

WAKANDA FOREVER: THE OFFICIAL BLACK PANTHER PODCAST
“Chapter 6: Nate Moore, Simone Ledward Boseman, Ryan Coogler”
Final Transcript

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Hey, this is Ta-Nehisi. Before we start, I want to let you know of another great podcast made by the producers of this show. It’s called In Proximity...

[In Proximity Theme Song by Ludwig Göransson]

...and it features stories and conversations about craft and career with artists and executives in our creative community, including Michael B. Jordan...

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP]

Michael B. Jordan: He was like, “Mike, one day you’re going to want to stop waiting for incoming phone calls, and you’re going to want to take control of your own destiny.”

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And Tessa Thompson...

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP]

Tessa Thompson: This idea sometimes of networking for someone on the outside, you might think, “I’m going to go to the highest level person.” But the truth is it’s so important to build and grow with the people that are right next to you.

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Listen to In Proximity on your favorite podcast app or at ProximityMedia.com.

[MUSIC STOPS]

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

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

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Before we start this episode, I’d like to share some tape our team gathered from movie theaters around the world on opening weekend. Specifically, Lagos, Nigeria; Mexico City; and Ryan Coogler’s hometown of Oakland, California.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[Hiding In The Bathroom from Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Score by Ludwig Göransson]

[CLIP: LAGOS, NIGERIA]

Steven: As an African, seeing Wakanda and African culture, it means a lot, it means a lot.

Mohamed: Wakanda Forever, baby!

Ore: Wakanda Forever, baby!

[END CLIP: LAGOS, NIGERIA]

[CLIP: MEXICO CITY, MEXICO]

Mateo: Me gustó mucho de la película que siempre recordarán a Chadwick Boseman como Pantera Negra y le dedicaran esta película por su partida y me gustó mucho que ahora Shuri sea la nueva Pantera Negra. [What I really liked about the film is that they always remember Chadwick Boseman as Black Panther, and that they dedicated the film to him after his passing. I really liked that Shuri is now the new Black Panther.]

Erick: Oye, ¿te consideras fan de Marvel? [Hey, are you a Marvel fan?]

Mateo: Sí, mucho! [Yes, very much!]

[END CLIP: MEXICO CITY, MEXICO]

[MUSIC STOPS]

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

[CLIP: OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA]

Lenora: My understanding was, is that we were going to be both mourning and celebrating the transition of Chadwick Boseman, and so I wore white in honor of that. His presence is felt throughout the film, but I also thought it was helpful in allowing everyone to move on, I think, as we inevitably have to without shortchanging him or diminishing his memory. So that was beautiful. I feel at peace.

[END CLIP: OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA]

[MUSIC STOPS]

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

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wakanda Forever opened in movie theaters in November 2022. It was always going to be a challenge for this sequel to top its predecessor, a cultural phenomenon released in a world before lockdowns. Yet, in spite of a global pandemic, the film grossed hundreds of millions of dollars worldwide. And, most importantly, it connected with audiences in different, more personal, and more emotional ways.

[MUSIC STOPS]

I've always thought of this podcast as both a work of journalism and a work of history. The journalism part is pretty obvious. You get in a room with some people who are doing something fascinating, and you talk to them. The history part is a little more complicated.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

There's not a lot in this world that gives me comfort. I'm not particularly religious, but I do believe in ancestors. I don't mean "ancestors" in the biological sense, but in the sense of the mission. Maybe it's naïve, but I have this notion that there have always been people who believed that, however cold and brutal this world is, it is our job to improve it and not just profit from it. I've got a particular attachment to the writers who believed this — to the George Orwells, the Toni Morrisons, the Audre Lordes. These are my ancestors, and to the extent that I cling to something beyond the living and the tangible, it's their words. It's their spirit. It's their tradition.

What that means is that I believe someday, after Ryan is gone, there will be people, presently unborn, who will look back and wonder how this thing was built.

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

How did it happen that after decades of being confined to the margins of cinema, decades of being made objects to reinforce somebody else's power, this grand myth of Wakanda was weaved out of the history and culture of the, quote, "most broken people"? How did it happen that this myth itself was not confined to the margins but instead occupied the center of American pop culture? My idea of ancestry says that we owe those yet to come an explanation, if only because we benefited from the words of those who came before us.

So this podcast has always been an object of history, an artifact, a manual for how, in a brutal world, you leverage power for the good. You'll hear a lot of that in my conversation with producer Nate Moore and then you'll hear Ryan and Simone Ledward Boseman reflect on the ancestor who made it all possible, Chadwick Boseman.

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

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

[MUSIC STOPS]

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

[MUSIC SWELLS]

I talked to producers Kevin Feige and Nate Moore on our second episode, and they talked about how they brought the character of the Black Panther from the comics to the screen.

Now Kevin is no doubt the architect of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and his vision leads all the intertwining, multiverse-jumping stories we see unfold in Marvel movies and television shows. But in the Black Panther films, Nate's centrality, to me, is clear. It was Nate who hired Chadwick Boseman, Joe Robert Cole, and Ryan Coogler.

But how did Nate get here? What was his path, and what gave him the particular vision to see what Black Panther and then Wakanda Forever could be?

To answer that question, we had to go all the way back to the beginning. So I met with Nate again, this time in person at Marvel Studios in Los Angeles. I knew he was a big comic book fan like me. So we started there.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Weirdly enough, I kind of want to start when you were younger, actually.

Nate Moore: Sure.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, when you were a kid. And I — you know, I've talked a lot, you know, in this podcast and will continue about what it is like to be, like, a comic book fan and what comic books meant to me and what Marvel meant to me.

Nate Moore: Right.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And I just — I wonder how you experienced the presence and the absence of people of color in comic books and in, you know, movies in general when you were really, really young, like how — how it occurred to you.

Nate Moore: Right. Right. Yeah, it's interesting. The first issue of any comic I ever got, and I'm not going to know the number, but it was — it's an X-Men issue where Moses Magnum is trying to sink Japan. So they're in Japan. The team is Cyclops, Wolverine, Storm, Colossus, Sunfire, Nightcrawler.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow, wow.

Nate Moore: And I was like, look at all these faces, you know what I mean?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nate Moore: Like, just from the beginning, you're like, wow, here is — here is something that, visually, felt really colorful and inviting because it was pretty eclectic, you know, and the villain was a African American guy. Like, the whole thing felt really cool to me. And a lot of my experience collecting comics was sort of diving through the 25-cent bin and getting the ones that were — you know, that they weren't in sleeves, and they were chipped up just because that's — we couldn't really afford the new ones. And I got a lot of, actually, old Cap books, and the old Cap books I got were Cap with Falcon or Cap with Falcon and Panther. So, again, it felt like a medium where I was seeing a lot of people who look like me, and that was appealing in a way that I couldn't articulate at the time, right? You just — your eye goes to, "Oh, wait a second."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: It's so fascinating to hear you talk about Marvel like that because I grew up in a community, inner city West Baltimore, but there were actually — I mean, people don't realize this but — because they think about comics in a particular way, like they don't realize, like, how diverse the audience actually is. So there were a number of kids, you know, around me who collected comics, but they were almost all exclusively Marvel.

Nate Moore: Right, right.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And it's largely because, you know, of what you said. Like, that was — I mean, even when compared to the larger pop culture — like, I started collecting X-Men, and Storm is, like, leading the team. I was like, what?

Nate Moore: Yep, yep.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, what is this? Like, this is possible? I used to think that. And so, it is. It's kind of, you know, like your earliest sort of notion that, oh, this is actually possible. You know, this, this could be a thing. Was your — like, were your parents into comic books at all?

Nate Moore: No. So my — my parents divorced when I was very, very young. My mom moved us to Clovis, California, which is not a hotbed of diversity. And I'm the youngest of four kids. So my brother collected.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Got it.

Nate Moore: So I got a lot of hand-me-downs from my brother. And even — my older sister never was into comics. My younger sister actually got into it for a little bit, too, and we would walk to the comic store, which is about three miles away, like, once every two months. And it was interesting, too, because, again, Clovis is not a diverse place, so there were not a lot of faces that looked like mine or like our family's.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

And so you kind of found it in other ways, you know what I mean? And you found it in comics. You found it in music and some movies. And just seeing different faces was cool.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. Yeah.

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Nate and I talked about comics, about how he made his way into the movie business as a young Black kid from Clovis without any industry connections, just a love of great stories, whether they were in comics or movies.

In 2009, Nate combined both and came to work at Marvel Studios. Ironman had just come out the year before, but they weren't the blockbuster studio they are today. At that point, they were more like a startup, albeit one with a larger, well-known publishing parent company called Marvel Entertainment.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[MUSIC STOPS]

Nate Moore: I called an executive named Jeremy Latcham, who's no longer with the company. Jeremy had gone to grad school with a friend of mine at Northwestern, and, for whatever reason, he put my resume in front of Kevin's desk. And on my resume was Exclusive Media, which Kevin did not know, Participant — Kevin did not know that. Wait, he was a PA on Spider-

Man 2? I should meet that guy. I wonder if I'll remember him. It was almost like a lark. Like, it was almost like —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Where was Kevin at?

Nate Moore: He was now the head of Marvel. And it was, at the time, a one or two-off company, meaning, if these movies work, great, we can make another one. If they don't work, we might be in trouble.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right, right.

Nate Moore: So they were sort of in the very nascent stages of building what is now Marvel Studios. And I met with Kevin, and he said, "Here's what we're doing, and we have this thing called the Writer's Program, and we need somebody to kind of run it." The Writer's Program, at the time, was really interesting. It was a yearly program where they would take three or four writers and pay them essentially scale to write as many drafts of anything that they could come up with.

So it was, for them, an opportunity to just try stuff. At the time, there was a version of Blade that was being written. There was a Power Pack script being written. There was a Luke Cage script being written. And this young woman, Nicole Perlman, was writing what would become Guardians of the Galaxy.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow.

Nate Moore: So I started working on those, and he also said, "And we also want to develop Doctor Strange, Black Panther, and Iron Fist.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What year is that?

Nate Moore: This is 2010. So I —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So 2010, he wants to develop Black Panther?

Nate Moore: Yes. Yes.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow. What did you think when you heard that?

Nate Moore: I was excited. I loved it. I was like, cool!

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Were you like — but, but were you also like, "What?" Like, did you do a second take? Like, like, we can — what happens now afterwards, in the hindsight of it, we're like, "Of course." But 2010, for a major studio to do a Black superhero, like, I mean, that — that is —

Nate Moore: I mean, Blade was out. Blade existed.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: That's true. That's true. And that's, like, late '90s, right?

Nate Moore: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I think the first Blade's like late '90s.

Nate Moore: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, like there's a argument that's, like, really the first one of the modern era.

Nate Moore: 100%.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. You're correct about that.

Nate Moore: And I was maybe naively going like, "Oh, of course. You have to make Black Panther." At the time, I couldn't tell you, like, "I got this great plan." It wasn't. I was working in the Writer's Program. I was developing those movies. We were having trouble getting anything going partially because we had one to two slots a year, and Iron Man started to work, Thor starts to work, Cap starts to work. We start to make a lot of sequels.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Nate Moore: You know what I mean? And, and the one thing that sort of bubbled to the surface was Guardians, was Nicole's work on Guardians. But it also was a very small staff, and Kevin needed somebody to be on Captain America 2. So he said, "Look, you did a great job on Guardians. We're probably going to make it, but not before I need somebody to make Cap 2. So I'm going to pull you off of Guardians and put you on Cap."

And so that started, you know, Cap 2, and it was very exciting. It was very successful, led to Cap 3, trying to figure out what that movie was. And we didn't know at the time we were going to get Spider-Man. Like, that was sort of a late addition, which was really exciting. And we didn't know in the beginning that we were going to put Panther in it. But —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You didn't? So that wasn't from the start?

Nate Moore: No. So we were building the movie. We were struggling to find sort of the unifying idea, and Kevin — it was Kevin's idea to do Civil War, to be honest. And I was like — I was a fan of the original run. I said, "Look, Kevin, the problem is we don't have the rights to a lot of stuff that happened in that, and a lot of the other stuff hasn't been set up. Like, we don't have a negative zone prison. We don't have the New Warriors. Like, how do you do Stamford?" Like, and he was like, "No, I know, I know. But you guys can figure it out."

So that was the grenade, and, and we started working on it. And we were developing the movie, and we realized there was an opportunity for — if the conflict was between Cap and Iron Man, which we knew that would be the central conflict — it was in publishing — there was an opportunity for, like, a third person to stand toe-to-toe with those two characters.

And we had a story session, and I went home, and I was like, "Ooh, I wonder if we could put Black Panther." So I texted Kevin. I was like, "What about Black Panther?" And he was like, "That's a great idea. See what the guys think." And Joe Russo is also a comic fan. So I said the words Black Panther, and he was like, "Yes, let's do it."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow.

Nate Moore: "Let's do it." And we started integrating Black Panther into the narrative, and then Spider-Man, and then, all of a sudden, you're like, "Oh, wait a second. Is this going to work? This is going to be great."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What, what broke the dam that allowed you guys to do Panther? What happened?

Nate Moore: It really was — once we started screening the movie, you know, if — you have a movie, Civil War, with Chris Evans and Robert Downey, and you're introducing Spider-Man, and the character that would test the highest, often, was Panther.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Really?

Nate Moore: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And that — and test the highest across the board? Like, this is not controlled for race or anything like that.

Nate Moore: Yeah, no, just like —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, people liked that.

Nate Moore: Yeah. They were like, "There's the numbers. Who do you like the best?" And so we knew there was something really special. And so, when I got back, one of the people I called to come in and pitch was Joe Robert Cole.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow.

Nate Moore: And I skipped this part. Joe, when I ran the Writer's Program, after the first sort of generation had sort of aged out, we hired three new writers, and one of the people I called was Joe Robert Cole.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow

Nate Moore: I had hired Joe first, and then, in talking about filmmakers, I remember During the Writer's Program, me and Joe and a writer named Eric Pearson decided to go to dinner and a movie. And we saw a film called Fruitvale Station. It was honestly — it was like a Michael B. Jordan movie more than it was a Ryan Coogler movie, you know what I mean?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Nate Moore: And just, like, the least fun dinner, not because we were — not because the movie was bad. You were just like, that was so heavy and intense and effective, And so obviously then we knew Ryan but weren't necessarily tracking him until the trailer for Creed dropped.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Nate Moore: Wait, who did that? The guy who did Fruitvale did that? And then — and then I tracked him down. I tracked him down.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. And can you recount what the conversation was?

Nate Moore: Yeah. I called him. He was on a scout for some pickup stuff he was doing in Atlanta, ironically, for Creed. And his first question was, "Are you Black?" I said, "Yes, yes."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You know, we laugh about that.

Nate Moore: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: But did you consider, like — first of all, did you consider white directors or white writers for Panther?

Nate Moore: White writers, yes. White directors, not really.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Why not?

Nate Moore: Yeah, yeah, probably less intentional. Honestly, just, like, that didn't feel right. Like, you know what I mean?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: But, like, when you think about it now, like, I — like, I understand in the moment maybe it's not the conscious thing. But, like, when you think back on it, what does it mean that it did not feel right? Like, why not?

Nate Moore: I mean, we knew — that's a good question.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Because I remember a time when, like, somebody wouldn't have made the decision you made.

Nate Moore: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You know what I mean?

Nate Moore: No, it's interesting. I, I — you know, we wanted it to feel like its own thing, and we wanted it to be set heavily in Africa, and we wanted him to be the James Bond of Wakanda. When I think a lot about the movies about Africa I had saw growing up that were not directed by Black people, the Africans tend to be the victims, you know what I mean? You don't see a lot of them being the heroes. Like, you know, I think of like Blood Diamond. And you're like, yeah, Djimon Hounsou is great. Why is the movie about Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly? And so you just wanted to try something different, I guess, you know what I mean? So, yeah, not — was never considered.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. I just — it's interesting because there was, like — and this is not actually a critique of the movie because I think she was doing the best she can. When I was back at Howard, Amistad comes out, and people are very mad at Debbie Allen because Steven Spielberg is directing. And I will never forget her saying, "It's not I didn't want a Black director to do this. I wanted this to get done, and he was the one that could get it done." Like, this is how — and now here you are, a generation later, and you don't necessarily have to make that choice.

Nate Moore: Yeah, exactly.

[Music from Pat Mesiti-Miller]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: It's interesting because I can see the pieces coming together. Like, I can see you, you know, as a child reading these comic books and being attracted to this thing, you know, with all of these faces. I see you in college or maybe just after college, having all of these jobs and understanding how the business works. I see you at Participant almost being awakened to the idea that — the impact that film could have, and then maybe also at Participant realizing that films have to make money.

Nate Moore: That's right.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: That's great, but...

Nate Moore: Exactly, very important.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You know what I mean?

[MUSIC STOPS]

So one of the things I think about is, you know, next step, when you finally get to making Black Panther, you're conscious, like — because, see, the weight of it, and it's always often like this with stories of people that come from marginalized communities, you're not just bearing the weight of the film. So you were thinking about that, like, "We are not just making a film. We are creating a comp. We're creating a market for The Woman King."

Nate Moore: Yeah, or not, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Or not.

Nate Moore: There was — there was certainly —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Or not.

Nate Moore: I remember a couple conversations in Atlanta when we were in prep, and Ryan notoriously works long hours, and it was late, and everybody had gone home. And we talked about what would happen if the movie didn't work. Like, to your point, like, the fear of, look, you could create the wrong kind of comp very, very easily. Especially at a place that only had movies work, if this doesn't work, you start to go, "Why didn't that work? Wait a second."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Why didn't that one work? Yes.

Nate Moore: You know what I mean?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes, yes. Yes.

Nate Moore: And do that — there was — I would say, more so than, "Man, we're going to create this great comp," it was like, "Oh, man, if we blow this, we are going to make it hard for movies like this to get made."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Nate Moore: Because you go, "Well, they were hitting — batting 1,000 until they made Panther."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right, right.

Nate Moore: And, luckily, the reverse happened.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: How do you characterize the difference between the emotional response to Black Panther and Wakanda Forever?

Nate Moore: Oh, that's interesting. I mean, the weight of this movie was so different than the first one, right?

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

Nate Moore: The first one was, "Are they going to pull it off? Because that looks really fun." And they did, and you're like, "It was really fun! We did it." It feels like a triumph. It feels like a celebration. And this was, A, I think — and maybe — you know, sometimes I worry we listen too much to what people say online because that clearly is a small, vocal minority, but did we make the right decision? Did we make the right decision here? Should we have made this movie? Should we have done it differently? What do we do? There's just a lot of weight on this movie. And, again, the first trailer felt good because it was like, oh, okay —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. No, it blew up. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nate Moore: Oh, people — okay, people understand what we're trying to do with this, which is — the degree of difficulty of this movie, I think is unparalleled because no one's ever had to do it in that we lost the title character of our film, who was also our friend, and are also trying to help people deal with that loss in a real way and tell a story that's entertaining and also be fun and — I mean, wow.

And so, the response this time, I think felt a little bit more like relief than a celebration of, like, "Okay, we didn't embarrass the man or his family." We did as right as we knew how to do, and, again, we'll see what, what time will say about the movie. And, you know, it is a — I think, a more challenging movie than the first one because of course.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes.

Nate Moore: So the experience people have out of that movie is not the same, I think. Some of the responses I've gotten anecdotally are almost more emotional but in different ways.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, yeah.

Nate Moore: You know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. Honestly, Nate, I think long-term the second one is going to have more weight. I obviously love both films, but there's a — to the extent that it's a challenging film, I think it's because it's a superhero film that's, like, mourning. You know what I mean?

Nate Moore: Yeah. Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, I think people go to, you know, superhero films a lot of times to feel great, which you kind of got out of the first Black Panther. And this one is, is a much more —

you know, it has all of the spectacle, all the beautiful bells and whistles. Like, you want to see it, it's there. But the feeling of it, the weight of it is very, very different, and I am anxious for people to see it in the theaters but then to see it again at home.

Nate Moore: Yep.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: You know what I mean?

Nate Moore: Yep.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Because there's just a lot to dig through, man.

Nate Moore: It's a lot, yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: There's a lot to dig through. There's a lot to dig through. And I really want to extend this back to when we started the conversation with, with, you know, you as a kid collecting comic books.

Nate Moore: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I'm not saying this is the end of your career, but, but you can see, like, the arc of the journey, right?

Nate Moore: Yeah, yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, you can definitely see, I mean, from the kid collecting comic books, being attracted to all of the diversity, through all the steps I mentioned before to making Black Panther and Wakanda Forever. How does it feel?

Nate Moore: Boy, I wish I had a good answer to that question. You know, the truth is I haven't had time to process it.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes.

Nate Moore: You know? And we are in pre-production on Captain America 4 and Blade. So it's sort of like — you're like, okay, keep going. Like, the movie came out, and I was like, "Great, I'll be at work on Monday." And Ryan was like, "Wait, are you going — you're going back to work?" Yeah. Like, we got to keep making movies, you know? So hopefully, at some point, I'll be able to stop and think about it. The truth is I do feel very lucky to be able to make any movies, to be honest.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, yeah.

Nate Moore: And that they happen to be these movies is pretty special, and I think one day

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

when I actually have five minutes to think about it and talk to my kids about it, I think it'll be pretty magical. But right now, it's sort of, what's next? You know? And, and making sure what's next is as good as what's come before because it is not — nothing is a given in this business. And being a good storyteller, part of that is just sort of keeping — keeping telling stories.

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: It's a particular experience to pour all of yourself into something like *Wakanda Forever* and then release it into the world. Maybe some of you out there have kids and thus can relate to the anxiety of giving all you can to the child only to see them go out of your house and have their own set of interactions, some good, some bad. Art is like that. The work comes from you. You have your own private time with it. And then it takes on a life of its own, and, like any parent, you worry. You hope the work reaches as many people as possible, and when it does, a whole new set of anxieties come to the fore.

We've said before that *Wakanda Forever* was a special child, one that embodies the tragedy implicit in its birth and is yet bound by all the expectations of the genre. For our final episode, I could think of nothing more appropriate than to journey back to the start of the movie's conception with Ryan, but also with the person who knew the lead actor for *Black Panther* best, Simone Ledward Boseman.

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

An artist and Chadwick Boseman's wife, she also co-founded and chairs the Chadwick Boseman Foundation for the Arts, a non-profit dedicated to providing scholarships and critical funding to uplift Black artists across the diaspora. This includes the Chadwick A. Boseman Memorial Scholarship, which was established at Howard University in 2021 with a donation from Netflix, to support students pursuing the arts.

I talked to Ryan and Simone about Chad's legacy but also about their memories of him in a conversation recorded just weeks after *Wakanda Forever* premiered around the world. I started with a question for Simone.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I kind of want to start, if we can, like, at the beginning. I've watched some interviews with you. I've seen some of the — I know you haven't done a lot, but I've seen a little bit of what you've done. I've been trying to put into context for people who Chad was as an artist, and I think you can kind of help with that. But to do that, I actually want to talk about your path as an artist first, and then — you know what I mean? — and then what you saw, you know, of Chad, you know, up close. How'd you start singing, Simone? Like, what was it?

Simone Boseman: I don't actually ever remember a time when I wasn't singing. The story that I get told is that my great-grandma would hum to me. She would say, "Sing, baby," and I would, like — I was like — I was a baby. I was cooing, but I was humming back to her. And, from as far back as I can really remember, you know, it was like, "Go sing that song that you be singing," you know? "Simmy, sing This Little Light of Mine." Okay, you know, and I was — and I was just singing.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Did you and Chad ever collaborate on anything?

Simone Boseman: Not officially.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: That's what I mean, but even, like, other —

Simone Boseman: Yeah, not officially.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, I'm not — like, that was released. I mean just — because art is not just what's released to be consumed. It's also what you do.

Simone Boseman: Yeah, a lot. Chad played guitar.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, I'm not surprised to hear that.

Simone Boseman: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, he was — he was really good. He was — he was literally good at everything he put his hands on.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Simone Boseman: He was good.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Did he ever freestyle in front of you?

Simone Boseman: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, nonstop, kind of, like every time we would get in the car because we had a few, like — we would listen to a lot of, like, beat playlists and he — like, he couldn't help himself. He was always freestyling to the point where sometimes —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: A little much?

Simone Boseman: It would be like, "Okay, all right." You know, between that and, like, James Brown coming out every five minutes, it was like, "All right, can we get back? Can Chad come back?" No, but he — at one point, I started wanting to learn how to play the guitar. So I bought myself a guitar, and Chad played it more than I did.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow.

Simone Boseman: So, yeah, I mean, like, we would just sit around in the house, and he would just, like, lay down by the fireplace and just, like, play whatever was in his heart or in his head, and I would sit over, and I would have a book, or I would just be humming or the TV would be on or whatever. And, yeah, there were just these little — you know, little pockets of normalcy that now feel, you know, heavier than they did then.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, yeah. The reason why I asked — I actually asked that question about whether y'all collaborated because, like, thinking of Chad back at Howard, like, he was enormously talented, right? But he wouldn't've been the dude I would've said movie star, though.

There were people at Howard back then that were clearly aspiring to that. And he definitely didn't seem like he wanted that. Like, he was pure artist, you know what I mean, in a very, very, very particular way.

And so, when it started happening, I mean, it only made sense. You know, when I saw it, I was like, "Yeah, of course," you know what I mean? But it wasn't the thing I saw. And so one of the reasons why I was curious to ask you about all of that is because being a artist yourself, I

wonder, from your perspective and, you know, having spent so much time around him, what did he bring as an artist that was different? I know that's a big question.

Simone Boseman: It is. It's a big question because he brought so much. And the first thing that comes to mind is not necessarily something that other artists don't bring, but it's faith.

Never have I ever met any person ever that had that kind of faith because he seemed to almost perfect the art of being the vessel. And he would separate himself — I don't know if this is even going to make sense, but it's like he would separate himself so completely that he would find a new version of himself through the work.

Like, he would be one person at the beginning of the process, but he would allow the process to redefine him. You know, one can only do that if they fully remove themselves and their ego and the person that they think that they are from the situation. He was made into an entirely new creature every time.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: That's, like, really, really interesting because I think — and I don't know — Ryan, I don't know if you've had this experience as an artist, but, you know, I know I've talked to people and, you know, in the most blessed of times, I felt this way, where it's, like, not you anymore. Like, you're doing the thing, and it's not — like, it's something, you know, other thing that's going — going through you. Could you — can you see that in his work as T'Challa?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. It's interesting. Chad played a lot of roles where he was portraying people that —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Mm-hmm, right.

Ryan Coogler: — that lived — and this is different in that this is, like, a fictional character. But I think, like, T'Challa's interesting because he's based on, like, real feelings, real dreams and hopes, you know? So, yeah, he was definitely a vessel for all of that. Getting to know Chad actually helped me understand that character. Like, it was one of the reasons I was looking forward to making this movie with him, like, because it was like how I learned to make movies. I think it's, like, independent cinema, like the language, you attack things through the flaws. So T'Challa is a tough one, you know? Like, like, you've written about T'Challa and Wakanda before.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: If you learn to attack things like that, that character is very difficult, you know? Like having had conversations with Stan Lee about him, like, Stan Lee was like, "Yeah, I made him perfect, like, for all the racists out there." Like, he was like, "Can't say nothing." You know? Like, that's the energy of the character from his perspective. Like, "Yeah, I made him smart. I made him rich. I made him handsome. I made" — you know, like, like all of these things. So he was a character where I was like, "Ooh, man, like, how do I — you know, how do I get in there? And seeing Chadwick's performance in Civil War was helpful.

But, like, meeting him and, like, getting to work with him through the process, like, like, I always knew what was special about T'Challa, you know what I'm saying, why people love that character, love Wakanda. But, but working with him made me understand, like, just how deep it goes, you know? And, like, I think personally, selfishly, you know what I'm saying? But, like, I see that character, and out of all of Chadwick's performances, I see the most Chad there.

Well, I know that's the most Chad there. Me and Joe was writing them lines. I was watching the takes, you know what I'm saying? Like, I was looking for the reality, you know what I'm saying? My friend, my guy, I was looking for it. Like, where, where was it true? And that character in that film touched people, and I know, having been on the inside of it making it that that was Chad touching people, you know what I mean? Like, truthfully. Like, but, yeah, like he was totally the vessel for all of, like — for everybody's hopes and dreams and all the things that people wish was the reality.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I — actually, Simone, I heard you say something similar, that, like, when people fall in love with T'Challa, they fall in love, like, with Chad. And I saw you, you know, nodding your head. What do you mean when you say that? Like, when you said, "They fall in love with — I know they falling in love with him"?

Simone Boseman: Yeah. I also want to, like, say, too, when I say a vessel, it's like he's a vessel for the spirit.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yes, yes.

Simone Boseman: Not, like, you know, because he did, like, obviously, a lot of — a lot of biopics, and you have to, you know, reinvent yourself, I think, in a different way. But because he was trying to be that vessel all the time, then what he was trying to open up to at all times was truth, the highest truth and the highest love. And those are things that I see in the character that I know are Chad, too, right? In a lot of ways, it's like Chad was being prepared his whole life to play that role because T'Challa's character is his character.

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

You know, I mean, he — working in the African bookstore, learning about — you know, studying history, studying mythology, studying, you know what I mean? Learning that, starting martial arts, so therefore he was able to, you know, do a lot of his own stunts and be — you know, and having the network of teachers around him that poured into him that he could pull from, it was like all the pieces kind of fell into place for that moment. And as we would talk about it, it definitely felt like one of those moments for him where it's like you just realize how everything in your life has come together right now.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Could he see that? Did he feel like that?

Simone Boseman: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah, yeah.

[MUSIC STOPS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I just — I want to fast-forward a little bit, and I want to ask — because I know you guys had conversations about how to proceed forward after Chad passed. I just want to ask, like, Simone, at what point were you able to even contemplate, or did you even contemplate — T'Challa had been so much of him invested in it. So he is — you know, he's a franchise player, you know what I'm saying? Like, how that franchise would proceed, whether it even should proceed, like, did you — like, when did — did those thoughts enter your mind? Were you considering that at all?

Simone Boseman: Honestly, it was the last thing on my mind. You know, and, and the only — the only thoughts that I had about it were around how Chad was feeling about it and just how much — how much it hurt him that he wasn't going to be able to be a part of that. And after he passed, it was, you know, really, really quickly, the question that's on all of the fans minds, like, you know, "What are you going to do?" And it was pretty soon after his transition that the team — you know, Kevin, Nate, Ryan — had said that they were not going to recast him. Time is a blur. So I don't know how — you know, how, how soon exactly after.

And I remember talking to Chad's management team about it, and we all, you know, were just really — I struggle to find the word. I want to say emotional, but we were all — you know, it was already an emotional time. But we just — I just remember feeling just so much gratitude, and it was also just a moment, too, a reminder that everybody in the business is not just about the business, right? Because it's a almost, now, a multi-billion-dollar franchise, and that — that story has to continue.

And it should, and while I try to not speak for Chad, I know it's not something he would've wanted to end because he transitioned. But the thought of somebody, you know, else just kind of coming in and playing that role, it wasn't — it wasn't something that I wanted to entertain. So I was really grateful that none of us had to because that decision was made.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. You know, I want to ask you about something, and I want to be really sensitive about this, you know, because I know we all need our own space to hold things, but please forgive me. You mentioned that it hurt him that he might not be able to continue with it. I want to ask if you would mind speaking a little bit more about that.

Simone Boseman: Yeah. I mean, it was such a special project for dozens, hundreds of reasons: because of how important it was, because of how it could change and did change the lives of people and industry and the family that was built while they were filming it and everything that can be done with the story.

And while that was an enormous amount of pressure, it was also a huge privilege and blessing to be able to play that role, you know, in the larger scheme of what is playing out through this project. And, and it's — it was what he loved, too. So, on level one, you have that this is just what he loves to do. And not being able to do that and make more of that and tell the stories that he knew should be told in the way that he knew they should be told, it's that.

And then it is this particular thing and the weight and the — you know, you imagine that, like, this is — this is possibly, like, one of the most impactful things that you will do, that any one person, anyone would do in their career, in their life.

One day you are a regular guy going to the grocery store, and the next day kids are dressing up like you, and you're seeing how this piece of work that you have given your all to is doing exactly what you want it to do. It is raising up everybody that it touches, everybody, and it's teaching, and it's opening minds of people who have been closed, and it's opening hearts, and — and it is doing so much to uplift this community that you love, and you get to lead that, you know?

And he was just — and I, I do, you know, just personally know that he was so well equipped to do that, to be that person, not just to play the role on screen, but everything else that he did offscreen, every way that he led offscreen, off set.

And then having to sit through and say, "Well, you know what" — having to make yourself feel okay about it, knowing that, "These hands are capable of doing what they need to do. I don't know who is going to be in this space, but I know that Ryan over here is in the space that he's in, and I know I can trust him. So that'll be okay. I just think that he loved his work, and he had put so much — he had sowed so much into this that it was just — it was hard for him to, to know that he didn't get to do that anymore. He didn't get to keep sowing and see what else it would become.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What's incredible about, like, what you just gave and the answer you just offered is, like — you know, like, one of the things we've been struggling with on this podcast, honestly, is like, where reality ends and where, like, a film or a piece of entertainment or art begins because I feel like much of what you just described is like, very much the sentiment we get, like, of Wakanda in the film. It's very much like, you know, what's going to happen here? You know, who's solid over here? Who's going to take up the mantle? We won't have a Black Panther anymore. And, you know, Ryan, I know you said that you pulled a lot, you know what I mean, from very, very real things. The truth had to be, you know, the, the highest principle. You, you called Simone to talk about the possibility of how to proceed?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, I think we spoke a few times. Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What were those conversations like?

Ryan Coogler: Hard to say from memory because — like she was saying, it's the last thing you want to talk to somebody about. Going through something like that, it's unimaginable, you know? But I had to talk to her about it. But for this, for this movie, bro, that was how we made it. We made the movie very, like, honest and, and we worked closely with each other. We got to know each other, you know what I mean?

Like, and I got to know Simone through Chadwick, but, like, we from the same place. Like, we from the Bay Area, you know what I'm saying? Like, there's no version of me. There's no version of me making business decisions around this movie and not consulting her. You know, if everything was put on the other foot, I know Chadwick would've reached out to my wife, Zinzi Evans Coogler.

I know for a fact, like, we're not industry people, bro. He a Black man from Anderson, South Carolina. I'm a Black man from the Bay Area, bro, you know what I'm saying? And that was how we — that was how we was able to work. That was how we was able to make that movie before director, actor, before artist, before any of that. And that's how I'm moving, you know what I'm saying? I'm moving on — the other stuff got to fall in line with that, if that makes sense.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: No it totally, totally does.

When we first started with the idea to do this podcast, one of the first things that happened was Ryan hooked it up so that, you know, me and my wife, Kenyatta, could go see the, the, the — you know, the cut that you had at that time.

So we're sitting there watching everything, right, and then the scroll comes up, like, of Marvel, and it's all him. And Kenyatta just lost it, you know what I'm saying? Just completely, "Hey, stop the film! Stop the film!" And I know you saw it, you know, before all of us and everything, you know?

Simone Boseman: That was where I lost it, too.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Okay.

Simone Boseman: And it took me probably like five hours to watch it.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. Did you have to stop and pause?

Simone Boseman: I had to keep stopping. I had to keep stopping. And, yeah, just seeing him that much. The smiles and the laughs and the — that's, that's really — I think in, even in, like, the flip card, those were the moments that really, really, really got me. And it's also been a process, too, just, like, you know, again, just kind of trying to put myself in — as much as I can in Chad's mind with everything that kind of has to be taken care of after somebody transitions and then asking myself, "Okay, well, then what does this mean that he expects of me? Like, what's my job now?" All these things that I have to take care of and all these people now that I have to take care of. And, Ryan calling me and saying, "Hey, you know, is — is this — how do you feel about this? Let me know," and then watching the film and knowing, like, okay, I can't just be watching this like I would normally watch this. I have to try to watch this how Chad would watch this.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow.

Simone Boseman: And I have to, like, really pay attention to who I believe. And do I — like, do I really believe it? Does this feel true? Does this feel real?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Like, you couldn't watch it as a fan.

Simone Boseman: I couldn't watch it as a fan because it was a job, and feeling like, "This is not my arena. This is not my field," it was exhausting. You know, to be honest, it was exhausting because it was also so emotionally taxing. I mean, the whole movie is like — it's a symposium on what happens when you lose somebody, when you lose somebody important. Not that everybody is not important. I didn't — scratch that, as a matter of fact. But, you know, when you lose —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: But important to you. I understand, somebody important to you.

Simone Boseman: And somebody important to you and somebody that also just, like, has their hands in so many different spaces. I think what I appreciated about it was that it moved on pretty quickly from the funeral scene to life and what else was happening because that is — it's just such an accurate reflection of loss, not that you move on because you never really move on. You move forward. But life is happening all around you. So you don't have a choice but to move forward.

Once, you know, we address this thing in life and on screen, you know, we get to see the world progress, but then we also get to see how the grief continues with each of these characters and then how that defines how they move. Yeah, so it, it took me six hours, and, and I was sitting there at the end of it, thinking, like, "I should probably, like, watch it again. I should probably just, like, watch it again right now." But, you know, there's, like, a guy waiting to pick up the laptop. And, you know, it's midnight at this point, and it was also a practice in just, you know, saying, "OK what is my instinct? I should just call Ryan now while it's fresh." And we talked, and there really wasn't — there weren't a whole lot of notes.

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

And I really — I just thought it was beautiful. I just thought he did such a great job, and I wanted to tell him that right away so that I could soothe even an iota of anxiety that he might've been having because I do. I just think that it's — I think the film is beautiful.

[MUSIC SWELLS THEN FADES OUT]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So movie's out all around the world. Ryan, you've been to premieres, Lagos, Mexico City, New York, L.A., London. Did I miss anything in that?

Ryan Coogler: D.C., D.C. with the foundation.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: D.C., D.C. with the foundation. Y'all were together in D.C.?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Hey, can I just say — I'm going to go off-script for a sec. Can I just say, Simone, I really, really appreciate what you did. Setting up a scholar — at Howard, and the fact that them kids — you know, get that four years to actually be artists, you know what I'm saying?

And it's sometimes hard to explain, like, the importance of artists to our struggle, to our community and everything. I just — I just — I want to say I really appreciate that — frankly, as somebody who went to Howard and was like, "Man, it'd be really cool to be, like, a writer or do whatever," and there was just no track for it, you know what I'm saying? So I had to find the most tangible thing I could, which was not what I really, really wanted to — and I ended up dropping out largely because of that. So I really — I thank you. I thank you for doing that because that was me, you know what I'm saying? That would've been me.

Simone Boseman: Yeah, our scholars are like — they're just brilliant kids. And, yeah, like, anybody that's in school, period, but particularly, like, you're studying art, you're going to — you're going to struggle once you get out of here. So to just be able to focus on doing art, that's all you got to do...

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. Right, right.

Simone Boseman: I'm honored to be able to do it, you know? I'm grateful to Netflix. I don't know if I can name-drop there.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: No, I think it's fine. I know they put up the money.

Simone Boseman: I'm grateful to Netflix, Scott Stuber and Ted Sarandos and Tendo Nagenda that, that they approved the amount for the scholarship so that it never ends.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right. Are you able to say how much it is?

Simone Boseman: They gave \$5.4 million to an endowment. And so, you know, the way endowments work is that it operates off of interest. So the principal never gets touched. So that scholarship is going to outlive everybody sitting around here today.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: That's incredible.

Simone Boseman: It's actually even deeper than that because Bob Iger is leading the fundraising efforts for the new College of Fine Arts that's been named in Chad's honor, which is huge and speaks not only to his humanity but also his love and respect for Chad, as well.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right.

Simone Boseman: Yeah. And it's, it's — the scholarship at Howard gets to do that, and then the work of the foundation gets to make sure that happens elsewhere, people that aren't at Howard, that may not be going to college, that may — you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Right, right.

Simone Boseman: Yeah, it's beautiful work. It's beautiful work.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And it's full circle for him because, you know, student here — not just student, student who fought for the college not to be closed. College reopens named for him and money for the kids still going there, and as you said, also expanded outward for kids that may not even — you know, young people that may not even be going to college.

Simone Boseman: Young people, old people, middle-aged people, all people.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Got it, got it. All people, all people. So I —

Ryan Coogler: I met them kids, bro. I wasn't ready for that.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Keep going. Go on, go on.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, she didn't — she didn't give me no heads-up.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What happened?

Simone Boseman: Well, you were right there.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: How did it happen? What happened?

Simone Boseman: And they were right there.

Ryan Coogler: I just met the — I just met the scholars.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: But how did — like, you saying you wasn't — what happened?

Ryan Coogler: We went to the screening in D.C. as we go to all of these screenings. And, you know, I knew we were going to have the screening, obviously. I figured we would, we would introduce the film and take pictures. I knew, obviously, Simone and Logan and Chadwick's family, but I didn't know I was going to see the kids. I didn't know the kids was already — I didn't know it was going already. Like, I knew the school had been named for him and, and — so I saw Simone, and she was like, "Yeah, and these are our scholars."

Simone Boseman: We had just come off the carpet.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Simone Boseman: And I think Ryan and Zinzi were just about to go on, and we saw each other at the top of the carpet. And, yeah —

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, y'all —

Simone Boseman: There was no time to give you a heads-up.

Ryan Coogler: I was — I was — I was a puddle, bro, for, like, the rest of the day.

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Wow.

Simone Boseman: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: You know, because I'm just meeting them, and, they like, "Man, I want to be a — you know, production design," and this, and I'm just like, wait. Wait, it's already going? Like, these kids — and just — and just seeing the look in they eyes and, and, and, you know, how young they were, but I feel like they had it figured out, you know? And seeing Simone with them, you know what I'm saying, proud? Like, I — yeah, it was the most touching moment of the press tour for me. You know, and I'll say this without getting emotional, but, like, yeah, the press tour —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: What's up with you and not getting — you keep saying that.

Ryan Coogler: Bro, because, like, I, I don't want to be crying on this, bro. Like, but, like, the, the —

Simone Boseman: He's a Black man from the Bay Area. Are you kidding me?

Ryan Coogler: Hey —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And he keeps — he has said that every time. You know, obviously it's emotional material. He gets emotional —

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah, but I'm trying to —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: — and then he's mad about it. He get mad about the fact that he got emotional about something —

Ryan Coogler: I'm mad at you about it, you know what I'm saying? I'm not just mad in general. We, we — the press tour was a fun time, bro, on that first movie, man. Like, we got to hang a lot. I remember you met up with us in New York. So going through it without him, it sucked, man. Like, you know what I'm saying?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, yeah.

Ryan Coogler: It did. But then, like, going to to D.C. and seeing the kids, it was like what the movie's about, you know what I'm — you know what I'm saying? Like, straight up, I was like,

knowing what that school meant to him, you know? Look, man, I'll tell you a story from the press tour, bro.

I think this was before you came to New York. We were doing a New York premiere. We already did the L.A. premiere. And we at this, you know, small screening room in, like, a DGA theater or something like that. It's cold, and I'm with Zinz, and she did something goofy with her contacts. Like, she probably put the lotion on, and the lotion touched the — but she's completely — she's completely blind, like, because her contacts is going — is going crazy. So I got to get her back to the hotel.

And Chad is nervous, and this man was never nervous. And he's like, "Yo, is Denzel coming?"

And I'm like — I'm like, "I just texted with him, and he said he was pulling up."

And he was like, "All right, I got to talk to him."

And I'm like, "Okay."

So I texted him and told Denzel, like, come — we had this other little spot. So now, at this point, I'm hoping he don't stand us up, you know what I'm saying? Because I know he busy.

And then Denzel comes in in his Denzel way, you know what I'm saying— "Hey, what's up?" You know? Like, and, "After we watch this movie, man, we'll and we'll get out of here, man, see what y'all boy is doing."

And — and Chad takes his hand and says, "I wanted to thank you. You know, I never told nobody about this, but when I was at Howard, Phylicia, you know, reached out to a bunch of her friends and had them pay for students to go to, to Oxford for a year, and I was the student you sponsored."

And, like, bruh, the look on Denzel's face because I could tell, like, he remembered, and he was just like, "Holy shit," you know what I'm — you know what I'm saying? Like, "That was you?"

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah. Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: You know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: And I'm just sitting there watching this, no idea we would lose Chad when we would, but it was like —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Damn.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. So back on that — on that carpet with them kids, bro, you know what I'm saying? Like, like, knowing —

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Yeah, it's full circle, right?

Ryan Coogler: And he held it so he could tell the guy to his face. And, like, for me, I'm getting taught in that moment, you know what I'm saying? Chad is like my big brother, you feel me? I'm

getting taught in that moment. Like, I'm getting exposed to something special, you know what I'm saying? So then being on a carpet with these kids, I'm like, "Oh, my god."

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I mean, you know, as deep as what you saying is, it's kind of — in his spirit, like he's doing for all them kids basically what Denzel had did for him.

Ryan Coogler: 100%, bro. And Denzel pulled up on me and Zinz after we watched the movie.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

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

[Additional music by Pat Mesiti-Miller]

He was like, "Man, y'all" — he, like, "Y'all boys, man, y'all off to the races, man. Like, this is — man, this is what we do. This is what we did it for." Seeing them kids was like — it was like, yeah, it's still — it's still going, you know?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Mm.

[VOICEOVER]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: So this is it, the end of our journey. We've gone from Wakanda to Talokan, from death to life. We've seen the pain the actors were pulling from and the cultures our crew was pulling from. We've seen who had to be in place where, and what they had to do to make a science fiction epic feel true. Altogether, we've seen how Wakanda Forever was conceived, revised, and then built.

It's easy to lose sight of what all that means. A Black president was a dream before Obama. After him, after all the twists and turns of history and politics, it became easy to forget that the dream really had become real.

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

The notion that there would be a grand epic rooted in history and culture of two of the most exploited peoples on the planet, that that epic would be invested with budget and resources that come with a blockbuster film, well, for a lot of us that was a dream, too. And now it's true. The dream is real. I often wonder what the world will be like when it's run by people who don't remember a time when a Black president was a dream. Likewise, I wonder what film will look like when people who were raised in a world where T'Challa, Ramonda, Shuri, and Namor are not just fans but filmmakers themselves. In that sense, the journey really isn't over. It's only just begun.

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

Thanks for listening to 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 – and about other new projects from Proximity Media and the world of Wakanda – at ProximityMedia.com and follow @ProximityMedia, @Marvel, and @MarvelStudios on Twitter and Instagram.

[MUSIC STOPS]

[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.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[MUSIC SWELLS THEN FADES OUT]

Before we go, I want to let you know of another great podcast made by the producers of this show. It's called In Proximity...

[In Proximity Theme Song by Ludwig Göransson]

...and it features stories and conversations about craft and career with artists and executives in our creative community, including Michael B. Jordan...

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP]

Michael B. Jordan: He was like, "Mike, One day you're going to want to stop waiting for incoming phone calls, and you're going to want to take control of your own destiny."

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: And Tessa Thompson...

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP]

Tessa Thompson: This idea sometimes of networking for someone on the outside, you might think, "I'm going to go to the highest level person." But the truth is it's so important to build and grow with the people that are right next to you.

[IN PROXIMITY PODCAST CLIP ENDS]

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Listen to In Proximity on your favorite podcast app or at ProximityMedia.com.

[MUSIC STOPS]