



CLOSE-UP: RYAN COOGLER

Black Panther

Black Panther, from director Ryan Coogler and co-screenwriter Joe Robert Cole, begins with a history lesson. A colourful animated sequence unravels the origins of the fictional African nation of Wakanda, as told by a father to his son. Wakanda, the home of our hero T'Challa (played with muted gravitas by Chadwick Boseman), has disguised itself to the outside world as a poor farming nation, in keeping with the stereotypes that often reduce the continent to a single country.

In fact, the entirely self-sufficient Wakanda has never been conquered by outside forces and is the most technologically advanced nation in the world thanks to vibranium, a rare sound-absorbent metal, desperately coveted by those aware of its more violent effects. All at once lush and bucolic, urban and futuristic, with gargantuan rhinos and flying spacecraft and, perhaps most importantly, populated by a people of rich tradition, Wakanda soon becomes emblematic of the film's loftier themes: it's a tale of home, and so a tale of history, and so a tale that begs for cultural specificity even in its fantastical framework. Thus *Black Panther* diverges from the tradition of the superhero films that have come before it, films that by their very nature strive to appease, not to offend.

To be sure, *Black Panther* is very much a product of its genre. It's a dynamic, electrifying ride of a film, with balanced measures of comedy, action and heart. But so much of that heart, so much of what will likely resonate with audiences, cannot be extricated from the immovable politics and inherent implications of a Black superhero (though he has been preceded by the *Blade* trilogy and 2004's *Catwoman*, among others). The birth of *Black Panther* in 1966 (created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby) predated the official formation of the American Black Panther Party, but coincided with an era of independence for many African countries. It is nearly impossible to divorce Wakanda from its very real neighbours, ripped apart by colonisation and plundered of their natural resources. And to their credit, Coogler and Cole embrace these politics wholeheartedly.

Black Panther follows the events of *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) after the sudden death of King T'Chaka (John Kani). Still mourning his father, T'Challa returns home to his mother Ramonda (a regal Angela Bassett) and his witty, engineer-savant sister Shuri (Letitia Wright), whose innovative weapon and gadget designs protect her brother and her country. With their support, he ascends to the throne as Wakanda's king and warrior-protector Black Panther, and immediately finds himself at the centre of an age-old battle between tradition and modernity, and more pressingly, between justice and revenge.

When black-market arms dealer Ulysses Klaue (Andy Serkis) crosses his radar, T'Challa enlists the help of old flame Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o), a Wakandan spy, and Okoye (Danai Gurira), the head of the Dora Milaje, Wakanda's elite all-female royal guard. Klaue absconded with a portion of vibranium years ago and murdered the parents of T'Challa's best friend W'Kabi (Daniel Kaluuya), but their plans to bring him to justice are thwarted by American black-ops soldier Erik 'Killmonger' Stevens (Michael B. Jordan), who harbours a secret connection to Wakanda. Erik, like T'Challa, has lost a beloved father, but unlike T'Challa, he grew up poor on the streets of Oakland (a nod to the film's Oakland-born director). A ruthless fighter, Erik sets his sights on the throne, determined to avenge his father and save, in his mind, the oppressed peoples the Wakandans could easily aid but choose to ignore.

Earlier in the film, as part of the coronation ritual, T'Challa visits his dead father in the 'ancestral plane' and the dead king tells his son, 'It is hard for a good man to be a king.' This pronouncement does not – at least in the current instalment –

foreshadow T'Challa's internal character arc. He is noble, almost to a fault, and in fact one of the film's few flaws is that he almost never betrays any semblance of moral complexity. These words instead become an indictment of the seemingly gracious former king.

Each of Coogler's three films has been concerned with the legacy of fathers. His assured debut *Fruitvale Station* (2013) unfolds the final day in the life of Oscar Grant III – killed by a California transit police officer in 2009 – and much of the film's emotional weight resides in the wide, unknowing eyes of the daughter Grant will leave behind. *Creed* (2015) and now *Black Panther* both follow protagonists burdened by history and haunted by a looming inheritance, men who set out to forge their paths in the name of fallen fathers, soon revealed to be not quite heroes but deeply complicated figures whose sins endure beyond the grave to trouble their sons. How these sons ultimately reckon with the humanity of the men they have made into legends and how powerfully they allow the past to guide their steps will prove the measure of their character.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is no stranger to the tragedy of patrilineal trauma, with Thor, Tony Stark and lately Peter Quill all grappling with varying degrees of filial strife. But what in part distinguishes *Black Panther*, the film and the man, from other Avengers is this reverence for ancestors, and the ripples – the curses and blessings – that the past sends across generations into the present. It lends the movie a refreshing poignancy and vitality rarely found in the age of superhero films.

Comparisons to *The Lion King* (1994) are well earned, but the film also feels a natural heir to classic Afrofuturist cinema such as *Space Is the Place* (1974) and *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984). Moreover, Coogler brings a deft, nuanced grace to questions of generational hauntings and Wakanda's responsibility to the outside world. For, ultimately, Erik embodies all the rage and pain of the African diaspora, of a people displaced and cheated out of an inheritance.

Jordan, in this his third collaboration with Coogler, commands the screen with a simmering gaze and a bitter, acerbic delivery, in a magnetic performance sure to earn Killmonger the rabid fanaticism that has attached to Loki and Heath Ledger's Joker before him. Boseman, for his part, despite having the more thankless role of the two, carries the film with a quiet dignity one might rightfully expect of a man raised to be king.

That said, the real stars of *Black Panther* are its women, both before and behind the camera. Most superhero films – and Marvel has generally been no exception – struggle to give their women characters enough, if anything, to do. The Dora Milaje – 'the Adored Ones' – can boast one of the most impressive combat sequences in recent memory; Gurira as their staunch traditionalist general is a revelation throughout, and her fight scenes easily outshine any between T'Challa and Erik. Nyong'o makes for a compelling love interest, one who has her own ambitions, and Bassett is an elegant, endearing Queen Mother. But it is Wright, the charming, lively Q to her brother's Bond, who emerges as the bright star of the film.

Rachel Morrison, who became the first woman nominated for an Academy Award in the cinematography category for her work on *Mudbound*, produces some remarkably stunning visuals here, while Ruth E. Carter's costumes cement the film's Afrofuturist aesthetic with elaborate designs inspired by real-life African tribes such as the Xhosa, Dogon and Suri, among others.

A meticulously crafted film, *Black Panther* establishes itself as a kinetic, powerful entry in the superhero genre.

Kelli Weston, *Sight and Sound*, April 2018

BLACK PANTHER

Directed by: Ryan Coogler
Presented by: Marvel Studios
South African Production Services by: Moonlighting Films
Executive Producers: Louis D'Esposito, Victoria Alonso, Nate Moore, Jeffrey Chernov, Stan Lee
Produced by: Kevin Feige
Co-producer: David J. Grant
Unit Production Manager: Helen Pollak
Production Supervisor: Jason Zorugian
Production Co-ordinator: Sara Bartkiewicz
Financial Controller: Eric Pike
Production Accountant: Matt Monaco
Supervising Location Manager: Ilt Jones
2nd Unit Director: Darrin Prescott
1st Assistant Director: Lisa Satriano
2nd Assistant Director: Josy Capkun
2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Scott Brown
Additional 2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Danielle King
Script Supervisor: Dawn Gilliam
Casting by: Sarah Finn
Extras Casting: Tammy Smith
Written by: Ryan Coogler, Joe Robert Cole
Based on the Marvel Comics by: Stan Lee
Marvel Comics by: Jack Kirby
Director of Photography: Rachel Morrison
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Bruce McCleery
A Camera Operator: P. Scott Sakamoto
B Camera Operator: Thomas Lappin
C Camera Operator: Ross Sebek
Steadicam Operator: P. Scott Sakamoto
Digital Imaging Technician: Nicholas Kay
Key Grip: C. Alan Rawlins
Visual Effects Supervisor: Geoffrey Baumann
Additional Visual Effects Supervisor: Jesse James Chisholm
Visual Effects Producer: Lisa Beroud
Visual Effects by: Method Studios, Industrial Light & Magic, Scanline, Luma Pictures, RISE Visual Effects Studios, Trixter, Double Negative, Storm Studios, Mammal Studios, Ghost VFX, Perception, Cantina Creative, Lola VFX, capital T, Technicolor VFX
Additional Visual Effects: Exceptional Minds, Rodeo, Anibrain, BOT VFX, Futureworks, FX3X, Imageloom VFX, Method Pune, Pixstone Images, Vertigo Visual, Yannix Thailand Co
3D Stereoscopic Producer: Jon Goldsmith
3D Stereoscopic Supervisor: Evan Jacobs
Special Effects Supervisor: Daniel Sudick
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Jesse Noel
Animation by: Method Studios, Industrial Light & Magic, Scanline, Trixter, Double Negative
Edited by: Michael P. Shawver, Debbie Berman
Supervising Finishing Artist: Maxine Gervais
Production Designer: Hannah Beachler
Supervising Art Director: Alan Hook
Art Directors: Jason T. Clark, Joseph Hiura, Alex McCarroll, Jay Pelissier, Domenic Silvestri
Assistant Art Director: Marlie Arnold
Head of Visual Development: Ryan Meinerding
Set Designers: C. Scott Baker, Aric Cheng, David Chow, Nick Cross, Patrick Dunn-Baker, Daniel Frank, Sarah Forrest, Chad S. Frey, Marco Rubeo, Mayumi Valentine

Set Decorator: Jay Hart
Graphic Designer: Zach Fannin
Property Master: Drew Petrotta
Construction Supervisor: Greg Callas
Costume Designer: Ruth Carter
Costume Supervisors: Wendy Craig, Paul Simmons
Speciality Costumes by: Film Illusions Inc.
Make-up Department Head: Joel Harlow
Hair Department Head: Camille Friend
Key Hair Stylist: Jaime Leigh McIntosh
Main Title Sequence by: Perception
End Crawl by: Exceptional Minds
Music by: Ludwig Göransson
Original Songs by: Kendrick Lamar
Choir: Voquality Singers
Music Supervisor: Dave Jordan
Score Supervisor: Steve Durkee
Supervising Music Editor: Steve Durkee
Production Sound Mixer: Peter Devlin
Boom Operator: David Fiske Raymond
Re-recording Mixers: Steve Boeddeker, Brandon Proctor
Supervising Sound Editors: Benjamin A. Burt, Steve Boeddeker
Stunt Co-ordinators: Andy Gill, Jonathon Eusebio
Fight Team Co-ordinator: Clayton Barber
Military Adviser: Stephen Conroy
Armourers: Fritz Buckley, Hayden Bilson
Unit Publicist: Carol McConnaughey
Transportation Co-ordinator: Aaron Skalka
Digital Intermediate by: Technicolor

Cast

Chadwick Boseman (*T'Challa, 'Black Panther'*)
Michael B. Jordan (*Erik Killmonger*)
Lupita Nyong'o (*Nakia*)
Danai Gurira (*Okoye*)
Martin Freeman (*Everett K. Ross*)
Daniel Kaluuya (*W'Kabi*)
Letitia Wright (*Shuri*)
Winston Duke (*M'Baku*)
Sterling K. Brown (*N'Jobu*)
Florence Kasumba (*Ayo*)
John Kani (*T'Chaka*)
Angela Bassett (*Ramonda*)
Forest Whitaker (*Zuri*)
Andy Serkis (*Ulysses Klaue*)
David S. Lee (*Limbani*)
Nabiyah Be (*Linda*)
Isaach de Bankolé (*river tribe elder*)
Connie Chiume (*mining tribe elder*)
Dorothy Steel (*merchant tribe elder*)
Danny Sapani (*border tribe elder*)

USA 2018©

134 mins

NEW RELEASES

Decision to Leave (Heojil Kyolshim) From Mon 17 Oct
Triangle of Sadness From Fri 28 Oct
The Greenaway Alphabet From Fri 11 Nov
Aftersun From Fri 18 Nov
What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?
(Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?) From Fri 25 Nov

CLOSE-UP: RYAN COOGLER

Fruitvale Station
Sat 22 Oct 12:30; Sat 29 Oct 16:15; Mon 14 Nov 20:50
Creed
Sat 22 Oct 20:25; Sun 13 Nov 18:00
Black Panther
Sun 6 Nov 18:10; Sat 12 Nov 20:20
Black Panther: Wakanda Forever
Opens Fri 11 Nov BFI IMAX

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