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>> Hi, everybody! Thank you so much for being here with us. I'm Ricci at the New York public library and I'm so lucky to talk to author and creative extraordinary Nic Stone today.

So Nic's new book is Shuri, a black panther novel. He is a genous scientist. She's so brilliant she's the master mind behind the black panther and the inventor of much of the tech in the highly advanced nation. This black panther is a moment in her life where she can save her country from the impending doom, her brother, mother or other elders.

And for century, the black panther has gained her powers through the juices of herb. Something is wrong and the plants are dying. It's up to her to travel and discover what is killing the herb, how she can save it in the first volume of the all new original adventure.

Even though we are closed, that doesn't mean we can't bring the book to you. If you have your library card, it's available simply E.

If you haven't already, you can get your library card by downloading the app and signing up.

So before I get started with Nic, there's a few housekeeping items have to be go over.

This event is casted on Zoom and YouTube. If you encounter any technical difficulties during the conversation, please bare with us and we'll sort it out as quickly as possible.

I should tell you that the event is being recorded. Only myself and Nic are being recorded.

Not the attendees but to say, not you. You can close out of Zoom or close the YouTube page at any time and we'll miss you.

Nic also really wanted to answer your questions today especially that of young people. You can definitely send them to her any time during the conversation if you have a question, please type it at any point in the Q and A box on the bottom of the Zoom app.

We'll make sure that Nic sees them, though she may not have time to answer everything and we'll go to the Q and A at the end of discussion today.

So, without further adieu, welcome Nic!

>> Welcome to you to my --

>> Yes, that's amazing!

>> I had to bring you in here because the tech is amazing, I promise!

>> You are incredible! Thank you for doing that. I could just -- this is just the end. We don't even have to -- we can just look at

you and the background and the make up and everything.

That is incredible! (Laughing)

Oh my God! So welcome. Welcome, welcome.

>> Thank you!

>> Is there anything that I have missed about the summary of the story without spoiling anything?

>> No, not really. I mean, you're right. She seems to be the only one that cares about this.

She's like, this a huge deal and no one is paying attention because they're all worry about challenge day.

Anyone who has seen the film, it's the tradition where people can come and challenge for the thrown and the mantle of life. There's like all of this stuff going on.

She's like, can we get a little attention over here because this herb is dying and it's important.

>> I mean, it feels basically this super, this super strength, the powers of the black panther, right?

And with that, you know, they're just -- it's just technology and the training and the smart which is not nothing obviously.

>> Right! Yeah, there's a line with she says, without the juices of the herb, the black panther is just a dude in a stretchy suit and it's not untrue.

>> I mean, she also spends a lot of her time in the book trying to look for the right fabric and stuff to make out of the black panther suit that her brother -- her big headed brother is requesting.

So I'm glad you mentioned the movie because that is the background from the marvel universe.

>> It is!

>> But the book is not in the marvel cinematic universe, correct?

>> It is not. So this was the most interesting thing about, the most interesting thing for me about this project is coming to it knowing that most people who come to read it, will solely be familiar with the movie.

It's a book for middle readers, technically. She's 13 in the book so it's aimed at like age ten to one thousand, really.

But knowing there will be small children who read the book, they're not reading the black panther comics. That's a little out of their league. They're heavier, older, aimed at more of an adult audience.

So I had to figure out how I was going to build this world that people are familiar with from a film without actually using the elements of the film because the film is Ryan's intellectual property.

So like, it's just stuff I couldn't do. It was fascinating. It was quite a ride to say the least.

>> Well, I was going to ask you, you know, what is the difference? So you -- so you have written odd one out.

You have written dear Martin book, that are very near and dear to my hearts as well. So you have created these original vibrant characters before.

What was different? You are talking about creating a world

that people already know.

>> Yeah.

>> What was different about that? What was different about that process?

>> Well, what is fascinating about creating, I should say, even -- because I didn't really create much of anything.

It was just like moving through a world that people are honestly not as familiar with as they think.

So as I am moving through creating this space and kind of augmenting what people think they know about Wakonda, it was me asking questions like where exactly is the palace situated in the city? How far is the lab from the palace?

We talked about the sacred mound, how far is that? So things like distance were very interesting and then picking through and even the palace layout itself.

It's funny, I'm working on something else in this world, wink wink, and one of the critiques in the draft that I turned in was that they wanted more world building inside of the palace.

So maybe like, we can create a map so we can see what the layout is, what the palace layout is like. Because with world building, what I have discovered even as a creator, is that I'm really just giving snip its and it's up to the reader to fill in the rest of their imagination.

That is real tricky! Especially with a place like that where we have these different conceptions on what the place is like but I had a blast writing in the world! I will continue to have a blast writing in the world, again, wink wink.

>> Wink, wink. Is that something you can say officially to us or you're just -- going to leave it as a wink?

>> What I say to people, I'm just like, go and check Target's website. If you put in Shuri book, more than one thing pops up.

>> Okay, okay. I will do that because I have not done that and by the way, I'm an avid Target shopper not to plug it or anything.

>> Same, same.

>> Okay, well, you're talking about this world that people, again, having already conceptualized. And you're talking about maybe having a map. When I -- I noticed when you were -- when I was reading it and I just finished it a couple of days ago, you know, you have this -- it was really intriguing to be there, okay.

She was going here. She was going there. Did you have that map set out for yourself before you do it? Is that your writing process?

>> I did! That's interesting because with this sort of original Shuri book, I needed to know where it was because it's like, I need to be able to map out.

There's so much science in this book and I know how we science geeks are. I am a massive science geek.

I know how we are about wanting things to be accurate so if I say this place is 300 kilometers from XY or Z, I need to know my starting point. And how many -- yeah, exactly! I need to know what

is the velocity of her vehicle that she's going to be traveling in so I know exactly how long it's going to take her to reach her destination. I can put it in the book.

There are maps. There's like hand drawn maps in the hard cover and I kind of pushed a little bit for those to be in there because I think that when we think of this, we don't know where it is. It's in a part of East Africa near,

It's surrounded by like, five little tiny nations that all, they pop up in the marvel canyon.

So it was really fun, you know, writing about this imaginary chunk of Africa that could totally exist just saying.

Clearly I'm here so --

>> Yeah, no doubt about it. You're there. You're just blending right into it. I'm feeling kind of gypped because I downloaded the E book and I don't have those maps in my E-book copy.

>> Oh, you have to get them -- I will get them to you. They're so beautiful!, right? So like in the next one, I think we're going to do a map -- oops,

>> You said the next one and it's being recorded.

>> We're going to do -- oh, God, they're going to kill me.

I'm trying to do a map of the palace and then a map of another prominent place in that. I'm looking around for my iPad. I wish I had it. I drew a map of something that is in the next book.

And I would show it to you if my iPad was down here but it's probably good it's not because I don't want to get murdered.

>> It's not there --

>> Right, I left it where it is, which is not there right now.

>> You know, did you get there but social distancing, that's the next question.

>> Oh, we don't have COVID-19 here. It's not a thing.

>> Okay, so the tech, the tech like made sure that COVID-19 was not there?

>> Absolutely. There's like things that heal and get rid of it.

>> You know, when you first posted and you talked about the event on your Instagram, you know, I got really excited. I'm like, but wait? What would happen if, you know, how would it and Shuri, as a tech genious and advanced country, how would they deal with the pandemic? How do you think?

>> Certainly not the way we did here in America. Oh, okay! You know, I think, I think -- it's interesting. I am not going to go too deep because I'm sure there's small children watching and this would go right over their heads.

But the way we handled it says a lot about the way we think of other human beings in this country.

If this had taken place there, which clearly it won't because it can't get past the dome and it is not going to happen.

But if this is a thing that had taken place there, it would stopped early on because I don't necessarily think that we would have a problem with the social distancing and like, having to stay inside for a minute.

And you know, there wouldn't be protesting in the streets because they can't go bowling. There's just things they are just not going to do. I'm going to leave that there.

>> I wonder if there's -- maybe in your place, the next one we're not talking about, there could be a bowling alley. Do you think there would be a bowling alley?

>> That would be fun and now when one appears, you'll know where it came from.

>> Yes!

>> Shoo, it may not land in this -- the one that's being edited but it might land in another one.

>> Oh, it's being edited already? We're laying out the -- we're spoiling.

>> Oh, sorry friends, that's the hope.

>> So this is a far cry from the realistic fiction that you have done. The so called, you wrote issue books that you usually write. What was it like to write the sci-fi behind it?

What was it like to be in the mind set? Is it your first sci-fi iteration?

>> It was awesome! Like getting to step away from racism for a second.

This is what fiction is. Like, I just had a moment where I'm like, oh, you mean I don't have to write about police brutality or white supremacy or all of these things that are not an issue there.

And I would say, there's something very powerful about getting to write for a younger audience in this space so I got to be more playful.

There actually is a social issue addressed lightly in this book.

>> Very lightly.

>> You catch on? Yeah, it's climate change. So the one in this book is very low key, super low key climate change and there of course, would be a social issue in every book because I don't know I know how to not write about social issues. It's just getting to do it in a different way where I don't actually have to research news articles and face these really terrible things that are happening around me all of the time.

>> That was great!

I have written before, kind of a speculative contemporary fantasy type thing. That is on the -- what pad friends.

So if you insist, feel free to check it out. I'm a at the actual Nic Stone there. I'm verified. It's called little spark. I had an eighth grader last year convince me, I need to put my first ever novel on there.

I did and I think I have three or four chapters and I have been posting a chapter a day for the past month and a half.

So yeah! There it is. If you want to read Nic's ever first attempt of writing a novel, just go for it.

>> You just made my heart --

>> It's one hundred percent my first novel so keep your expectations

low.

>> As many pad novels are, right? That's what it's there for. It certainly doesn't have to be this polished piece of work, you know?

It's there and you can post chapters by chapter. So that's definitely for all of our young people out in what pad, I know there's a lot of the teens that come to the library and they are on it and stuff, and we sometimes create your own book cover in our activities.

>> Yeah!

>> So you know, just so you know, Nic Stone is on it as the actual Nic Stone. Verified. I wrote that down. We're going to be posting it.

>> Come through. Come check me out on Y pad.

>> Add the comments and like it and favor it. We need followers.

>> Yes, there's some stuff I'm reading like, oh, oh! There's so much really good --

It's interesting and I say it as obviously as a published author, best seller, whatever, whatever. We do too much kind of discrediting of early work and I think that like, something not being published by a traditional publisher doesn't make it invalid.

I'm a huge fan of Y pad.

It's a great place to find your writing tribe. I love it!

>> I mean. And also, it's like, you don't know how your work can improve without comments, right? Without feedback and that is a great place to start and it's free and it's awesome! So thank you for that, for shouting out your own work. (Laughing) and you know, you mentioned best selling, this and that. That's not something to snooze on, you know. So definitely, always, and this is something that I think I always want to emphasize.

As a teen librarian to our kids, applaud yourself!

Right? And you know, yeah, so thank you for being a good example of that. Pat yourself on the back and pat yourself on the back for the good things that you do.

>> Thank you!

>> So of course, as a fan, I follow you on good reads.

>> Good reads.

>> So I got your letter on good reads and I did want to read it.

>> Oh, good.

>> Yeah, yeah, they want to read a portion that really felt, you know, it really felt very moving to me.

So you wrote, when the book was published and released. Shuri, the genous little sister, the black panther, represents everything that I was at age 13. A science obsessed black girl struggling to figure out my place in the world.

But the true beauty of this project is I got to celebrate those things. Validate them. I got to write a girl like me as a Savior of a nation.

So can you talk to us a little bit more about that and how it felt when you were called to write about Shuri.

>> I can't cry because this is like, fifty dollar mascara.

>> It's not waterproof?

>> You never know, like, if the water works start and it just goes

away. So I was, when I was in 7th grade, my favorite book was Michael's book Sphere.

I was utterly obsessed with black holes. That was like, 7th grade Nic and on the debate team.

And people meet me now and are like, oh, there's no way you were a nerd. I'm like, you have no idea!

It was interesting because I got clout for it so much. I grew up at a time when it wasn't quite cool to be super super smart.

I think honestly, I can't say that's still the case today because I'm not in middle or like, living the daily life in a middle or high school.

But getting to celebrate a love of science and technology. If you tapped me on the shoulder and said, oh, you're going to write a book on literally the smartest person on earth and she's amazing and you're going to be the person who writes her story.

I would be like, stop trying to punk me. I think, punk was on the air then. Like, where is Ashton?

I would be 35 in July and I'm proud of it. Black don't crack.

>> Yeah, so getting to write this amazing story of, really, myself. I don't have access to -- sadly. Man would life be different if I did but Shuri loves experimentation and science and reading and knowledge and she loves things that she doesn't know.

Because those are just the things she has an opportunity to learn. And having a book that celebrates that in a black girl, I think, is really a powerful thing and I'm hoping that all of my little science obsessed black girls specifically, they get this book and they see themselves and they're like, oh!

Yeah, I can be the next major person. I can go out here and completely flip the world upside down. I can go into neuroscience and be an electrical engineer and build the next tech company.

I just want it to be validated. Especially inside kids of color.

>> And I think you do an excellent job of it by the way in this story and for validating all of that.

You know, you're talking about how it wasn't cool back then. I'm just like a -- Asian, don't raisin.

>> Hey! I love it.

>> You know, when we were growing up, there weren't a lot of examples of people of color, much less a black person as a smart and cool.

We had Urkle. That was it. And I'm dating myself right here. And it wasn't a cool thing, you know? You still have like this nerd thing going on. But Shuri here is just an incredible person who saves her nation even though she's not being taken seriously. Even though she's not the big king.

It's really great. Even though she's not a great king, she's an integral part of the nation.

And she is the one who makes it possible for her to perform with the soup, right?

He has a wedgy without her, right? And that's no good in

fighting. You don't want to wedge that.

>> Yeah, I don't want to try a round house kick with a wedgy. It's not the thing I want to do.

>> No, no. So throughout the story as well, you make -- you really -- it's not over done. It's perfect. You're going through and she's noticing all of the absence of strong women characters throughout the story that are being recognized, you know?

She's like, why isn't it that the princesses are being recognized? Why is it the king that's the black panther?

Why is it the DORA, the focus even though they're the strongest Army out there? How important was it to make that the focus in the story?

>> Listen, in my research, I basically got to spend like, a few months literally watching movies and reading comics. That was the research process.

>> Perfect!

>> For writing this book and I'm like, how do I do this all of the time?

What is fascinating is there's evidence of one female black panther and she wasn't a black panther for very long.

And I think that it's fascinating you have this country that supposedly sets women up so high.

Their fiercest and strongest warriors are all women but there's never been a female ruler.

So Shuri, there's a scene in the book where she's getting her hair braided and she noticed on the wall, she's in the queen's dressing chambers and she notices the portraits of all of the queens.

She mentions to the birth mother -- they don't have the same birth mother. And she was like, the minister of science before she married the king and suddenly became baby momma.

Now, I'm the queen and I had a kid and Shuri questions, when happened to her after that? Like, did she continue in her scientific pursuits?

And I think, to me, this is a really important theme to touch on. Because I find that like, while there are programs and things that are making more space for women and for her girls, women and girls are not necessarily celebrated in those places.

So it's like, here, we'll get a little seat at the table but we'll act like you're not here or treat you poorly.

And I really wanted to touch on that a little bit and think a little bit deeper about, you know, even in this country that is so technologically advance and so big and powerful, patriarchy is still a thing. So Shuri in this book is trying to figure out her place.

Like, what is my role here, exactly. How do I make my mark on this place? I am just as much a child and if something happens to her, I'm going to have to rule because she's first in line to the thrown.

So she's grappling with all of these questions and she is just not okay with the way she's dismissed.

And I think, my goal with that is to empower young women to be



less okay with being dismissed.

I want young women to understand, yes, take up space. You don't have to ask for permission to use your voice. Like, say what you have to say. Do what you have to do. And don't allow yourself to be dismissed. And she, you know, she had to kind of go around to solve the problem in order for people to recognize, oh, wait.

But I think that initiative is important and sometimes, we just have to do what we have to do.

>> You know, and in particular, it's, as a -- for young people, they have that added layer of also not being taken seriously because they're young, right?

And she definitely navigates that. She ends up kicks butt! And saving the world,

Or at least saving, her part of the world for now. No spoilers, right?

>> Yes.

>> You know, so thank you for that! And I did want to ask a little bit, something personal.

>> Yeah?

>> You're a Slytherin.

>> Yeah, hard core. I have it tattooed on my forearm.

>> Oh, yeah!

>> That's amazing. So did you think you were that because of the potter test or did you just proclaim it for yourself?

>> It started with the potter more test. There's certain things that I just couldn't get, oh, you can't see it because -- doesn't want me to be great but you can get a glimpse there.

So I -- there were -- I have always had a strange thing for Snape. It's weird admitting it out loud.

There were points in reading the series where I didn't like him very much but, I don't know. I think the fact that he was just always aggressively himself.

That was something that, got, that moved me as a young person because I was like, twelve when the first Harry Potter book comes out.

I was reading these books and existing in a space where I'm nine times out of ten, the only black kid in the class room.

So reading this character who wasn't the best character. I always had a thing for anti-heros in general but reading the character who was a jerk for most of the series but never stopped being a jerk.

Like, there was something really endearing to me about that. Like, I liked the fact he was so unmoved but everything and everyone.

It was just like, I'm going to do me and you are a little punk.

And sometimes, he was right. Harry was kind of being a little punk.

>> Yeah.

>> Harry in general, let's not like --

>> That's not up for debate.

>> We are not going to scorch the children but I don't think they're ready to admit it yet that their hero -- any way.

>> He's a hero and still a punk. You have layers to take care of.

>> You're right. Being a hero and being a punk are not mutually exclusive. That's excellent!

>> Yeah (laughing)

>> But there was something about the whit and like, it's like its only evil if you use it for bad things, right? That's how I always felt about it. You are kind of like, slick. It's good to be a little slick, you know what I'm saying?

Like, slick people get stuff done. So I have always identified a little bit more with like the darker side of things.

No matter what the universe, like, Loki is yeah, uh-huh.

>> And he's about himself.

>> Exactly! Exactly! And yes, there's times when it's not a good thing but then at other times, when you see this -- I don't know. It's like they represent like, raw humanity to me.

And I think that raw humanity is something we don't give enough space. Like we don't give enough space for people to just kind of be trash but, at the end of the day, I think if you strip everything away, we are all pretty much trash.

Like, we have to be conditioned to actually be kind to each other and I say it as a mother of two children.

When children are small, they don't care about anything that you think or say or feel. And you condition them to start caring. Like, I think they develop a little bit more where they start caring a little bit more but like, have you hung out with a baby?

They're the worst. They're like, it's like, raw humanity.

>> After they get past the really cute stage and then all of the sudden they learn to talk and you're like, oh, oh. (Laughing). You know, also, when you give nuance to characters, it also gives us a chance to sort of let go of these high expectations that we put on ourselves too.

We are layered people. Everybody makes mistakes, you know? Everybody does.

>> Yes, including Shuri, yes, she messes up a few times and it's always fun to watch.

>> It is! Redeeming all at the end, by the way. Very redeeming.

>> Yes.

>> Okay. We do have quite a few questions and I do want to get through them. I'm super excited.

So let's see here. Love your costume and virtual background!

>> Thank you.

>> Same, same. Your character's voices are so authentic as a writer, how do you ensure authenticity of voices across genders and what is your process like for that?

>> I have no idea. That is the, like, best truth. Like, I, what I do say, when I teach workshops and interacting with young writers, is it's important that you know how to listen. A combination of listening and reading, I think is what trained me with regard to writing voice.

I sit, you're going to find out how big of a creep Nic Stone

is.

I will sit in whatever coffee shop I write in, which I haven't written in a coffee shop for two months but I will sit with my head phones on, looking like I'm working but I'm actually just listening to the conversations around me.

>> Yes, that's creep, next level.

>> It is what it is. If you don't get caught, are you really a creep? Like, I'm not --

>> (Laughing)

>> If you don't get caught, I'm not actually creeping on you -- I am, but you don't know it so I don't qualify as a creep.

I listen to these conversations because it gives you an amazing opportunity to hear how people tick. Where does the voice rise? Where do you find the emotion?

There was one time, I was sitting in Starbucks, clearly not at all minding my own business listening to these ladies at the table next to me and first, the conversation was mad boring.

They were talking about some like -- one of them runs a non profit and the other one was asking her about a fund raising and I'm like, this is okay. All right, and then out of nowhere, one of the women goes, oh, by the way, I got divorced a couple of weeks ago.

Wow! It was like, conversation whiplash but I tuned in and it got really interesting, right?

But knowing, listening to like, she started out super flat when she said that. It was like a statement of that and then the emotions started to come when she started talking about it.

So it just gives me insight into how people tick, into how we think and how we move and how we process information.

So then when I come to the page, I can take the inflections and nuances, I can put them on a page like, as a way of me writing down what I'm hearing, as oppose to me writing the way I was told to.

Does it make sense? I'm hearing the stuff in my head and I'm just writing it down as I hear it instead of trying to make sure that the -- like, I don't really like attributes, like, he said, she said.

I like when the conversation flows on the page and when I hear internal thought, I would like it to be flowy as well. I will say, you do have to know the rules to break them.

So if you know your grammar and know you don't actually have to abide by those rules when you're trying to write voice but to me, listening is the first step. Like, actually listening and giving validation to the way people speak.

Like, there's no such thing as correct English. If I'm speaking, the whole point of language is communication. So if I'm talking to you and you know what I'm saying, I have communicated effectively despite how I said it.

>> Exactly!

>> So yeah, so that was probably not helpful at all but that is the answer.

>> No, I think you hit it on the head right. It's about authenticity and you were listening to authentic people, real people. You were

creeping on them but, you know, they're real. (Laughing), okay.  
Cool!

So I like that one a lot because it talks about the writing process. And then, let's see here. We talked a little bit about it but, was it really hard to describe a place that you have never been to? A place that is made up?

>> Oh, one hundred percent! I am the worst at world building. Any time I turn in a book where there's like a fantasy component, the first set of notes back, it needs more world building. Every single time. It's like, I'm so used to writing in contemporary spaces where all I have to do is say, he reached the side street and boom! Side street pops into your head.

But when I say -- the (inaudible) and it's like, what is happening? I don't know. What does the thrown room look like? Et cetera, et cetera.

It's hard! But it's also, it has -- it can be very fun. The biggest struggle for me is I don't actually like tons and tons of words.

I like to be succinct in my fiction but when you have to world build, you have to write extra description and I am like --

>> Yeah.

>> I so struggle through it.

>> Yes, it can slow your pace down, definitely. That's the kind of stuff in high fantasy. So when the kids ask for like, when they come in the library, when they have come into the library, oh my God, you know, but they would say they want high fantasy and I would be like, how do you want the pace to go?

>> Are we talking like token or like -- what do you mean?

>> Do you want to jump into the action or do you want to have this tree talked about for ten pages because we can get you that.

>> I'm good. I'm real good I will say with world building, I like to use what people are familiar with. There's a lot of metaphors and a simile and figurative language. So when I describe the travel, it's like the shape of a panther mid leap. Boom, you have a picture in your head.

I'm like, let's try to keep it simple. We're not going to talk about the sleek lines and the narrow dynamics. Like a panther in mid leap, you got it!

>> So another question is, since you're hinting there will be a few Shuri novels, you heard it here first (laughing), is there any intention to integrate other marvel characters?

That's probably coming from a person who hasn't read the book just yet. No spoilers, but moon girl, maybe.

>> Oh, look. All I will say to this question, I love a good cameo, that's all I will say.

There is a solid one in this first Shuri book if I do say so myself. And when I tell you -- I had such a blast writing those scenes. So my brother, I have a brother.

He just turned 32. And you know, he's reading this book about

this 13 year old girl and he gets to a part where there's the reveal. There's like a cameo reveal and I get this text and he's like, bra, if this is dot dot dot, isn't natural, I'm going to flip.

And then he flips the page and he says, bro!

So yes, I do love cameos, take that and run with it.

>> So for the person who asked that question, definitely jump in and read the book because that cameo, I was, I also got on the phone by the way.

But I didn't wait like your brother. I didn't wait to find out. I didn't want to wait to find out who it was before I text.

>> So fun! Oh, so fun!

>> That's part and parcel of the marvel universe which is so cool because they find a way to connect almost a very seamless connection. I was so struck by how surprised I was.

I'm like, well, this does make sense.

>> It's comic cannon, too. I can pull up the panel where she is interacting with this character that makes a cameo in the first book. When I found it out, like, this is good! We're done here. This is absolutely going to be so much fun to write! I was right, it was.

The cameo, there's actually a couple of cameos. There's four cameos in -- look, there's going -- the second book comes out in February.

We might as well stop hinting about it.

>> All right, you heard it here, February! February 2nd, 2021 and there are some fun cameos in that one too. Yeah.

>> Well, okay, okay. So this one kind of relates. Are there other strong women there whose stories you want to tell?

>> Not there, necessarily, but there is a character in the Shuri-verse, as I call it because yes, she gets her own universe. There's a character I created.

The one thing that bothered me in the film is like the utter and complete lack of friends.

I get it, like you have a two hour film. You can't do everything in two hours. But as a black girl who was like, a science geek, having friends who understood me was like vital. Or even not understood me but just having people who accepted me for who I was, was like a huge deal.

So in the Shuri-verse, she has a best friend and she is training to become a (inaudible). She's 13, like Shuri is. They have the most ridiculous like, bantering, bickering -- they're like an old married couple.

>> It's so good, by the way.

>> I would write stories about it. I would totally write stories about her. There's definitely other people in the marvel universe I would love to write about. We'll see what happens is all I'm going to say there.

>> I mean, you're hinting at sequels so -- okay. And so another question I did want to pull from the group was, how were you selected to write this project?

Can you tell us about the process so that our closet writers can emerge?

>> I have no idea how I was selected. All I know is I got an e-mail. So what is wild about this, I saw black panther in theatres. I left the theatre and I'm like, geeked!

I left the theatre, well, I was real mad when I left the theatre because there was one thing, like one particular plot line in the movie and I'm like, it didn't have to go like that.

I left the theatre and I was like, I have to say that Shuri character totally sold the whole movie and I have to figure out a way.

I was telling my partner, I have to figure out a way I can write a book about her. I don't know how to do it but Jason -- that's all I did.

Eight months later, I literally got an e-mail and was like, hey, we're doing this new initiative and you were the person we thought of to take on this particular project.

>> You spoke it out in the air.

>> And I screamed in the airport! People were alarmed. I was in Amarillo, Texas. I think I was the only person with any melanin in the entire airport at that particular time.

And I screamed in the airport and people were freaked out but I didn't care because, I mean, are you serious?

>> There you go! That is like forever.

>> So what I will say is just like, dream big! A lot of the things that have happened to me in forming me in my writing career haven't really -- I wasn't in pursuit of them.

I know it's not necessarily helpful but I think that we don't do a good enough job of stressing how much of this stuff is like, a giant crap shoot in like a bag of luck.

You can be the greatest writer in the world and you still need a ton of luck in like the right roll of the die.

So keep pushing. Keep chasing things. Dear Martin my debut was my third ever novel I wrote.

My first one was on Y pad and then the second one, I second novel I ever wrote will come out in spring 2022.

So like, don't quit, basically!

>> So your second novel is coming out after, like, after the debut.

>> Yeah, years after. It will be my fifth YA. So like, my second novel I ever wrote will be my 10th published novel. Wow!

>> Yep. Congratulations!

>> Thanks! I don't know what it's doing but it's okay. It's been working out so far!

>> And great to take the time to figure it out. Much like Shuri did in the novel and she just kept trying. There was a lot of resilience in her as she was navigate through that. You know?

So we're getting an alert that it's time to start wrapping up.

>> Sad! We just got started.

>> I'm pretty sad myself, actually. But one last really quick question, what is your favorite book and author and why?

>> Oh, lord! Why you got to do this to me? Favorite book is easy.

My favorite book is a book called the virgin suicide. It's very dark. It should come with a number of content warnings.

But it is a book that I read at a time when I really needed to. And I think there's something to be said about finding the right book at the right time.

It validated a lot of things that I was thinking and feeling despite the fact there are no people of color whatsoever.

This is a book about five white sisters in a white lily white town who are going through some things but I was able to connect to kind of the emotional core of the story.

It moved me in a way that no book ever had before. And yeah, it's actually kind of weird. To say aloud, that my favorite book is one about a bunch of white girls but I have come to a place where it helps me to understand the power of an emotional core of a story.

It helps me to -- it gives me this launching off point to explain how books are vehicles of empathy and how you can absolutely connect with somebody who is wildly different from you.

Just by reading the right book. Favorite author -- I am going to say Jason Reynolds. Most people roll their eyes when I say that. But he is, he's like an older brother to me so I'm totally biased.

>> So gifted!

>> He's amazing, right? And I started reading his books when they first started, the second round of when they first started coming out which was like 2013, I think.

When I was the greatest, came out. But when I was trying to figure out. So this first novel I wrote on Y pad, got shot down left and right, I even got fired by my agent. Get used to rejection. There's a lot and you have to be okay to just get up and keep going.

So I pitched, well, we parted ways, I wrote the second novel, the one that comes out in 2022. It got me a new agent but when she went with that novel, she couldn't place it.

There was an editor who was asking if I was working on something else. And I had the idea for dear Martin kind of kicking around for a while but I was really scared of trying to write a story like that.

When I was the greatest, Jason Reynolds kind of re debut novel, there was this freedom that I got from reading that book.

And from seeing the way he used language from hearing the voices of the boys in that book. From seeing the things he was willing to discuss. In that book and like every book since, like Jason is a book that continues to push the envelope and who continues to kind of stretch what the children's literature means.

I have yet to read a book of his that I don't like. I even have some that nobody else has.

>> I'm pretty jealous so that's your in, I'm jealous about.

>> I had to like -- I bought them on Ebay. I will not tell you how much I spent.

So Jason Reynolds published a book called self when he was much younger. It's a beautiful book and there's some poetry and some

photography. He and his buddy, they like, paid to get it published and printed, et cetera. And I will not tell you how much money I spent to get a copy of this dang book but I'm glad I did.

It's written out to some random family. I'm like, I'm glad you let this go because now it's mine. Be

>> It's yours now, and sometimes you have to treat yourself.

>> Treat yourself.

>> Okay, I don't know if we're over time or out of time. Oh, we're over time. Okay, we're done. Fantastic!

>> Sorry, friends.

>> So check out the book on simply E. And thank you Nic, so much for being here with us.

The hard cover is beautiful and until you can get your hands on it, forever. Check it out on our E book and thank you so much for being with us here today.

>> Thank you for having me all the way from here where there's no COVID-19.

>> There you go!

>> As soon as I hang up, I will have to go back to reality.

>> Keep the Zoom background up.

>> Yeah, that's fine.

>> I guess folks, good night! Stay safe and stay healthy.

>> Thanks for tuning in!

>> Thank you so much!