

WAKANDA FOREVER: THE OFFICIAL BLACK PANTHER PODCAST
“Chapter 3: Angela Bassett, Hannah Beachler, Autumn Durald Arkapaw”
Final Transcript

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

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: There’s a lot to break down in Wakanda Forever – the arc of old hands like Nakia and Okoye and newer additions like Namor and Ri-Ri Williams; the way co-writers Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole forge an adventure epic from the ore of genocide and enslavement; the mother-daughter story between Shuri and Queen Ramonda. But what made the set of Wakanda Forever different was that it wasn’t just a set. It was a wake. It was a repast. It was therapy.

Maybe there’s another big budget sequel, where the lead actor died so close to production. But I can’t think of one. In our first episode, we talked to director Ryan Coogler about how he personally bore that weight.

On this episode, we’re going to expand that conversation in hopes of understanding the way in which a fictive mythical grief came to be informed by a very real one. We’ll learn how Wakanda and Talokan were built, by talking to production designer Hannah Beachler and director of photography, Autumn Durald Arkapaw.

But first, actor Angela Bassett.

My name is Ta-Nehisi Coates, and this is Wakanda Forever: The Official Black Panther Podcast.

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

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Angela Bassett has seen a lot in her career. She’s shifted from iconic role to iconic role – from Tina Turner to Betty Shabazz (twice actually) – with grace and aplomb. But she’d never been on a set quite like this one, where reality in the form of Chadwick Boseman’s death met art in the form of King T’Challa’s passing.

As she once again graced the screen as the regal matriarch Ramonda, I wanted to know how she managed the transition, how it informed her performance, how she mourned both on camera and off, and what she felt returning this time, not merely as the mother of a king but as a Queen in her own right.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Angela Bassett: I guess it’s like bittersweet in a way because you know why now you’re not just Queen Mother but Queen. You know why you’re in this position, but also you are queen, and the excitement as an actress, you know, as a woman of a certain vintage, you’re like, "Ooh, okay!" You know, as an opportunity, when you’re ready, it’s like, "Oh, this is good, and this is juicy." Oh, you long for these kind of moments, you know, and these kind of roles. I hadn’t read any of the earlier script, and I hear maybe there were about five different iterations of it before we landed

where we are. But, yeah, you — that duality, the duality of life, the bitter and the sweet, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: How'd you get to queen?

Angela Bassett: When you think about the story and you're looking at the script, okay, it may be — you know, it's Marvel, it's based on a comic book, all of that. But it is a mother. It is a queen. I understand mother. I had to get to queen. You know, how does she hold herself? You know? Just ground yourself in that which you understand, motherhood and love because I think that's, you know, that's what will translate.

You know, I give a lot of credit to Ruth Carter and the costumes that she placed on me, very different, you know, and how it feels to dress in these garments and with this headdress and these set pieces. And even more so in Wakanda, she really stepped it up from the first one. And then to enter the space and to look around and to, to really gaze at it and to wonder about it and to call it home and to make it home.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: There's a moment in the film that I just keep thinking about — where you say — and I'm not going to try to quote you because I'm going to mangle it, but basically the end part of the quote is, "My entire family is gone." It feels almost like you're pushing out of the film and into reality because, obviously, we're thinking about Chad in that particular moment, and then we're thinking about the fictional aspect of what the story is.

Angela Bassett: Exactly.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What were you thinking when you said that? Like, what were you pulling from? Were you thinking of Chad, or what was it?

Angela Bassett: Yeah, absolutely. I was — it — very insightful, both of those things. Of course, Chad, and I remember 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 — fill this moment, fill these shoes?

And the entire throne room has the Dora Milaje up and around and all the elders sitting around. And you just think about this a great weight for this woman, and this woman has to lead this nation. This Black woman has to lead this African nation. Yeah, it's — you know, you think about the responsibility, to me, Angela, the actress, on this throne in this moment, and then you look around, and it's so — as if the country or the people, there are really people there — it's a beautiful space, and they're waiting for leadership.

And as the first day on set, they are waiting, as actors, for leadership, how to be because we all miss our dear brother. But now, you, Angela, are driving this scene. And then, also, in addition to that, there is this sort of theatricality. So it was a moment of feeling — you know, usually they say less is more, you know, on film.

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

But in this moment, it felt very theatrical, as if I were on the stage, a stage. So it was okay to express in a big way, in a deep way these feelings and to really go for it and more being best, I hoped.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP]

OKOYE: 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.

M'KATHU: Perhaps we are being too hasty. She raised a spear against her own husband for Wakanda.

QUEEN RAMONDA: Where is her treacherous husband now? But in a place where she can visit if she wished. Mine is with the ancestors. I am queen of the most powerful nation in the world, and my entire family is gone. Have I not given everything?

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: It's a killer moment. It really — I mean, the performance in total, but that, that moment specifically is the one that really sticks with me.

Angela Bassett: Right, because she's lost her husband and her son and her daughter, 360 degrees of loss she's going through. So there might be a bit of anger.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. No, that makes sense. And I think, as viewers, what we also bring to it is, even though this is Wakanda — well, I'll say as this viewer. You understand how perilous a concept family has been for Black people.

[Queen's Blessing from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

And so I understand that, these are Black people in Africa, not necessarily African Americans who went through the slave trade, etc. But nevertheless, the weight of that, the loss of, you know, a son, the loss of a husband, and what looks like, at that moment, the loss of the daughter is just, just so huge, you can feel it. Like, you can really, really, really, really feel it.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

You said something earlier that I wanted to go back to. Obviously, you're Queen Mother Ramonda in the first Black Panther film and here in Wakanda Forever, and you talked about leadership. And I wonder if you felt that sense of — or that need, that seniority, and let me just throw something in here, that maternal need to lead in this film.

Angela Bassett: Of course, yeah, I feel it every time I step up on the stage in whatever capacity, whether it's lead or in a supporting capacity, there's always an opportunity to exhibit your craft, your professionalism, your experience, all of that is an opportunity to lead. Because people are always watching you, you know? Somebody's always watching you.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right.

Angela Bassett: But I take it. I love the craft. I take it very seriously, and there are moments to have, like, a great deal of fun in it, and there are moments where we just have to focus, and all the different aspects have to come together to try to be on one accord, to attempt to be on one accord, to get to that finish line because we want to tell the same story in the best way possible.

You know, we have to look toward our leader, our director, our able-bodied director in Ryan, of course. But sometimes it's not the director. Sometimes it's that actor in that first seat that you look toward, also, like, "Who's steering this ship, and are we going to reach our destination?"

And we had that leader in Chad, in how he conducted himself, his professionalism, his readiness, his competence, his excellence, his talent, his availability, his preparedness. All that was on display. If you looked at him, oh, he showed you how you ought to hold — in what way you ought to hold yourself. I attempt to do that for others and for myself, as well.

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

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. And sometimes you have the text, the words, the opportunity to really do that. To really do that. And with Wakanda, we do.

A lot of that, it has to do with the reality of our moment, but also I think — I know, with Ryan as director, he surrounds himself with strong women, you know? The voices, the characters are not something so far from him. And so it's in the words. It's in the story. It's in the direction. It's in those who are surrounding, you know?

And nobody will go to bat for you like your mama, you know? So, whether it's Autumn, our amazing director of photography, who filmed this movie, or Ruth with these costumes. I don't know how she did it. When you see the, the specificity within the various tribes and Hannah, the specificity in the detail of each and every set, even down to the lingua, the language, the script that you see written here and there on the ship or in the throne room.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

And, and of course it's made mention, what people have seen on the side of the building as we are, you know, laying our — laying our dear brother to rest.

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

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: One of the most striking scenes in Wakanda Forever hits us very early, and, again, we find ourselves at the intersection of myth and reality. We see T'Challa's homegoing. Everyone is in white. There's drumming and dancing and a coffin carried by the Dora Milaje.

And then everything slows down.

[MUSIC SLOWS DOWN]

The music breaks, and you see a troupe of dancers almost frozen in time. Above, a mural with the face of Chadwick Boseman appears.

Next to it, an inscription in Wakandan reads "The Panther King Forever Lives In Us And Rests With the Ancestors." The ceremony ends with T'Challa literally ascending and leaving us in the wake of his passing.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

That scene is the result of the hard work of the entire Wakanda Forever crew, but it owes a lot to production designer Hannah Beachler and director of photography Autumn Durald Arkapaw.

[I'm In A Cave from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

It was Hannah who laid the foundation for Wakanda in Black Panther. In fact, Hannah has worked with Ryan Coogler on all of his films, since Fruitvale Station. Autumn, for her part, was working with Ryan for the first time, but having lensed the Marvel television series Loki, she had some sense of the MCU's grammar.

Still for both, Wakanda Forever, was a different beast. Like everyone else, they were in mourning, and, from it, they had to make art.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: It's a pleasure to be here with both of you, Autumn and Hannah. Autumn, had you ever met Chad in any other capacity? Did you guys ever cross paths?

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: No, we didn't actually. I interviewed for some projects he was on, but I had never met him.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: To come on to Wakanda Forever was to come on to a family in mourning and very, very real mourning while, at the same time, making a film that was suffused with mourning. I'm wondering how it was for you to come into that. Had you worked on a project like this? Had you seen a situation like this before? What was it like?

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: I don't think I'll ever work on a project this unique. I think because he was such an amazing person and they had such a great experience on the first one — like all the heads of department are very close. They're all a really tight-knit group. They were always celebrating him in the happiest way, like telling stories about him or wanting to do a great job for him. So I always felt like that part of it, as far as mourning, was in a happy place. And even the scenes that celebrated family mourning over the character, were done in a beautiful way where it was, like, remembering how good of a person he was and that energy that he brought to set.

Ryan always speaks of how he made him a better director and a better person. So, when someone talks about someone like that, it's very impactful. So I'm coming on, you know, inserting myself into this new group, and wanting to pay respect but also to do good for the new people because they already have something built. They've told this story before for the first time. They had to create this from scratch, and now I'm coming in and we're telling kind of a new part of it, but the energy was always lovely, and, you know, we have some very impactful scenes where I got emotional but in a good way because I think everyone was —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Which ones? Which ones?

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: Oh, the end for sure.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. Of course.

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: And then when Lupita and Bashenga Square — Lupita's speaking to Okoye, when she's talking about him, and you could see, like, on the day when we were shooting it, she was actually talking about him, as well. Like, that's how I felt about it because —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: About Chad, about T'Challa and Chad.

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: Yeah. Like, they were both kind of similar. I got emotional. It just felt like a heavy — a heavy thing to do good for everyone that had known him prior.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP]

OKOYE: After Thanos' attack, when you left without saying a word, it hurt.

NAKIA: I regret not being there with all of you. It was not easy. He was king and Black Panther to everyone but to me, he was everything, my T'Challa.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Hannah, how did you find out Chad had passed, and how did you process, mourn, and work all at the same time?

Hannah Beachler: I got a phone call. Someone had called me. I can't even really remember. I just remember like, "This isn't real," like — you know? When someone tells you that, you kind of go through a, like, "Okay, this isn't..." I don't know. Because I'd been through this before, and I was like, "Okay, this isn't real." So there was a little bit of denial, and then I kind of got more phone calls and understood what had happened. And, that's how I found out that he had passed. And it was just — all I could do, at that moment, I think, was really think about Ryan because I just wanted to make sure he was okay, and I wanted to make — I knew that that — and everyone. It was going to be incredibly hard to move forward.

I guess, for me, it was making people comfortable in their grieving, if that makes sense, but also the celebration of him. And I wanted to infuse everything with Chadwick's memory, paying tribute to him and paying tribute to the character that changed film in a lot of ways, changed how we thought about what its potential is in the world and what it means to young people when they see these things. So I wanted to make sure that he, he was always there in the way that I knew how.

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

So, you know, in the details, in the words, in the structures, in the colors, in the everything. And I think that that's how I kind of got through it a lot, right? I think that's sort of how I made sure that he was still there and will always be there because film is forever.

Again, the celebration of him and a lot like how we celebrate New Orleans when we second-line, which oftentimes people think, like, "Oh, it's a fun second line," and it's actually a jazz funeral.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Funeral. Yeah.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

Hannah Beachler: It's a grief, but it's also a joy of having known someone, of having seen the impact their lives have had. And I think that, for a lot of Black people in the United States and in the diaspora and on the Continent, that is, as I was researching how people grieved their loved ones within the diaspora all over the world, I kind of found that we all kind of have that in our DNA, that same way of passing someone on to the ancestors.

North Triangle, I think, is where it really got me, with seeing everybody come down in white and hearing the music...

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

... and seeing the celebration of life and, and how hard it was for the actors, not just in the scene but thinking about Chadwick is when I kind of had my little moment, had my breakdown a little bit of, like, this is really real now.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Autumn, there's this scene I think about, where various, you know, foreign powers – I think it's the French or whatever – are trying to get Wakanda's vibranium. And they go into the city, and out come the Dora Milaje, and my recollection is that they kind of come out of, like, shadow almost. So, chiaroscuro is, like, when you use a lot of shadow in a painting. A lot of the old masters would use it, and it has, like, this effect of just contrast because a lot of times, they would use these, like, colors that really, really popped.

But they kind of just sort of come out of this shadow...

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

And it's like this real, like "aw, shit" moment.

[MUSIC SWELLS THEN FADES OUT]

So one of the things I'm always interested in is there are these moments in the film where it's like, I have to convey badassery, you know what I mean? But what does that mean to you technically?

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: Well, number one, that set was fun. Like, I remember when we talked about that set — and Hannah knows this, she's smiling — because I'm big on texture and light, right? So she, she would come in. She'd build something, and then she'd be like, "I know you're going to like this," you know, she'll come over and talk to me. She's like, "Autumn's going to like this," and, "Let's give her a ceiling," or, "She's going to love the wall texture, and let's poke holes in the windows," you know?

We have so much action in that set. But why I feel like that scene looks so amazing is because there's so much going on there, right? Not just in the space but the people in that space, and when you walk into a space as an actor, and you're being given something interesting and powerful, and the structure's made out of stone, and that's powerful, and then there's texture in the wall, and there's levels and stuff, they get excited and then I get excited. And then, you know, you have that lighting.

So, Ryan actually — he asked for that specifically. He wanted them to come out of the darkness there. So it was just making sure that, on the day, giving him a type of shaping of light so they could actually do that in camera and walk out. And then we darkened a little bit behind them to make it more dramatic. But, yeah, he's very specific, like, with certain moments that he wants certain things to happen with camera. So you either know about them ahead of time or you're setting yourself up for just, like — you know, you want to make sure on the day, you can give him what he wants. And when he's in the moment, and he can see people in the space, that he can ask for something, and you can give that quickly with the tools that you have in the set.

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

Ta-Nehisi Coates: We obviously have a new antagonist in the film in the form of Namor. But this is a very different Namor. This is not the Namor that I, you know, grew up, certainly, reading about. He's a very, very different mythos. He is rooted in the mythos of the indigenous peoples of the Americas or Mesoamerica specifically. There is certainly elements of struggle, of genocide, of enslavement that have now become part of his origin. I was excited about this because I thought Ryan opened up the mythos by doing this, that he actually made the story more universalized. And, you know, when you usually hear that word, you think "white people." But he actually did it in another way.

What I'm trying to get to is how you guys created Talokan, like how you, you know, drew from all of the variety of influences. How many books did you read? Who did you talk to? What did you do? Because it feels so real, man, and it feels respectful. It feels reverent. It doesn't feel dashed off, like, insert indigenous culture here. It feels like you guys really did your homework. And so I just — you know, I'm, I'm fascinated by how that was done.

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: Hannah?

Hannah Beachler: I mean, it was a lot.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: That's Hannah's specialty. I'm going to let her take that one.

Hannah Beachler: I mean, it, it ended with a 400-page Talokan bible. And just like the last time was Wakandan bible, and so I did it again. And we found a wonderful expert, Dr. Gerardo Aldana. I can't even thank him enough. In my first conversation with him, I said, "Who am I to be able to do this? I'm not of the culture. I'm really nervous about this, and it's just time to study."

I mean, like, we would be on Zoom, and he'd be on his board in his classroom, you know, teaching us about reading hieroglyphs, talking to us about all the proper history of Maya. 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 still. 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 Talokan. So I needed to understand, going back to 900 AD...

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Mm. Mm.

Hannah Beachler: ...where they started and why. And from 900 AD in Chiapas, Mexico, after the death of Pakal, a group of people migrated to the lowlands. That would be Tulum. And they then were there until the Spanish came. At that point, and I believe it was 1792, is when they went into the water. So we tracked them for 200 years in the water until they ended up in the Puerto Rican Trench, and they were in the hadal zone, which is about 12,000 feet down.

So that's where we placed them. That's where they went. We tracked pretty much everything about them because the people in Palenque and Chiapas were considered the water people of Maya because they contended with Agua Azul, which is this beautiful blue river that runs through Palenque at that time. So they were able to make rubber. So they could have sort of waders, if you will, at that time. And so, again, you're talking 900 AD and before.

And so we just kept going and going. I needed to know everything, and then, from that moment, we started their timeline.

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

From the minute they go into the water, we started their timeline.

And I'd sit with Ryan, and I'd go through it with him, and here's how I think they got here, and here's why they think they did — then I did a 300-year look at their population growth around the entire ocean, and then I did a 200-year look of the evolution of their architecture, and then we did a 200-year look at the evolution of their technology based in the ocean.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: It's incredible. It's incredible.

Hannah Beachler: Every piece of painting that you see in the memorabilia room with Namor is a story told about him becoming a king or K'uhulajaw of Talokan, and K'uhulajaw is "one with the with the loudest voice," and not necessarily a king. He's also K'uk'ulkan.

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP]

QUEEN RAMONDA: Who are you?

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

[BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER CLIP ENDS]

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

Hannah Beachler: Ryan has this great way, when it comes to villains, of giving them many names, especially when you're talking about indigenous people because one way, I think, he felt that they kind of keep you in a place is they never let you settle with the name. That's why Killmonger had so many names, and that's why Namor has so many names, as well, but to his people, he's K'uk'ulkan or K'uhulajaw.

So we put the sun and the moon on the doors of his throne room. So we tell the story of the moon and the sun. We tell the story of the establishment of Talokan, all in hieroglyphs, which we can now all read. And, as well as in his memorabilia room, which you'll see the spirit god, as well, in there that he talks about a little bit. We designed the mural tree of the calabash in that story.

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

So, I mean, it goes so deep, of the three realms of the underworld, the middle realm, the upper realm, which Namor is part of all three of them because he can breathe underwater, he can walk on land, and he can fly in the sky. So he is part of all three of the Maya realms.

And I just didn't stop ever because it was so important to me that when — just as I wanted a young African American or a young Black girl or boy that in — throughout the diaspora, to look at the first Black Panther and feel a sense of pride before we learn about pain. I'm really a big advocate of teaching our children pride before they learn about pain. There's plenty of time for that.

I wanted the same for any child of Mexico, any Latino child to understand, boy and girl, and be proud of the beauty of that culture that went through a lot of the destruction that the African culture did when it came to the United States or was, you know, trafficked here to the United States. So I took that really personally, and it was a heavy, heavy responsibility and weight.

It just was really serious to me that this was right and that we weren't appropriating or mis-telling the story, and I wanted to break down the truth. I wanted to get to it, which nobody really knows, and then use my knowledge to create something that was spurred from that, which was Talokan, as far as, like, what you see in the design and the environment.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. No, you know what? I think, though — I think it's really, really instructive because, again, there's always this debate about who can say what, and there's this sense that you've got to be from a culture to write.

[Con La Brisa from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

But I think, more than anything, what people want is they want to feel respected.

[Foley by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Given the fact that so much of the film is, is taken up by this, you know, magnificent protagonist, Namor, and his kingdom, can you guys just talk a little bit about the technical aspect of shooting? Because we're made to feel like, when they're underwater, that we're actually underwater. Were you underwater? And if not, how did you make it feel like, you know, we were underwater?

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: On a base level, there was a decision made, which all of us were a part of, to number one, make all of the water scenes feel like they were real, right, because we're used to seeing movies where people are underwater, and it's hard to make something look real when people are talking underwater because that's not natural, right? But to approach it in a way that it feels like, you know, Hannah's bible, right, that we have, and all this design underwater and this culture underwater. You want to be able to see it, but when you're in the depths of the ocean that deep, light sources have to come from a real place.

[MUSIC STOPS]

So all of these elements were very important. It was like, 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? So it's this — very much a relationship between VFX, production design, obviously Ryan and I discussing how we're going to shoot it. What do we need from Hannah as far as what sets are we putting in water? What sets are out of water, in dry sets in a stage?

So the idea came up to shoot everything that we could possibly do underwater in a tank, so that we could give Weta, who's the VFX company that's doing those underwater sequences, give them some type of reference for light and reference for how hair, how Ruth's costumes react underwater, Hannah's colors, her sets, textures, and, you know, different materials she wants to use underwater.

So, at the end of the day, we shot as much as we could underwater, which, you know, you see in the trailer. You see him descending from the sasthan and he, you know, goes into this beautiful throne. So we shot that underwater. He's on wires, and we shoot that. So there's a reference underwater camera housing. You know, we light it so it looks good, and then we take that, and we also put it on a stage. And we had a backdrop that was printed — right, Hannah? — that had the set, same kind of giving us the color of his throne room, and we would shoot that dry.

So then he was suspended in a dry environment, and we would shoot it two times. And it was kind of this idea so that we could have a great reference for how it feels in, you know, real underwater world, and then also in the dry world because he's speaking, you know? And obviously people can't stay underwater for too long, safety, and just a lot of people aren't the best swimmers. So that was the thought process, and it looks amazing.

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

I think it's kind of a groundbreaking process because it feels real, and everybody's work that went into it shines. And it's a testament to kind of how everyone — and Ryan just, you know, making everyone remember that it should feel real, it should feel textural, and we should pay homage to this culture.

[MUSIC SWELLS THEN FADES OUT]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So when I, I texted Ryan earlier today, and I told him that I was going to interview both of you. I told him I was going to get the dirt, and I was going to — I believe I told him I wanted to hear about how he was walking around the set in a fur with no shirt on and chains. So I was going to get all of the stories, you know what I mean, of his craziness but without you, obviously these worlds look very, very different, right?

And you having been — you particularly, Hannah, have been with Ryan, you know, since Fruitvale, what was the experience like before, and what came in the 10 years after?

Hannah Beachler: I mean, before, when I was coming up and coming into production design, I oftentimes was the only woman as a department head, as a crew member on any given film, and most certainly always the only Black person, male or female, that was in a lead role, if you will, a department head role. I most certainly never worked with a woman production designer as I was coming up in this industry before.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Hmm.

Hannah Beachler: So, you know, when you start getting into those positions, you start challenging the sort of dimensions of power, right? And there's often pushback to that. So you kind of struggle to — who are you going to be in this industry? And how do you then be diplomatic, get your vision heard, be taken seriously, and, you know, convince people that you know your craft. My whole thing was keeping my head down and my mouth shut and just moving forward at all costs.

And so I met Ryan, and I was like, "Who's this young kid?" first of all, but, also, there was never a moment where he didn't think I could just do it. Like, he never questioned my ability, and that was new. I've always been questioned. There was never a moment where he didn't ask my opinion. That was new. I usually had to shout it. And as I started being treated in a manner that everyone should be treated or is treated that doesn't look like me, that is not me, I realized that I don't have to have a wall, and then my creativity came through. I unlocked something.

And I think what I did, over time, was adopted how he saw me. I adopted the way he saw me, I started seeing myself. And at that point, I actually saw someone who is capable and who had a vision and who could make a statement, who could listen, who could — you know, all the things that I think I questioned about myself before as a creative.

He still has his own perspective on things, and he's not perfect, and we don't always agree, but he's certainly someone who will always be there, and nothing will ever change that. And it took me a long time to understand that bit of it. I am a better person since I met Ryan, and I'm a better filmmaker.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Autumn, what did you feel in what she was just saying? What sounded familiar?

Autumn Durald Arkapaw: She has to deal with so much extraneous stuff as a filmmaker, as a Black woman, because production design comes on way before I come on, right? I'm coming on for a little bit of prep, and then we're shooting. But sometimes you're getting bogged down by all the stress and all the things that happen, to get things done for your director, to get things done for the story in such a big environment and such a long shoot...

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

... that having a person like Ryan there to believe in you and to make you feel like you can do anything, honestly, like, creatively and lead your team properly.

And I think it's important to mention that we're females because you know, certain males that we've worked with in the past, unfortunately, haven't done that for me. And to see someone, especially a person of color — everybody in our heads of department were people of color — it's groundbreaking. To look around and see people that look like you and are empowering you and supporting you, it felt really good. So I think, when you see the film, you see that empowerment within the creativity that he allowed us to have on this.

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

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Black Panther and Wakanda Forever mark moments in time for me, the kind of visual spectacle and mythical storytelling that I always dreamed would expand to include those of us who've long been stereotyped, marginalized, or excluded from Hollywood epics.

But Wakanda Forever left me with questions. How did they do it? How did the spectacle work? How was the myth constructed?

On the next episode, we'll hear more of the cast and crew discuss how they moved the story of the Black Panther forward...

Including costume designer Ruth E. Carter...

Ruth E. Carter: It was definitely very much like starting Malcolm X, knowing that you were doing a film that was going to be very important to the culture very important to you.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Composer Ludwig Göransson...

Ludwig Göransson: And as soon as I put in this song for that scene when he's showing Shuri the underwater world, it's like it fit in perfectly, like a glove.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: ... and actor Dominique Thorne...

Dominique Thorne: I think definitely feel like a little bit of a badass, like, "Oh, shit, okay. I did this? All right." (laughs)

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.

Learn more about our journey at ProximityMedia.com and follow @ProximityMedia, @Marvel, and @MarvelStudios on Twitter and Instagram.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[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.

Special thanks to Octavia Ridout, Adam Cole, Susan Mueller, Lydia Ward, Courtney Archerd, Natalie Meade, and the Proximity Media team.

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]