason why what was called Atlantis, what we call Talokan, would exist. And you start to sort of back into a mythology that makes sense for the character in a way that was sort of not ever really defined and therefore lacked a specificity of storytelling that Ryan kind of requires to understand how to write to.

And so, by landing in this Mesoamerican society and specifically sort of the Yucatec Mayan society of past and present, I think it gave the character and the society an anchor point that allowed Ryan to build a myth -- A, a mythology and, B, a narrative that put it on a collision course with Wakanda because both of the similarities of the two civilizations and the very stark differences in their experiences historically.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You know, one of the other new characters that we see, obviously, is Riri, Ironheart. Can you talk about just the importance of Riri in this film, and also, I think, related to that, the extent to which this film centers around women and is very much a mother/daughter story, you know, I would say? Whereas, you know, one might consider the first Black Panther actually much more of a father/son story, this is very much, you know, a mother/daughter story. And I wonder how you guys felt about that, what you, what you thought about that.

Nate Moore: Yeah, I mean, the mother/daughter angle was dictated by the reality of what we were working with once Chad passed, right? It seemed natural that the two people who would be most affected by T'Challa passing would be Ramonda and Shuri. And I don't know what other course of action there would be other than to lean into that dynamic because that is where the emotion is for the storytelling.

And it doesn't hurt that you have two fantastic actresses in Angela Bassett and Letitia Wright. So it's not like, "Oh, we can't depend on them to deliver. In fact, they overdelivered in the first movie, I would argue, and sort of... if not emotionally, at least from a talent perspective, were ready to carry the film.

I think Riri is an interesting addition to the franchise because, much like Talokan, it's a study in contrast, right? It's someone who, you could argue, is as smart as Shuri is but educated in a completely different society with a completely different experience as a Black woman in America. And so, to hold those two characters next to each other, there's -- again, there's just narrative tension in that relationship.

And so -- I'll just go back to it. Ryan, as a filmmaker and a storyteller, is interested in building the tension of people and then seeing how they pinball off each other. And so, when you have both Wakanda and Talokan and Shuri and Riri and Namor who all have these points of view that are in contrast with each other, there's magic in that if you can land on it correctly. But the female-centric vibe of the movie is just organic storytelling. Like, I guess we could've introduced more male characters and shoved them in there or figured out ways to, you know, get other male heroes in there if our goal was just, like, have more guys. But that's -- that's not a great goal to -- for anybody to have. It really is, "How do we tell the best story?"

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. How did you guys know Letitia was ready? I mean, she did an incredible, incredible job. I'm sure you guys, as producers, are familiar with her oeuvre in a way that certainly casual movie fans are not. I mean, not to say that they haven't seen her in other things, but you guys, you know, like really, really -- it's your business to know. From that perspective, how did you know she was ready to carry the weight of this role?

Kevin Feige: You know, Ryan very much believed in her based on her early auditions for Panther 1. She obviously killed it and crushed it on Panther 1 in the emotional scenes, in bringing humor to that film. So I think there was no question that she was capable of even more. I don't even remember having the conversation, "Do we think she's ready for this? Do we think she can do it?" I think we just knew that if she believed she could do it and was willing to step into it, that she could, and she did.

Nate Moore: Yeah, I think the bigger question was always, emotionally, is she ready to do it? It was never a question of talent. You know what I mean? She's so -- to Kevin's point, she's so talented. She was great in Black Mirror. She's great in everything you ever see her in. Frankly, it was, "Hey, you've just lost someone who was very important to you, as well. Are you ready to take on this thing?"

And, again, she'll say it and has said it, for her, it was about honoring Chadwick by doing this. And experientially, in the filming of the movie, I will say, incredibly prepared, incredibly passionate. Again, kind of knew what the movie was for her character in a way that always kept her as our North Star, to some degree, still funny, still charming, still all of the things that Shuri was in the first movie with just that added gravitas of going through this tragic loss.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So, Kevin, where do you foresee the world of Namor and Talokan in the future in MCU?

Kevin Feige: You know, people who read the comics know that there's 80 years of stories with Namor that we can tap into. So 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.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I would be remiss if I did not point out the fact, and I'd be a bad fan if I did not point out the fact that he refers to himself as a mutant. Is that intentional?

[Namor's House from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Kevin Feige: Yes.

Nate Moore: Yeah. I mean, it's accurate, as well, you know?

Kevin Feige: Intentional and accurate.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Okay, intentional and accurate. Finally, guys, I'm going to ask you guys just to answer something, both of you. You both are, like myself, old-school comic book fans with memories of the floppies. I got the whole library on my iPad now here, but, you know, in my office, I have all -- I have, like, a ton of floppies, and, you know, with the backboard and everything, you know? And I just -- I want you to try to think back to a time when you were kids collecting. And I wonder what the kid of you would think of this now.

Kevin Feige: I think about that every day in every aspect of what I'm lucky enough to do. Every day is surreal. And bringing these comic stories to life, again, which has now been a 22-year journey just from when -- longer, going back to working in the early days of the first X-Men film. And so much of that time -- that was half my -- almost half my life ago, was spent looking at comics and dreaming, dare I say, what if? What if we could make more X-Men movies? What if we could bring Spider-Man to the screen? What if we could eventually do The Avengers? And it's fun that the audience has responded the way they have so that we can keep -- and now finally bringing Namor to the screen.

Nate Moore: Yeah, it certainly seems like the cuts are deeper than ever. I mean, when I was a kid, and it was Superman, and there was Batman, and Spider-Man was coming in, you're like, "Well, I guess we've made it, guys. I guess that's it." But, you know, the fact that there's a

Guardians of the Galaxy movie and an Ant-Man movie, and people are like, "What? What is going on?" And, for me, it's like, oh, no, these are all characters that I've lived with in my imagination for, again, 40 years plus.

But it just goes to show that I think comic storytelling, which was marginalized for a long time for a lot of reasons, is as valid as any form of storytelling if you take it seriously and see it for what it can be, which is a genre that you can explore things with: great, fantastical ideas, big adventure, big characters, and themes that are resonant. And the great news is Marvel Comics, even back in the day, thematically, were talking about stuff. So we're just -- we're getting --

Kevin Feige: It was always there if you --

Nate Moore: That's right.

Kevin Feige: There were some people who couldn't get past a four-color, printed, two-dimensional story. They just couldn't do that, just like today, dare I say? There are people who can't get past a genre story or something that's in space, or, "People can breathe underwater? Not for me."

Nate Moore: Yeah, "That's not real. That's a theme park."

Kevin Feige: Yeah.

Nate Moore: When, really, we're just standing on the shoulders of the creators that came before us who laid the groundwork for all this stuff.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, no, I, I think it's incredible, and I just want to say, I remember back in what -- it would've been '95, '96, I was amazed that there was an X-Men cartoon.

[Wakanda from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

And so to live in this world where there's actually an MCU is just mind-blowing. Congratulations, guys.

Nate Moore: Hey, thanks, Ta-Nehisi.

Kevin Feige: Thank you. Always good talking to you. Thanks so much.

[Wakanda from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Back in 2003, I was a struggling journalist working for a newspaper on its last leg. It was not my finest hour, and, honestly, I kind of knew it.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

I wrote some profiles, did a little bit of local politics, and reviewed some music. The newspaper's owners, meanwhile, were cutting budgets and trying to push people out.

One day, while contemplating my dim prospects I saw an ad for an assistant editor job at Marvel Comics. I thought really hard about applying. But comics were mystical to me. I had no idea how they were actually made. I could never work for Marvel, I thought. So I didn't apply and, a few months later, when it was clear I was next to be pushed, I leaped instead, thus beginning one of my many bouts of unemployment which dotted the early days of my writing career.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Twelve years later, in a very different place in my life, I got an offer, out of the blue, to write the Black Panther. Comics were still mystical to me. A writer friend of mine says you have to learn how to write every book. I felt like that about Black Panther. Frankly, it's hard for me to read those early issues because I'm still editing them in my mind: trimming dialogue, changing panel count, critiquing plot points. It's not fun. It's also not very different from how I feel about all my work.

But like I said up top, comics are heritage, which means you get to see the characters you worked on, the world you lived in, rendered by other hands. You'll hear stories of comic book creators being resentful about this. But not from me. On the contrary, the beauty of reading Jonathan Hickman's take or Evan Narcisse's take or seeing Ryan and Joe's take is that I can stop editing and instead be the fan I always was all those years ago. Moreover, Ryan and Joe are working in film with actors who can breathe life into the characters, with actors who are real people with real lives and real deaths.

And that's where we pick it up with Ryan – trying to find his story, excavate his story really, from the tragedy of Chad's passing. I met up with him at a studio in Los Angeles just weeks before the world premiere of Wakanda Forever.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So I think, like, we talked before, but one of the things I really really wanted to zero in on is, obviously, there was the emotional weight of Chadwick passing, but there was the practical weight of it, too. And once the decision was made to move forward, to definitely do what became Wakanda Forever, how did you make that switch where you have somebody who is like -- you know what I'm saying, like the fulcrum of your movie, and, you know, tragically, they've been removed, and now you got to do something else. How did you make the switch? How'd you think about it? Once you made the decision to do it, you know, if you could just take me as detailed as you can be about what that process was like.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, totally, totally. So I turned in a draft that was the film that we were going to make had Chadwick not passed away, and it was a big, big movie, but it was also like a character piece, very much about T'Challa as a man and him grappling with finding himself in impossible situations and watching him navigate them. And I was really excited about it, but also, the supporting characters were there. But it was his movie, and I was fired up about that. And I was actually – one of the big reasons I was so excited about it was because the first Black Panther movie was kind of different from a lot of other, like, first films for intro characters. We, we set the world up as much as we set up T'Challa.

And T'Challa took not a backseat, but he was more of – he was not as front and center as you normally would have in a intro film. So I was like, really, really, really, like, excited to do the opposite. You know? And the script was built that way. So, when – you know, setting the emotional aside, just the practicality of, all right, now our actor has passed away. We've decided

that we want to move forward and still make this movie. So we had to make a film that worked without him. It was daunting, you know? It was daunting to think about it.

And what we realized quickly was we had to kind of maintain the same themes because restructuring it, you know, like, with having another character be the focus and having a different protagonist and all of that stuff, which would be, like, a daunting task on its own, but to also restructure the themes and the questions that the film is asking, that would have been – that would have been just impossible. You know, we would've had to shut down completely and not really use any of those other things. So, fortunately, a lot of the themes that were in that T'Challa vehicle draft were still applicable to what Wakanda would be going through if they lost that guy.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And what are those themes? Such as? Because – and I ask that for a specific question because when I – when I watched the film, like, one of the big ones that I think, and I think you told me this, is mother/daughter.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. That's, yeah, so interesting. That first script we wrote was a father-son story through and through. It was about T'Challa and his kid, and it was about a man who was so affected by his relationship with his father, being a father. But the idea was really about how he copes with loss because he lost a ton of time with his kid, you know, in having to be king and this kid being somewhere else.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: During the Blip, right?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, exactly.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: During the Blip, right?

Ryan Coogler: Exactly, during the Blip. And the film dealt with tragedies befalling people and, and T'Challa having to find a way to cope with these things, you know, and the idea of coping with loss and the idea of ritual was, like, really heavy in that script, you know? And in that script, Shuri was kidnapped by Namor, you know, and so that idea of Shuri spending time in Talokan, there were elements of all those things in that draft.

But when we lost Chadwick and, by circumstance, lost the character of T'Challa in the script that we were trying to make, it became very clear that the movie couldn't really be about fathers and sons from a plot perspective anymore. And in doing that, it illuminated a lot of things for me personally, you know, which is, like, I never made a movie that, that really dealt with my relationship with my mom, you know? Like, I had done three movies that were all kind of like, centralized of a father or a son, you know?

And I got excited. You know, I got excited to have this film be about motherhood. And once that light turned on, and it made a lot of sense for Shuri to become our protagonist, it became a movie where, like, the chief relationship was a mother/daughter relationship. And I hadn't made a film like that since film school.

So I was fired up. You know, like, I was like -- I was like, man, and it was really great. I would talk with Chadwick all the time about Letitia and about Shuri as a character, and he would – that was his favorite character in the movie, like, even aside from his own self. And, and it was really interesting because –

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Ryan, why?

Ryan Coogler: I mean, it's complicated, man. Like, I can go into it, but we looked at a lot of actresses for that role, tons of them, and they all were talented. They all were extremely gifted and skilled. And Chad is, is really – I mean, you could call him, like, a method actor, but he was very disciplined. You know, like, and he literally -- when he performs, he becomes a different person, you know? And you know Chad. Chad had the biggest smile I ever seen in my life. It was ginormous, you know what I mean? Like, it is like a full -- a full-face smile.

And when he would become T'Challa, he would kind of stop smiling, you know? Like, the smile would go away because T'Challa had all of this weight, and he was just coming over the loss of his father. And, you know, he's a politician who can't really show -- you know, like Chad, the guy's smile is, like wide open, you know what I'm saying? And when he's T'Challa, if you watch those films, you know, his smile is, like, more measured. You know, you don't see a lot of teeth, you know what I'm saying? It's like, sometimes like a half-smile, you know?

And, for whatever reason, when he would do his chemistry reads with Letitia, you would see the Chad smile. You know, like, like she could break through, like, whatever, like, preparation or get -- you know, she would just, like, dig in there, and it would -- and I noticed it. The producers noticed it, and I actually talked to him about it, you know?

And what he said was -- he said, like, "Yo, she's really skilled, like as a -- as a actor," you know? He's like, "She's really skilled. She's probably the most skilled actor that we've auditioned," but he also said, "Man, she reminds me of my people. Like, she feels like she could actually be my sister for whatever reason," you know? And, and so, you know, we casted her. And they became really close, and you can see in those scenes that they have together, it's different. You know? Like I said, it's a difference there, you know?

So it was clear to me, if we're going to keep going, it would be through her eyes, and it kind of made a lot of sense, man. Like, even with -- you know, I didn't have any control over who was taken when Thanos snapped. You know, that was different filmmakers making those calls and, and executing, like, Kevin's vision for the whole universe at large.

But I found it interesting that T'Challa went away and Shuri went away. So you can make the argument that she's never been around without her brother, you know? And how a loss on that level could just be unimaginable. So that was kind of how we went.

And, you know, Namor was a great antagonist. You know, I got notes from the studio, like, of how we should shift him. And at that point, Joe came into the process, and we were able to kind of hit those notes, make the script more concise, and put Shuri at the center of it. And once we did that, things, like, really kind of came into focus. You know? Like, Ramonda was on the throne, and Shuri was grieving.

[Mama from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

And the ritual dynamic came into play big time because the first script was based on a ritual, you know, like the whole idea of that first screenplay was that T'Challa and Toussaint were doing something that we call the Ritual of Eight, which is where the kid turn eight years old, he have to spend eight days with his father in the bush. And during those eight days, he can ask his father any question that he wanted, and his father had to answer honestly, you know?

And so now it was like, okay, well, that ritual's gone, but what ritual are we going to do for Shuri, you know? And how can I play into her relationship with who she doing the ritual? Oh, man, it would make sense for it to be Ramonda, like, that kind of thing. And then, as we were going through all those questions, you know, this new script kind of started to illuminate.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What is the work you're doing between Angela and Letitia? Like, what is the work you're doing to pull out and to highlight that relationship?

Ryan Coogler: I mean, not a -- not a lot. You know, not a lot. With, with them two in the scene, I'm usually just kind of getting out of the way.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Again, the chemistry was fairly natural.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, man. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Like, I could leave those two in the scene, they'll get each other there, you know? And a lot of -- a lot of becoming, like, a professional director is knowing when to get out of the way, you know? Like, it's the truth, you know what I'm saying? Those two are just ridiculously gifted, man, and skilled, and then kind of got each other's number. So it's not a ton of scenes where it's just them, but the one scene is at the riverbank.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: That's right. Right.

Ryan Coogler: Now, that's a scene where I knew if this scene doesn't work, then we don't have a movie.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP]

QUEEN RAMONDA: You need to sit here with me and with yourself. It is the only way you're going to heal from the wound caused by T'Challa's death.

SHURI: I'm fine, mother. You don't have to worry about me. He's gone, but I'm moving forward.

QUEEN RAMONDA: T'Challa is dead, but that doesn't mean he's gone. When that illness took your brother from us, I had to lead a wounded nation and a broken world. But I still took time in the bush. I wandered until I found water, and I sat. Then I did this ritual that I am about to show you now. I found your brother in the breeze pushing me gently, but firm, like his hand on my shoulder. It took some time, but he was there.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP ENDS]

Ryan Coogler: And they just nailed that scene every time.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Why, why is that scene so crucial?

Ryan Coogler: It's about -- it's the whole movie, you know? It's the whole movie. It's just because somebody's dead don't mean they're gone, you know? The whole ritual gives the mom the opportunity to say that directly to her daughter, who's a scientist and a realist, and those two characters are there to challenge each other, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right.

Ryan Coogler: And you don't believe it as a mother/daughter relationship if they're not challenging each other. You don't believe it as a movie that you're going to spend a couple more hours watching if they're not challenging each other.

But, yeah, it's really, like, a simple premise, like a simple idea, a simple statement. But it's kind of like a universal concept, you know, like, us as human beings trying to grapple with the inevitable, like, that happens to all of us. But there's nothing like death that can -- that can be so ever-present but also seem so unfair, you know?

Like, one of the things the film is about is how dangerous Shuri is. Like, she's the smartest person in Wakanda and designs things for their military, and Wakanda is a very powerful place. She's a heir apparent. If she's not mentally stable, you know, it'd be very bad for -- for not just Wakanda but for the world, you know, and Ramonda knows this. And she's trying to get her to confront her loss in a way so that they can move forward in a quote/unquote "healthy" way because, as the film goes on, you see that she's processing this loss in a way that's not healthy, you know, and that's dangerous.

And our antagonist shows up, almost, like, immediately after that conversation, you know? And it complicates things. And he also is having that conversation with himself, having that conversation with the world, you know what I'm saying? Yeah, it's like the first time you hear Namor speak.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP]

QUEEN RAMONDA: I am not a woman who enjoys repeating herself. Who are you?

NAMOR: I have many names. My people call me K'ulk'ulkan but my enemies call me Namor.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: The last one was this kind of beautiful celebration of diasporic culture, right?

Ryan Coogler: Mm-hmm. We have actors, filmmakers who are from the diaspora, from the Caribbean, African American, from the Continent, you know what I'm saying, from the UK. And they're all coming together, and they do this beautiful thing, and I think that explains a lot of the reaction.

But this time, like, you had the myth of Namor, you know, who is one of, if not the oldest, you know, of Marvel's heroes, certainly the oldest mutant, which is a really, really important thing in Marvel. And you got ahold of him. You got your claws into him in the most beautiful way, though, because I think, like, what you did for the diasporic culture, there is a lot of that in terms of indigenous, Latino/Latina/Latinx culture happening here in this film. It feels like you opened it up, you know what I mean? Like, you said, like, "This, this is -- you know, this is for my folks, but --" you know what I mean? There's something larger here. And I wonder what your thought process was, you know, just in terms of -- in terms of Namor?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Because, again, I think the typical thing is just to go with what's there, go with Atlantis, you know what I mean, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, and just roll with that.

Ryan Coogler: Right. Right, right.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, you made a new world.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, we did, man. Like, we were very much asking ourselves the question, "All right, what makes -- so if Black Panther is now going to be a group of films, it's like, well, what makes a Black Panther film, you know?" I would have conversations with Nate, and we settled on the idea of the Black Panther films being films that are rooted in real cultural realities, you know? So it was like, okay, they're films that take cultural specificity serious, like that not only embrace it but, like, lean into it hard. Like, that becomes our theme, and it's peppered through every aspect of the film, like deep research, deep dives and, and things that could be seen upon second viewings, you know? They're films that wrestle with the idea of colonization and its effect on us.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: So all of these things are like, all right, so this is -- like, it was literally like, "All right, well, this is it. This is what these movies are. So this movie has to have this." You know? And this is in the books with Wakanda, right? Like, it's always -- you know, it's always -- it's always some conflict, whether internal or external. There's always a threat of, of them bumping heads with somebody, you know?

And, and so, when we looked at all of that, it made a lot of sense that, you know, we had to pick a lane, a cultural lane for these people. You know, it couldn't be a catchall, and it also couldn't be something that had been done before. And then that's when we started to think about, all right, so Atlantis is obviously kind of like a -- man, I hope I'm not butchering the academics here, but it's like a Greco-Roman idea, you know, like -- you know, Atlantis, specifically.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes, yes. No, it is. You're exactly right about that. Antiquity, yeah.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah, and, and this idea of this sunken -- you know? But then, when we peeled the layers back, as with all things, you realize that every culture kind of has one. Every culture kind of has this story of people that, like -- or a place that went into the ocean, you know what I'm saying, or, like, people -- you know, it's, it's like -- it's like, aw, man, they got it in South Asia, you know, East Asia, and the Continent, the Caribbean, you know?

[Chak from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

And so, for Talokan, when we settled on this idea that they were people who, who changed themselves and moved somewhere, that, for me, was like, "Oh yeah, that's it." You know, it's a migrant story, and there's going to be some tension there between someone who had to move versus somebody who never had to, you know? So that -- whereas with Killmonger, he was moved forcibly. The African American story, we were moved against our will, you know, to a new place and forced into a new place.

But the migrant story is the decision to go to a new place and never look back and change myself, change my children. That, I felt like, "Oh yeah." Just being from California, like, I know that that's a story that a lot of people in the world are going to identify with. They had to change themselves into water-breathers to go to this place to run from all this crazy shit, you know what I'm saying? And man, what a chip on his shoulder this dude must have. You know, even if he identifies with Wakanda slightly, it's also on a base, like, "Man, y'all don't get it."

Because, you know, Namor got a chip on his shoulder in the books, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right, right.

Ryan Coogler: And we were trying to find, you know, what's our movie's explanation for his chip? What's our thematic explanation for what this dude is dealing with?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Coog, the work is in service of something. You didn't go and just say, "Let me just cast indigenous --" you know what I mean? With Chad, you didn't say, "Let me just cast a Black dude who is --" The significance of it is there, you know what I mean? And so you were talking about communities who historically have been underserved, poorly served, exploited, etc., you know, by Hollywood and by pop culture in general. And you're now bringing a high, high level of craft to those communities.

That's what I see as the observer, right? So it's like a -- it's a -- it's a particular, particular service, you know what I mean, this is beyond what we just call quote/unquote representation, which, you know, good film/bad film.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I wonder if that ties into your thought process. Like, are you thinking -- obviously you're thinking about the fans, of course, right?

Ryan Coogler: Mm-hmm.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I have no other way to say this, but are you -- in your mind, is it, "I have to perform at this level for my people, too"?

Ryan Coogler: Wow. [laughs]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And you can define "my people" as big as you want to, by the way, you know what I'm saying?

Ryan Coogler: I know what you mean. Yeah, yeah, I understand. I played football before I made movies, and I would write -- I would write my family's names on my cleats, you know? Because it's like I don't know what I'm personally deserving of.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I know exactly what you mean. I know exactly what you mean.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. You know, but they deserve it all, you know? So, like --

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. It's like we fight harder for other people for some reason.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, man. Yes. You know, movies are also like a form of time travel, man. It's funny. I was talking with my editors, and we were watching the film. And we watched the film hundreds of times. Like, we watched it to the point that, you know, we know it by heart. We're, like, saying Mayan words in our sleep, you know what I'm saying? And, for us, the sacrifice is we don't get to watch it for the first time when it's finished and say, "Whoa!" You know what I'm saying? "How'd they do that?" That's what we sacrifice.

And we said to ourselves the other day, you know the film Men in Black, like the neuralyzer? That thing they flash and it take your memories away. We was like, "Yo, I wish we could, like, neuralyze ourselves and just watch it, like, as our eight-year-old selves," you know what I'm saying? Because I think that we chasing, more than anything, like, a feeling, the feeling that I got when I watched Jurassic Park for the first time or Terminator 2 for the first time and the feeling that I had while walking out of the theater, you know? And you want to give that feeling to somebody, you know what I'm saying?

And, yes, watching those films as a Black man is complicated. Sometimes you the side character, and you get ate by the dinosaur, you know what I'm saying? Like, like, I remember feeling it as a kid and saying, "Aw, man, this film is great, but, man, we kind of got played in this," you know what I'm saying?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: You know? Or, like, that was the story of me in film school, bro.

[Wakanda from Black Panther Score by Ludwig Göransson]

They show you these masterpieces, and they are masterpieces. But I'm also a Black man watching this.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: You know? Like, I can't let that go. You know? So, yeah, like, who it's for is like for people -- it's for everybody, but it's also for people who hold both realities.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So we're supposed to end here. But one of the best things about journalism is you think you know the story, but if you're doing it right, the narrative that emerges is always deeper, more complicated, and more nuanced than you think. The end you theorize is almost never the end that actually emerges.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

In this case, what emerged for me is that Black Panther and Wakanda Forever were not films that were made, so much as they were built. If Ryan's the architect of the MCU's Wakanda, Nate Moore was Wakanda's developer. It was Nate who called on Chad, Ryan, and Joe Robert Cole. It wasn't until I started this project that I realized how intentional and consequential these choices were. You'd be hard pressed to find another project of this size in Hollywood's history that was conceived of, developed, and led by Black men.

Joe joined Ryan and me in Los Angeles to talk about this tremendous moment in Hollywood history. I wanted to ask Joe about what it meant to work on a project where everyone of consequence spoke the same language.

Joe Robert Cole: Growing up I never saw myself ever as kind of a hero, certainly not a superhero. And so you're -- one, you just, like, the excitement of creating, the excitement of this,

of Wakanda, like, just the idea of the world-building of that was something that was so inspiring to be a part of, and daunting because you don't want to screw it up. But then the thing with the first film that really resonated with me, also, that I drew from was this idea of what it -- and, Ryan, I remember we talked about a lot of things, but I remember us talking about being African American and how we were raised to see Africa.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes.

Joe Robert Cole: And, and, like, just that shared experience of, like, how we both have these views of, on either side, that are shaped by non-Black people and, and what that is and how that could shape these two, our antagonist and our protagonist. Like, that's, that's really -- was so interesting to me and so personal.

Ryan Coogler: And people don't realize how much of a departure, like, MCU T'Challa is from the -- from every time you open a book. And I remember Panther 1, there was a decision that had a ripple on what this movie is, And we were going back and forth like, "Yo, this movie got too many characters in it, you know what I'm saying, straight up. Like, who can we pull out? You know what I'm saying?" And it was like, "Hey, man, what if we took Ramonda out of this movie?"

And I remember talking to Joe and saying, "Hey, man, this -- " I said, "This don't feel right to take her out. Like, I can't explain why it doesn't feel right." And I was thinking about plot and X, Y, and Z. And then Joe said, "Hey, man" -- very calmly, over the phone, he said, "Bro, you want him to have his mom." I didn't say nothing after that, and he said, "Bro, every time my mom touch me on my chest, I feel safe."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Damn.

Ryan Coogler: It's a deep thing to hear from your co-writer, you know what I'm saying? It's, like, a profound, like, human truth, you know what I mean?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: So, so, so all of that came a lot of our approaches with direction. You know, we cast Angela out of that, you know what I'm saying, out of that idea. And this film is all that, you know, the second one, you know? It's all that idea. And it just reframed a lot.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Do you remember that conversation?

Joe Robert Cole: Yeah, I do remember.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What were you thinking about?

Joe Robert Cole: I was -- I mean, he said it. We were trying to figure out the best version of the film and trying to do the right thing and make the best choices and be personal and follow our hearts and all those things. And, you know, my mother -- my mother and my grandmother, and, you know, I am who I am because of them, so...

Ryan Coogler: Joe wrote a specific scene with Angela and Danai. And there was a line I remember of Okoye saying, "Yo, I've given everything," And me, I would've never wrote that line because, for me, I couldn't see Okoye saying that to Ramonda in that tribal council but it was important for her to say it because Okoye would say that. And it was like, oh yeah, sometimes

people say shit they probably shouldn't say at certain moments to certain people, you know what I'm saying? But that's like reality, and it unlocked something in that scene.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP]

OKOYE: Ndingathetha, Kumkanikazi? [Permission to speak, Queen?]

QUEEN RAMONDA: You may.

OKOYE: Ndiyacela [I beg of you], I have given everything. Let me die serving my country and that throne. Ndiyacela, Mama [I beg of you, our Mother]. Allow me to make this right.

QUEEN RAMONDA: Make it right? I do not know if my daughter is alive or dead.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP ENDS]

Ryan Coogler: I mean, it's beautiful, bro, like, to be able to have the room for collaboration because the world's just realer that way. And me and Joe, we get along, but our lives are not the same. Same with Nate, you know what I'm saying? Like, we all three Black people, but our experiences are very different, you know what I'm saying?

Like, and it's helpful to be able to say, "Hey, man, what if this happened?" or, when you passing the script back and forth, you know, you run with something. You see it, and it's like, "Oh, shit." To have that is great, man. But I did not cast Chad. I did not pick Joe. These are, like, decisions that I inherited. And, man, like, I'm truly grateful, is the truth.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. I got to -- one, one think I would ask you guys to do, which is kind of -- you know, I don't know that you guys are prepared for this, but it just occurred to me listening to you both, you both have highlighted the uniqueness of the situation, and I think it's quite clear. You got a Black exec, you know what I mean, who hired you, Joe. Actually, you know -- you know, along with Kevin, cast T'Challa. That's Nate. Nate was very much responsible for that because I've heard him talk about that. And then brings you in, so you come into a situation, right, that's actually well set up?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. Yeah, 100%, yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You were very, very, very well set up. You then, you know, hire other folks. And so now, now you have a collective of folks who feel the story in a -- in a way, like, obviously, craftsmen at the highest level, but also feel the significance of it, you know, in, in a particular way. I wonder if that has given you guys any insights on the rest of Hollywood, and I wonder whether it has done anything in terms of your expectations. Thinking beyond yourselves, even thinking about young, young filmmakers, etc., like, I wonder how you guys think about, everything else, knowing that.

Ryan Coogler: I've actually had enough experience in my 36 years of living to be able to recognize special situations, special circumstances, special people. I've come across them a few times, you know? And Panther was, like, special in so many ways, man, that, that whenever I'm working on it, a lot of the anxiety I have is because I know that there's a chance something like this might not ever happen again. Straight up. And Chad knew it more than anybody.

So, like, what I do when I'm dealing with other companies or other situations, and, you know, as I get older, I deal with more, I try to say, "Look, Panther's one of" -- you know, Panther's Panther. If I walk in the door with them type of expectations, walk in the door expecting Feige sitting across, you know what I'm saying, the other chair or if it's somebody saying, "Yeah, we got a writer on this project, and it's Joe," you know what I'm saying, like, that ain't how it works. And I don't know if that's how it should work, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: But shouldn't there be more of these? I'm not -- and I'm not -- look, I understand it's a specific...

Ryan Coogler: It would be nice.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: But it's like, what you're basically saying, it's not a diversity conversation.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, this is a craftsmanship and a deep knowledge of a culture conversation. And they can walk in, and they know they're going to have other people like that, and this feels original in that sense. You would think there should be more of that, right?

Ryan Coogler: There's more. I think there's more coming.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right.

Ryan Coogler: Like, I do think that -- I do think that, like -- what we were able to do has -- has made an impact. Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right, right. I just want to ask in the most general sense, what is the significance of Nate Moore?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, without Nate, I'm not standing here, you know? Because Nate called me. And first thing I asked him, I was like, "Hey, yo, are you Black?" you know, over the phone because he called and was like, "Hey, yo, T'Challa this, T'Challa that," you know what I'm saying? I was listening to him, and I was like, "Oh, I think this a Black dude on the other end of the call."

So I just asked him because, like, your worst nightmare is going into a situation, making a character whose Blackness is so fundamental to why he's a thing, you know? And you don't have anybody who knows what that means in a position of power. I'm not sure I would've done it if that wasn't the case because it never feels good to be the only Black person in the room. Trying to make something like this without somebody there, for me, it would've been impossible.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Why? I think we understand collectively, but I want to tease that out. Why is it important for you not to be the only Black person in the room?

Joe Robert Cole: There's something beautiful about being in a room with other Black folks and having shared experiences but different points of view because you're creating not in a vacuum where people are looking at you as the, "Well, what is it?" And you're going, "Well, it could be a lot of things." It would be great to have someone who has a shared experience to be able to bounce it off.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Especially in the position like what's Ryan's talking about, these are big, big movies, and having somebody who really understands where you're coming from to be able to even -- Nate can translate. He's the bridge in that way.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, I wouldn't be here if that wasn't who called me.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: You know?

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Outside of comics, for all of my original works, I've had a Black editor. There is simply no way I'd be where I am if this weren't the case. This isn't a brief for some sort of magical or, god forbid, genetic invocation of race. This is about shared culture and shared history. It's about having a partner who gets your references – the Red Summer, the Double V campaign or George Jackson – and can build on them. That last part is so key.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

When you're a Black writer in a room with a Black editor, or Black director in the room with a Black producer, the possibilities are boundless. Ideas ping back and forth with each of you adding new ones drawn from a shared well of symbols, metaphors, and narratives. But when you're the only Black person in a room, you're just trying to bring everyone else up to speed. It's like opening a soul food joint and having to explain cornbread to your whole staff.

And that's not just true for Black people. At the genesis of any successful project rooted in a collective experience – be it the Irish experience, be it the Jewish experience, be it the LGBTQ experience – you need authors who know that experience, who've seen its possibilities and its limits.

The reason the Black Panther movies work so well, I'm convinced, is because its authors understood that need. That's not race. That's heritage. That's reality. That's life.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[Funeral Ceremony from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Now, I'll admit, I love talking about writing. It's close to my heart. But the true mystery of these films, for me, is the spell they cast – the music, the setting, the acting. Next week we'll hear about that from some of the people who make all of that happen.

Production designer Hannah Beachler...

Hannah Beachler: I wanted to infuse everything with Chadwick's memory. Paying tribute to him and paying tribute to the character that changed film.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Director of photography Autumn Durald Arkapaw...

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: How do you light the deep ocean? How do you show a city, a culture? How do you make it feel real? These people are also talking underwater. How do you do that?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And the incomparable actor, Angela Bassett.

Angela Bassett: Yeah, when you get an opportunity to pull from a real place and you really have an opportunity to reach out of that screen and pull at someone else's heart and imagination. That's what you hope to do every time you step up to the plate.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I'll be back next week with another chapter of Wakanda Forever: The Official Black Panther Podcast.

If you like the show, be sure to follow, rate, and review it on your favorite podcast app and tell your friends and loved ones to do the same.

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[Welcome Back from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

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

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 and streaming only on Disney+.

I'm Ta-Nehisi Coates. Thanks for listening. I'll meet you back here next week.

[Welcome Back from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]