

In Proximity
IN PROXIMITY SPECIAL: IRONHEART WITH CHINAKA HODGE
Final Transcript

[00:00 - KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: This is In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, Head of Audio here at Proximity Media. You might know us from the movies we've made, but we also make podcasts and TV shows. I run our podcasts here as well as our socials, and today I'm excited to share a very special episode on our flagship podcast, In Proximity, spotlighting our new TV show IRONHEART.

On this episode, I'll be speaking with Chinaka Hodge, the Head Writer and Executive Producer of IRONHEART, about her creative process for writing the show and how she drew from her personal experiences to create the characters that we see on it, too. IRONHEART is a production of Marvel and Proximity Media, so when they were in production on the show, Chinaka actually sat down with Executive Producer and Proximity Founder Sev Ohanian to talk about what it was like to be in the writers room, how she, Sev, and Ryan met back in their college days at USC Film School, and their journeys as writers and producers.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Sev Ohanian: I'll never forget that first day because you set such an amazing tone, and that was your first time running a room, right?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: Can I read this email that you sent to us a few days before? Is that okay?

Chinaka Hodge: I'm really embarrassed, but yes.

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: We have that part of the show. It is audio-only because that's how we were doing the show back then. I'll sit down with Chinaka here on video, but also available in audio, and just get a little bit more of a deep dive into her process.

IRONHEART follows bad-girl genius inventor Riri Williams, played by Dominique Thorne. While her character originated in the comics by Brian Michael Bendis and Eve Ewing, onscreen audiences first met her when she was on her internship abroad in the film BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER, co-written and directed by Proximity Founder Ryan Coogler. Riri is on a mission to be the greatest inventor of her generation, which she says doesn't mean much without the resources to bring her ideas to life. So, she resorts to alternative means to get said resources, and on her journey, she meets a host of friends and foes, including her AI, based on

her best friend Natalie, played by Lyric Ross, and Parker Robbins, also known as The Hood, played by Anthony Ramos.

So, if you don't already know, Chinaka is an accomplished writer of so many mediums. She's a poet, an educator, rapper, actor, playwright, and screenwriter. She's worked with many notable folks from Steven Spielberg to, of course, Ryan Coogler, and she's a touring slam poet known for a TEDx Talk with over 1 million views. She recently starred on MGM and Michael B. Jordan's CREED series for Amazon, and she's developing multiple projects with collaborators like Daveed Diggs, Justin Simien, and Will Packer, to name a few. She was a 2013 Sundance Feature Film Lab Fellow, a 2022 Kennedy Center 100 Honoree, and honestly, the list goes on. I can't keep up. Chinaka grew up in Oakland and is deeply involved in the arts, culture, and music community of the East Bay area.

It's going to be a great show. We're going to start with my video conversation with her right here in the Proximity Media office. And then, on the flip side, we will have her audio conversation with Sev Ohanian that they recorded back in production. And that's our show. Enjoy!

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[2:58 - In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Yeah, it—it's my real office.

Chinaka Hodge: It's your real office—you're doing this!

Paola Mardo: Yes, yes. Yes.

Chinaka Hodge: This is awesome.

Paola Mardo: Welcome.

Chinaka Hodge: Thank you.

Paola Mardo: Glad to have you here.

Chinaka Hodge: I love to be on the lot, and Proximity's offices are so nice.

Paola Mardo: Thank you. Thank you for doing this.

Chinaka Hodge: Boogie, boogie!

Paola Mardo: Before we get into the actual podcast, a new thing happened on this show that you didn't get to do when you were on with Sev that you get to do now.

Chinaka Hodge: Okay.

Paola Mardo: It's called the Get Reel segment.

Chinaka Hodge: I'm really excited.

Paola Mardo: So there's a surprise question for you to—

Chinaka Hodge: Inside?

Paola Mardo: Inside. So you—

Chinaka Hodge: What makes me most nervous is not answering the question—it's having to hold the microphone while opening this reel.

Paola Mardo: It's all good. You got it.

Chinaka Hodge: "As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?" As a child, I very much wanted to be an actor. I—

Paola Mardo: Really?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah. I was in, like, modeling classes and acting classes and learned to walk and, like, walked with a book on my head. And, like, I was in the Bay Area, so I worked with Marla Dell Talent. I was one of her girls. I remember, like, very vividly the era was Jurnee Smollett and, like, other curly-haired girls from the Bay—

Paola Mardo: The '90s, yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, early '90s in the Bay, and my very first gig was doing the voiceover on a CD-ROM about—

Paola Mardo: A CD-ROM?

Chinaka Hodge: A CD-ROM that was, like, a geography CD-ROM, and Wakanda fans will like this, it was in the center of Africa. It was like a—I was a girl, a Central African girl who was explaining both coffee export and import for the CD-ROM.

Paola Mardo: At what age?

Chinaka Hodge: Eleven? Ten, eleven.

Paola Mardo: Amazing. Amazing. And so how did you go from actor to writer?

Chinaka Hodge: I—Acting was not for me, and I think I knew that fairly early on, that it didn't feel authentic to the way I wanted to express myself. I did poetry for a really long time after that and performed in slams all over and sort of felt limited by the three-and-a-half-minute format. I wanted to—I was telling somebody the other day, I wanted to argue with myself onstage.

And someone was like, "You want to argue with yourself onstage? That sounds like a play." So I started writing plays from there, and then after playwriting and working with Campo Santo and

Intersection of the Arts, who you might know through their work with Sing Sing, moved down to L.A. and met Ryan at grad school and sort of off to the races from there.

Paola Mardo: The rest is history.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: I love that. So I'm very honored to be sitting here with you in the office. We have Ironheart over here.

Chinaka Hodge: Wow!

Paola Mardo: Of course, she's wearing the older suit, but—

Chinaka Hodge: I need to peep that.

Paola Mardo: But I did want to take it back because, you know, you are a writer first and foremost, even though you've acted, you've rapped. You're a playwright also. There's so many things I feel like you've done—educator—but it always seems to come back to writing. And I wanted to ask—first of all, it's very personal writing, too. That's what I really noticed through the show and also the other work you've done. I got to read excerpts of your debut book of poetry, *Dated Emcees*.

Chinaka Hodge: Ooh, *Dated Emcees* is my second, and I appreciate that you read the second and not the actual debut.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Okay, the internet called it the debut.

Chinaka Hodge: That's fair.

Paola Mardo: I shall edit that. I love this, a series of poems about your coming-of-age during a pivotal moment in hip-hop. I would say '90s, early 2000s?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah. I think the book is—yeah, it's called *Dated Emcees*, and it centers around my time in the early '00s, sort of like, the Y2K era of emcee.

Paola Mardo: And this is what I love. I mean, first of all, what I got to read was humorous but also haunting and deeply emotional. And I saw a bunch of folks had written about your work, and, in praise of your book, your friend, the actor/writer/singer/songwriter Daveed Diggs—

Chinaka Hodge: I was like, it's only two or three people who match all that.

Paola Mardo: He wrote that you write, and I quote, you write with “the grace of a dancer, the bars of a rapper, the heart of your best friend, and all of the swag and soul of Oakland.” How do you feel about that?

Chinaka Hodge: Man, I should've paid him slightly more. He would've written slightly nicer. No, that's the kindest thing anyone could say, and then, from Daveed, it means it all. He's known me since before I started performing poetry, and I used to go watch him perform in the plays at school. So, yeah, a compliment from Daveed about my artistry and my craft means—it means the world.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about how—you know, you're now writing—head writing a Marvel TV show, which we'll get to, and developing so many other projects. How do you stay true to yourself as a writer, you know, from when you write personal stories or personal poems but also when you write a big Hollywood project?

Chinaka Hodge: That's a really great question, and I think the act of staying balanced is both, like, the hardest thing for a human to do—I was headstrong, foolish, passionate enough to try and do IRONHEART while being a new mom. And so, in so many ways, I feel like when I'm writing for Aziza or when I'm writing with my child in mind, it's very easy to write from a soulful, heartfelt, mindful place.

I think it got really hard to balance motherhood and work life, and so the things I—what I want to change most in writing are the places where I had to, like—I knew I was running for a bottle, and I just had to get a line down on the page or vice versa, I knew I had to get a line down on the page and didn't get to play with her in the same kind of way.

Paola Mardo: Right.

Chinaka Hodge: So, I don't know, over the last few months, I've been really trying to get back to my natural and authentic voice. And who am I if I'm not writing for Riri Williams, which is—it's a hard adjustment for real, for real because I lived inside of her body and her suit and her mind for so long. But it's also a joy. It's like coming into my own again and again and again.

And I would say I'm really excited and really nervous and really precious about Ironheart in a way that makes it feel like one of my poems from when I was 13. Like, it feels like I'm risking something in a way that I'd lost along the way of performing sort of from my catalogue. And in and around my poetry community, I sort of knew my bounds and knew where I could shine and knew—like, I know how to rock a house, but the challenge here was collaborating and revision and trying to synthesize poetry and Eve's writing from the comic books and Bendis's writing from the comic books and make something that felt legible to people who hadn't read any of it, especially not my poetry.

So, if you don't know, Brian Michael Bendis and Eve Ewing both took different runs at the Ironheart comic book series. Brian originated it, and Eve, who's a good friend of mine from the poetry scene, handed it off to me. Yeah. I think I'm still getting back to my authentic voice, and I think that's the task of the artist consistently.

And I'd say, like, without any, like, trying to gas anybody around, like, having a circle of people like Ryan, like Sev, like Zinzi in proximity, no pun intended, has made the huge difference in—you know, people have known me since before I was making for Marvel and before I was in

any of these seats at any of these tables. Yeah, it's been really good for them to get back to me and say, like, "Nak, remember when you did X, Y, Z?" or, "What about this one poem you started?" or, "Remember this show we were working on before?" So, yeah, I really—it's nice to have trusted artistic friends like the Cooglers, like the Sevs of the world in my corner.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And I love that we're going to play, on this episode, your conversation with Sev, which, honestly, I feel like listening to that after this is going to be so interesting because you guys were so in the thick of it.

Chinaka Hodge: We were babies! What did we know? What did we know?

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: What did you know? But I wanted to ask—and let me clarify. I want to make sure I don't say this is your debut show, and maybe it's not, but is this the first show you've created?

Chinaka Hodge: This is the first show I've created. It's the first show I was a head writer on. It was the first show I got the EP title. So, yeah, it was a first in a lot of ways.

Paola Mardo: A lot of firsts.

Chinaka Hodge: It was the first room I got to hire, and I'm really, really proud of our room. I'm really proud of both who we hired and why we hired them, but the way I got to run the room—it was a big dream of mine to run a television writing room in a similar way that we run a poetry workshop. And so we started from the writing prompt, and I asked the writers in the room, "Tell me about a villain in your life. Tell me about a hero in your life." And that was our first day, first day out. So, yeah, I'm very, very proud of the firsts that I did on this show.

Paola Mardo: It's incredible. For those who don't know, because oftentimes when you hear "TV show," like, the head writer, you hear the word "showrunner," right? There's so many producers. Can you just explain to folks: what is a head writer, and what is an executive producer in terms of what you did on IRONHEART?

Chinaka Hodge: Well, I would say the role of head writer—head writer/executive producer is very unique to Marvel. So most shows outside of the Marvel setup: smaller budgets, less cinematic, and move with one showrunner. This was super collaborative between the Proximity offices, my office, which is called Restitution Pictures, and Marvel and our beautiful, creative execs there. So it was a team challenge in a different kind of way than most writing rooms operate.

That said, my role on this show included writing scripts, so writing—I wrote Episodes 1 and 6 on my own, and then we wrote—I wrote alongside—many writers, many showrunners will completely rewrite the writers in the room. So the writer will give a draft, and then the head writer or showrunner will take it and just put their own spin on it. I didn't want to do that, and so I think we have six episodes that feel like six unique voices that all sing together, which was a big goal of mine.

On this show, I worked alongside costumes, stunts, our beautiful hair and makeup department—I just got to watch. I didn't help at all. I just watched. I got to weigh in on casting decisions. I got to weigh in on lighting decisions and prop decisions. I got to weigh in on which panels of the comic book we should be recreating.

Paola Mardo: Wow. Can I pause you right there?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: What is that like?

Chinaka Hodge: That was super fun, and I think, like, that was actually Sev's strong point. You know, he loves panels in a way that I can't even pretend to love it like Sev loves it so—and same thing for Kelsey Lew, who was also in our room, one of our creative execs. They were just both really good at poring over the comic books and finding things that felt both iconic inside of character, didn't tell too much plot or story, and then gave to vis dev to sort of recreate.

So my favorite frame in the show, is—it's in the trailer. She goes head up in her suit against a—like, a delivery truck and—

Paola Mardo: Yep. I was hoping you'd talk about that. Okay, cool.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, and, like, we got it frame-for-frame. It's—I mean, it's really freaking cool to know what SFX, VXF, writing—everybody had to work together just to get one frame that matched the comic book panel. So it's also, like for our audience, it's like, man, if we had to work that hard for one frame, imagine why we can't produce the panels frame-for-frame-for-frame, why the TV is going to be different than the comic.

So, yeah, I got to touch so much on this show in a way that I don't think most head writers outside of this, or other writer/EPs, necessarily, get to play in the world unless they're showrunners. So, on this, I was kind of like, demi-showrunner, showrunner-in-training.

Paola Mardo: Can I ask—well, let me take it back really quick because my understanding is, even though this show is produced with Marvel and Proximity, and while, you know, Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, Sev Ohanian are executive producers on the show, you did have to pitch yourself for the job, right? And to Marvel, right?

Chinaka Hodge: I did.

Paola Mardo: And I don't know what you can or can't talk about, but—

Chinaka Hodge: I don't know how much I can talk about it because I'm bound by an NDA.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Chinaka Hodge: One NDA to Marvel and one NDA to Proximity.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Let me—I'll ask you. You tell me if you can answer.

Chinaka Hodge: Okay.

Paola Mardo: I'm just curious like, how—what was important to you to say in your pitch? Like, why did you really want to do the show, and what was your pitch to Marvel, like part of your take? What was unique to your take?

Chinaka Hodge: There were a couple different ways of approaching the stories I wanted to tell at the time, and I—whether or not I was working with Proximity or Marvel, I was very clear in all of my pitches wherever I was that I needed to—I wanted to write a strong woman. I wanted to write action. I wanted to write her in everyday circumstances with extraordinary power.

And so I pitched on Marvel's—one of Marvel's projects that has not yet gone, which was a really good fit. And I got really far down the line and made good friends with all the creative execs along the way. And then I could tell, just, like, in my very last moment to pitch, I pitched something that was too close to a different Marvel show, and, like, I watched it go. I really watched it go out the window! And I was crushed.

Paola Mardo: Can I ask how long that pitching process takes? It is like weeks or a couple months?

Chinaka Hodge: Months.

Paola Mardo: A year? Okay.

Chinaka Hodge: Months with not a lot of writing but a good deal of ideating.

Paola Mardo: Right, but it takes time. Yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: It takes time. And I'd gotten in—I was in the world of that pitch enough that, like, that story still wakes me up at night, and I still, like, can see that story in my head. So, hopefully, it'll be coming back around this way.

Paola Mardo: One day. One day.

Chinaka Hodge: I was also pitching on a different Proximity project that I won't say too much about but is not one that the world has seen. And I remember in the Proximity pitch process, Sev going, "Nak, you have a lot on your plate right now. Are you sure that this is the project you want to be doing?"

And I was like, "Honestly, no. There's this other thing that Marvel's pitching that I'm really interested in doing." And Sev and Zinzi and Ryan all kind of like—like, smiled and then hung their heads. It was the strangest reaction. Now I know that they were partners on the other project that I wanted to be on, but they had known—they had been able to see on both sides of the table, maybe on three sides of the table, that I was pitching this strong woman character out

in a lot of ways, and it was the best fit for IRONHEART, for sure, for sure. It would've been like a square peg, round hole for the other two projects. So it was really nice to feel supported by my friends—because I felt like Sev asked me as a friend, like, "Yo, friend, you got a lot on your plate right now."

And I think if I hadn't been honest and just been like, "No, I can do it!" my good friends would have been forced to be like, "You can't do all three at the same time, and probably none of them are a good fit." So, I don't know, it felt like the right moment in my artistry to choose what I wanted and to say what I wanted, and then be able to be like, man, that fell on, like, safe ears. What a blessing.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And then, so, when you got the call, you pitched for IRONHEART—first of all, do you pitch in front of Ryan, Sev, and Zinzi? Is it in front of Kevin Feige? Like, what does that look like?

Chinaka Hodge: I pitched to—I pitched to Zoie and Kelsey first, and they helped me get ready for the pitch to Prox, and then Prox helped me get ready for the pitch to Marvel.

Paola Mardo: Amazing. And this is Zoie—

Chinaka Hodge: Zoie Nagelhout and—

Paola Mardo: Yes, executive producer, and Kelsey Lew was supervising.

Chinaka Hodge: And executive producer of so many Marvel projects and you know and love. And I also—I worked with two other executives, and I'm not sure if I can say their names, but two other executives who remembered me from the first project, from Marvel, who, like, stewarded me along and suggested me for IRONHEART.

Paola Mardo: I love that because I feel like, you know, working in this industry, you just never know who you're going to end up working with, or, like, that person you meet in a pitch one day, maybe that doesn't work out, but then, later down the road, they call you for something else which is an even better fit.

Chinaka Hodge: You know what? You're right. Shout out to Nate and Eric. Thank you for having my back.

Paola Mardo: There you go. And so, sorry, when you said Proximity, Zoie and Kelsey, they helped prepare you for each step, what was the final step?

Chinaka Hodge: The final boss was Kevin Feige, Victoria Alonso, Lou D'Esposito, and Brad Winderbaum. And I pitched out probably a half-hour's worth of pitch with both, like, story ideas, which was really just an exercise in them seeing how I build story because what you see onscreen is so far away from the pitch.

I pitched out some things, though, that, like, are in the DNA of the show. So I wanted some of the murals that you see in and around Chicago, and I even named Max Sansing. He's in the show. I wanted to make sure that we had someone like Harper Anthony. He's in the show. I wanted to make sure that, like, our Gary felt real and someone from Chicago, and you see who we got.

So I feel like there were some elements of the pitch that really were, like, what I would bring uniquely to the table that were the things that made the pitch sing.

Paola Mardo: And I want to ask, because a lot of folks who listen to this podcast, you know, want to write, want to direct, want to be in that room pitching their version of whatever story. Do you have any advice for someone, like, whether they're longtime pitchers or even just first-time.

Chinaka Hodge: I would say that knowing your story top to bottom, inside and out is better than a PowerPoint or Prezi or any other preparation: knowing your beginning, your middle, your end, your complications, what your antagonist is going to bring, what your protagonist is going to bring, and just stress-testing it, telling that story to your mom, your dad, your abuela, your tita, like, everybody along the way knowing—like, my favorite person to pitch to is my sister, who will be like, "Ooh, Naka, that was good," or, "I don't understand this part," or ask questions along the way.

So I feel like knowing the story as well as possible so that your enthusiasm and your passion can shine through, and also, like, my favorite part of the pitch is getting to the questions, you know? And when my audience is leaning forward, asking me questions, it's a really good thing. So I don't feel like you need to know—you don't need to tell them everything in the pitch. You just need to know everything in the pitch.

Paola Mardo: Mm-hmm, leave them wanting more a little bit?

Chinaka Hodge: Leave them wanting more a little bit, but also, like, A to B, B to C, C to Z, but also beginning, middle, end, complications, know those things so that you can rattle it off. So, when Kevin interrupts and is like, "Wait, what about" dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah, and you go on a side tangent, and you learn about Lou's, like, last trip to Italy, you know? Like, so you can come back to your pitch and get back to the C to Z.

Paola Mardo: What is it like to get a question or even a note from Kevin Feige?

Chinaka Hodge: Kevin's so sweet, and he's so smart. Kevin is specific. He's conscientious. He's never mean for the sake of being mean, and he holds, you know, 20 or so movies and six or seven TV projects and four or five things down the pike in his head all at once and is able to connect the dots and offer—like, for example, we have a—we have a big spoiler in our show, and he's the one who suggested it. So, like—and it was on the heels of, like, "Hmm, this could be more interesting. How about you take this?" So he's benevolent in the ways he can be benevolent.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk a little bit about—well, first of all, and I think I mentioned this to you on our call before this show, what I really loved about watching it, because I've seen all the episodes, is while Ironheart is, you know, played by Dominique Thorne, she's a superhero, she is within the MCU, she's this bad-girl genius, it's very much this comic book superhero origin story, but it also feels very grounded, very real. Her day-to-day life, her neighbors, her family, her friends, the people she gets, you know, involved with and goes on adventures with, they all feel really real even though they're wrapped up in this comic book story.

And I wanted to ask, because you do write very personal stories, were there bits and pieces from your own personal life, whether it's people or events that inspired the show and the characters?

Chinaka Hodge: I love this question of, like, what things from my personal life or the world at large affected and became a part of the show. I joke that everything I write becomes true. I think it's the other way around, that everything I see becomes part of the writing. But every—I mean, there's so many elements.

So, maybe it's best to start with Xavier. Xavier plays as Riri's love interest throughout the series, and he's a musician who prefers analogue to digital and is, like, an old school musician's musician. He's based loosely on my brother who's a musician. And even the room that Xavier's in looks a lot like my brother's room. And my family went through a little bit of tragedy at the beginning of production where my brother was actually in an accident. And so a lot of the room is a tribute to my brother, who was in critical care, like emergency care for a good deal of production. So that's one of, like, the truest, clearest references.

I had a neighbor when I was living in Toronto, writing the show, who was a bit persnickety about her Black-eyed Susans. And so that made it into the show.

Paola Mardo: Love that detail. It's so specific.

Chinaka Hodge: Probably my favorite detail and probably the most heartfelt is Desperito's, which is the villain's lair that Parker and his crew hang out in the whole time. Our writer's assistant on the room was Nicole Desperito, and her name just lends itself to character. Like, we were going to name somebody or something after her, let's just face it.

But I got to ask her a little bit about the origin of her name. And it's her father's name, and her father was a firefighter, one of the brave who fought the fires that occurred in 9/11. And he passed after his time there. And so it was my great joy to be able to honor Nicole, her work, her incredible work as a writer's assistant, which often gets overlooked, and then her father's sacrifice for our country. I feel like it's so Marvel to name a villain's lair after a true American hero.

Paola Mardo: It's perfect.

Chinaka Hodge: There are other details in Desperito's as well. My grandmother, who loved hanging out in Chicago jazz clubs and took me there a lot, there's a picture of Chloe hanging in Desperito's as well. There's little details like that throughout.

Paola Mardo: Chloe's your grandmother?

Chinaka Hodge: Chloe's my grandmother, Chloe Hicks. Yeah. So, yeah, there's little details like that all laid in.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about the Alanis Morissette scene? What was the thinking behind that? Because that was—I did not expect that in a TV—in a Marvel TV show.

Chinaka Hodge: I don't think you expect it in a Marvel TV show, but let's be real, you also don't expect it in a show with Black girls. And I feel like that's the kind of girl I am. It's the kind of girl Malarie Howard, who wrote the episode, is. It's, in a lot of ways, the way Riri is. She's lived in lots of worlds. She's literally lived under the sea—she's lived in Wakanda for some amount of time. She lived in Chicago. She's been exposed to a whole bunch, so I think it's not far from the reaches that she might also like Canadian pop. Like, it could happen.

Paola Mardo: It checks out.

Chinaka Hodge: It could happen. And I feel like Alanis, for me, in my like 13, 14-year-old days was like—she was how I announced rebellion. She's how I announced my womanhood. She, like, was an incredible genius in her own right who put out, like, her first album at the age of 14, 15, something crazy like that.

Paola Mardo: Wait, what? Oh, wow.

Chinaka Hodge: She's a prodigy in her own right. So I feel like Alanis seeds through nicely, nicely through our show.

Paola Mardo: I love that.

Chinaka Hodge: Plus, it's a bop.

Paola Mardo: It is.

Chinaka Hodge: You Oughta Know.

Paola Mardo: You Oughta Know!

Chinaka Hodge: Have you heard the Beyoncé version?

Paola Mardo: I don't think so.

Chinaka Hodge: Find that!

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, it's good.

Paola Mardo: We have homework.

Chinaka Hodge: There's a reference. It's super quick, super fast when we meet Clown played by Sonia that's a reference to Angela Bassett in—brain fart, brain fart! Waiting to Exhale, thank you very much, from Waiting to Exhale.

Paola Mardo: Oh, was it an explosion?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, but, like, down to the white coat and the style of her hair.

Paola Mardo: Yes. Yup, yup.

Chinaka Hodge: If we had stayed in-frame a little longer, you'd see it, like, coming out like that, and I feel like that's a cool little Marvel thing to have, like, a nod to Auntie Angela.

Paola Mardo: I love it. Did you guys—and I don't know if this is giving too much away—was there a GET OUT nod? Was there a little—

Chinaka Hodge: Not to—oh! Oh.

Paola Mardo: A little, "Psst, action"?

Chinaka Hodge: Ooh, yeah.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Maybe that's too much.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, a little bit.

Paola Mardo: There are a lot of little nuggets.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, there are.

Paola Mardo: I will say. And I also want to ask, I heard your mom was an engineer.

Chinaka Hodge: You heard right! My mom is a—

Paola Mardo: Yeah, tell the world about that.

Chinaka Hodge: My mom is an engineer. My stepfather's an engineer. They both went to Northwestern. My mom is from the era where you had to get a degree in both mechanical engineering and computer science, so she can do both. She can MacGyver anything. She can make any table level.

Paola Mardo: Amazing.

Chinaka Hodge: That rattling window? No more. Doesn't rattle at all. When I was growing up, she had a whole bunch of telecom accounts. So I remember her going to Japan and France and helping to pioneer what the tech looked like there. Shortly after that, she worked in and around the technology that became the PalmPilot and helped the world talk about how you might use the PalmPilot, to help distinguish it from, like, your Casio organizer. Yeah, my mom's the shit. My mom's the shit. She's been—she's been at it for a while.

One of my favorite pictures of her is at her IBM training, where she's the only Black woman in—she's the only chocolate chip in the cookie, and she's standing—she's sitting in the middle, and everybody else has on their Dilbert outfit, and my mom is, like, pressed. She's got, like, a beautiful, like, silk organza tie situation on and, like, the glasses, and her cute little haircut.

Paola Mardo: Love it.

Chinaka Hodge: And I was like, yes, my mom was serving.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: And how did some of that sort of influence—because Riri's an engineer, right?

Chinaka Hodge: Riri's an engineer. I think, yeah, my mom definitely influenced it. But Riri, in a lot of ways, is like me: her Peach Ring addiction, her inability to make eye contact from time to time. I think Riri, both in publishing and in my imagination, is neurodiverse and neurodivergent like I am. I identify as autistic, and I think Riri is—we see her process through a whole bunch of her own neurodiversity. So, yeah, she's my mom, she's me, but she's really—she's really the young, autistic girl watching our show who has a really big brain and is not quite sure where to put it and is told all the time that she's behaving badly and might get kicked out of school.

Paola Mardo: And goes on to do great things.

Chinaka Hodge: Go on to really great things and fight villains and make bad choices, and live the life of a character.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

[27:18 - Juno Arp Sting by Ken Nana]

Paola Mardo: Let's talk about process because this is—this is a show where we talk a little bit about process.

Chinaka Hodge: It's artistic process.

Paola Mardo: Yes. I want to say, because you just mentioned all the personal things that you put into the show. Can you talk about: what does that look like in a writers room? How do you guys get together? It's like therapy—you guys are just sharing all these bits and pieces of your

life, throw it on the wall, and then pull from there, or, like, what does that on-the-ground look like?

Chinaka Hodge: First of all, we had the best writers' room.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Say more.

Chinaka Hodge: I can't say that enough. The sisters Gailles, Francesca, Jaqui; Cristian Martinez, who was our action specialist; Malarie Howard, who is—we could not have made this show without her; Amir Sulaiman, Nicole Desparito, who wrote all of our "previously, ons." We had an incredible writing room, and we got to write—I mean, it was COVID time, so it was remote. We got to write together every day, and I kept it pretty brief. We did, like, a 10 to noon, a short lunch, and then a 2:00-4:00 situation. Aziza was very much a part of the room and nursed and gave feedback on odd pitches.

Paola Mardo: Wait, how old was Aziza at that time?

Chinaka Hodge: Aziza was younger than five months when the room came together and six months when we really started doing it. And, you know, when we left Atlanta, she was two. She's almost five now.

Yeah, our room, it was special, and it was special because we had executives in the room, which is not the usual way of doing things, but our Prox partners were there every single day. And then Zoie and Kelsey were there every single day. So everyone had personal things that came to the table, I think. Like, there were some people in the room who have trans siblings, and we wanted to make sure that there was representation in the MCU of people that look like our siblings.

I think some of our parents were struggling through stroke and cancer, and so I think a character like Zeke, who's interested in pioneering, you know, to save lives, I think really rang true and through. Fran and Jacqui were raising kids. They're sisters, and they were—they were both raising one's kids at the time. Since, they both have kids, but at the time, they were both really interested in making what they called "the little boy" and "the little girl" television that they could watch.

So I think each of us—Amir is a poet, and I know him from our poet days, and Amir had just come off of Ramy and won an Emmy for his writing on Ramy. And nobody could bring the spirituality and sensualism—I feel like it's okay to call a Sufi a sensualist.

Paola Mardo: Sure.

Chinaka Hodge: He brought—he brought a different touch to the room and to the page as well. Yeah, I—everybody brought something personal, and that's—those are the kinds of writers we hired, and that's the kind of room I run. But also, I don't look that gift horse in the mouth. It was—it was incredibly personal. People sacrificed a lot to be in and around the show.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, and I love that. And as the head writer, as you said, you're running that room. How do you sort of wrangle everybody and make sure you guys stay on course but also have that, you know, time to be creative and just, like, you know, develop—

Chinaka Hodge: I mean, I feel like there was—Ryan wrangled us. If I'm being real, like, when Ryan came to the room, like, okay, let's have our ducks in a row. Sev is also very process-oriented in a way that I am not.

Paola Mardo: This all checks out.

[LAUGHTER]

Chinaka Hodge: You know. I'm not telling you anything you don't know. Zinzi was—I'm going to say her name right—Zinzi was her typical, very thoughtful, very creative—she did not inject herself where she, like, wasn't sure she could add value, but whenever she spoke, she added so much value. So, yeah, I think they kept me in check.

I did something. I brought some best practices from the nonprofit world into the writing room. So we did evaluations one month out, where they could evaluate me and not the other way around, tell me how I was doing as a showrunner, and then I could get feedback on the writing as well.

Paola Mardo: Not a lot of people do that, I feel, especially a month in. Like, that's intense.

Chinaka Hodge: But, like, that's the time. That's the time because if you wait until eight weeks in, and I'm only giving notes, that's not a time for, like, dialogue, and I don't think we can make good art that way. And I've had—I've been in enough Hollywood writing rooms that I've had less-than-savory experiences. And I wanted my writers to leave our room feelings like, even if the show never made it to air, that we got something, like, once in a lifetime out of the experience of the room itself.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. No, that's great. I love that because it's leadership, right? I mean, that's—everyone thinks about writing and writers rooms as if it's this magical, creative thing, which it is, but there's also process, leadership. Dare I say management?

Chinaka Hodge: Management, feedback, community agreements. Like, all the things that we know kind of rote in the Bay Area were, like, very well applied in this space and very well received in this space. So I would say, like, I would—I would change nothing about my writing room except, the big, large asterisked caveat is that I would provide free childcare for all of the people working on the show. Amir had kids, has kids. Like I said, Fran and Jacqui did. I did as well, and I feel like that's one of the few fidelities that we didn't have in place to make our writers feel as safe as possible. Like, I can imagine that—and, you know, Sev and Zinzi had both commented like, "Yeah, if we could do something different, we would make it so that we could, you know, make a little bit more balance so that we could all see our kids a little more."

Paola Mardo: It sounds like there were a lot of new parents or young parents in the room.

Chinaka Hodge: There were a lot of new and young parents, and the—it was COVID. Like, for real. Not, like, pretend, fake COVID, like real COVID. I would change plenty about the circumstances, but I would change none of the personnel, and I would change very little about the process.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And can you talk about, just wrapping up this section, because people love hearing tips and process things when it comes to creativity. And I hear that, yeah, there were different perspectives. People brought different stories to the table. But how does that translate to the page?

Chinaka Hodge: Well, I would say my perspective is character first. So I would say that's one of the things that I brought. And probably it was shocking to the other collaborators in the room of how long I wanted to spend on story. So we spent three or four weeks just knowing the backstory of the character, similar to what I was saying about a pitch, so that you can put the characters into scene knowing them well enough to know how they're actually going to interact with each other as opposed to, like, trying to figure it out.

Paola Mardo: That's great. Yeah. So are you writing, like, biographies of your—

Chinaka Hodge: We did biographies. We pulled—like, we started with people's own personal stories. And, like, can we pull that in? Or, is this what the character is like? Yeah, we spent—we spent time. There are documents. I feel like we could create a whole book.

Paola Mardo: Was there a bible?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, we could probably make a bible of all the Nicole Desparito™ notes. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: I love that. That's great. I have to ask—

Chinaka Hodge: Yes.

Paola Mardo: Because it's Ironheart, we've got to talk about the suit.

Chinaka Hodge: Yes!

Paola Mardo: And this is not the suit she wears. It's from—

Chinaka Hodge: This is not the suit, but it's a fire suit. This is the one from Wakanda.

Paola Mardo: Yes.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So this is the suit she wears when people first meet her onscreen. But in the TV show, by now people will know, she wears three suits.

Chinaka Hodge: She wears... three suits. There's, like, a mock 4.5.

Paola Mardo: You know all the technical terms. But in any case, can I ask, the very first time you saw her in the suit, or you saw the suit, I'll say that. Talk about the suit and what that was like.

Chinaka Hodge: Okay. The suit and I have a storied history, and I feel like maybe you don't know this. Seeing her in this suit for the first time, like in—because I saw *Wakanda Forever* in theaters in Chicago while we were in production.

Paola Mardo: Oh, wow.

Chinaka Hodge: And so it was like I saw it—I saw *Wakanda Forever* literally by myself on a Tuesday afternoon. Yeah, I screamed in a theater. I was so excited. This—I'm a Mae Jemison fan. I'm a fan of, like, Black women architects and Black women explorers. And so to see this vision of us capable of going into space, capable of boring into the earth, capable of stopping a train, I don't know, it's just so much safety in a suit like this. And I don't get to experience that safety on a day-to-day basis. There's so much power in the suit. Riri's not challenged in the same way when she wears the suit as she is when she's out of the suit.

Paola Mardo: No. Yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: And to me, it's like, I don't know. It's like—

Paola Mardo: She can fly in the suit.

Chinaka Hodge: She can fly in the suit! She can cook in the suit. And we spent as much time on the suit character development as the other story.

Paola Mardo: Oh, wow.

Chinaka Hodge: So Riri's suit is actually satin-lined in the helmet. Like, there are some Black girl fidelities.

Paola Mardo: Satin-lined!

Chinaka Hodge: Yes, for when she's got to take the helmet off and on!

Paola Mardo: Yes, yes.

Chinaka Hodge: Understand? It's like, she has some other things in and around that help, you know?

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: Like her suit is outfitted for every day of the month, I'll say that.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Oh! Very important.

Chinaka Hodge: You know what I'm saying? Big things.

Paola Mardo: Yes. Yes. You guys thought it out.

[LAUGHTER]

Chinaka Hodge: You have to! It's engineering.

Paola Mardo: So, when you saw—or can you talk about one suit and what it was like to see it for the first time?

Chinaka Hodge: Seeing her in the second suit, like in production, which is way more ragtag and more like an American quilt than anything else—that's my favorite of the suits, if I'm being honest, because it feels the most like—the most DIY, the most scrappy, the most, like—

Paola Mardo: This is the one she builds. It's not the very first one she flies off with from school?

Chinaka Hodge: Not the one she flies off with from school, which is a very, very cool suit. It's the—it's the second one, the one that she sort of like, engineers from the junkyard, but it's the second version of that suit where she actually put it back together a second time.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Yes.

Chinaka Hodge: That's my favorite because it's just like, it ain't pretty but it works, and I feel like that's—that's sort of my approach to filmmaking. The last suit, which we have a little nod to here—and the show's coming out after, right?

Paola Mardo: Mm-hmm.

Chinaka Hodge: So this last suit was, I don't know, probably my favorite portion of design. I'm a sneakerhead just like Riri's a sneakerhead, and we wanted to make a suit that honors Chicago and the Chicago colorway in the Bred 1s, like the iconic Jordan 1s, which the first suit, you could tell, like, she liked it, and the car that she had liked it. But this, the red is slightly different, the black is slightly different, and I feel like these would go with pretty much any of, like, the Banned 1s in the street.

Paola Mardo: I love that.

Chinaka Hodge: We wanted to make something that felt, like, fashion-forward, something that felt sleek and could move very well, that had all the safety and protections of the last one. Her time with Harper and her time with her mom, who's an artist, really helped to, like, streamline the suit, so, yeah, that last suit feels like freedom to me.

Paola Mardo: It's a good suit.

Chinaka Hodge: I like it.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about—because there's so many teams. So you write it onto the page and also run the show, work with the directors and cast, and all that. But there's, like, VFX, there's the—I don't even know, the team that builds the thing, what they're called. Can you talk a little bit about that and who you worked with?

Chinaka Hodge: I'm sure I will not get it all right because it was like getting thrown into the deep end. We worked—on this suit, we would work with SFX, so Special Effects, which is everything from a practical effect, which was, like, things falling out of the sky, something that no one has to draw or animate, but is an effect that helps you suspend disbelief.

We also worked with previs, which is a Marvel term. I hadn't really, like, been in and around previs before.

Paola Mardo: Can you explain what that is?

Chinaka Hodge: It's basically like I tell you what I want onscreen, and they help you pre-visualize it. So I tell you, "I want a suit that looks like this," and they brought like six or seven different suits that were red and black, and silver.

Paola Mardo: Did they build it, or did they draw it out?

Chinaka Hodge: They drew it.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Chinaka Hodge: And then we looked at two or three different versions of—

Paola Mardo: Like 3D renderings or something?

Chinaka Hodge: Renderings, 2D renderings, 3D renderings, and then they brought in some models. And then I remember us, like, refining the models. There's a whole bunch of different versions of the suit. There's a suit that Riri steps into. It's built to Dominique's size. There's a suit that Alex, who was our stunt double, who's much taller than Dominique, steps into.

And when I say I have a storied history with the suit, the larger suit, the heavier suit, we brought for our final day, like our wrap day in Atlanta. And, I don't know, I think I'm pretty visible. I think I'm—I'm like an EP! I was there!

Paola Mardo: Yeah, yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: And I got run over by the suit!

Paola Mardo: Wait, what?

Chinaka Hodge: I got run over by the suit.

Paola Mardo: Oh, my god.

Chinaka Hodge: That's, like, the full story.

Paola Mardo: Wait. Like, what—

Chinaka Hodge: Like, someone had the suit on a cart, and they ran me over with it, and I got run over by the suit. And then we called, "That's a wrap!"

Paola Mardo: Oh, my god!

Chinaka Hodge: That was my last moment in Atlanta. So I feel, like, extremely close to the suit.

Paola Mardo: But what happened to you afterward? Did you have to go to the hospital? Or—

Chinaka Hodge: I did not have to go to the hospital. I was very well checked on by our VFX team, our SFX team, the guy who was rolling the thing, a Proximity representative. But, yeah, it was a true, like a—

Paola Mardo: You felt the impact of the suit physically.

Chinaka Hodge: I—you know, like Ryan comes from a football space. I felt, like, very much in a football space.

Paola Mardo: You were tackled.

Chinaka Hodge: And insult to injury is I was actually—I was like "Ryan!" Because he wasn't able to be there. So I was, like, filming the whole crew. I was like, "Look, everybody, it's Coog!" But I feel like, how many people can say they've been run over by Ironheart?

Paola Mardo: Not many. Not many.

Chinaka Hodge: Literally one of one.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And one of my last questions I want to ask, you know, you mentioned earlier having a song by Alanis Morissette on a show, you know, featuring a Black girl at the center, not something that people would think of or assume, or whatever it is. But you had a Black character at the center, a Black superhero, a Black woman, and then, also, behind the camera, there were many Black women.

Chinaka Hodge: So many.

Paola Mardo: Black and Brown folks, writers, directors, you. Can you talk a little bit about the vibe on-set, the energy, and how that shaped the show?

Chinaka Hodge: What do the kids say? The energy was unmatched? Unmatched. We were very fortunate to be able to use Marvel's influence to call in the best of the best. And in this

case, the best of the best happened to be a whole bunch of Black and Brown women who really showed up for each other, who really—like I said, we were in COVID times. We were in thunderstorm times. We were in—you know, we had a big company move, and I saw these—all of our crew, all of our crew really show up for each other.

And while I must highlight—while I must highlight the arduous labor of Black women, I cannot leave out my brothers who were teamsters who were there with us side-by-side. There were—there were middle-aged white men who stood 10 toes down for Riri Williams in the state of Georgia, you know what I mean? Who showed up the day after Juneteenth and went to work for us. And if I don't speak that, it's a lie, you know what I mean? Our show was bolstered by our entire community who showed up for queer people, Brown people, white people, like, Jewish people. Our show is America, and it's not just that front-facing. It was that behind the camera as well.

So, that being said, let me go off about my sisters!

[LAUGHTER]

First of all, Angela and Sam, who—

Paola Mardo: Sam—Samantha Bailey and Angela Barnes.

Chinaka Hodge: Samantha Bailey, Angela Barnes, who directed Episodes 1 and 3 and 4, and 6, respectively—Sam set the tone for the show. She created the signature for Riri in creating the pilot. She worked with Ante Cheng, who—oh, man. Taiwanese by way of South Africa by way of Canada, just—

Paola Mardo: I'm following the map.

Chinaka Hodge: He's that deal, and to watch the two of them collaborate was truly special.

Angela Barnes works very closely with Alison Kelly, who was her DP on the show. And Alison brought such verve and conscientiousness, and thoughtfulness to every single frame. I learned so much about light, both from Ante and Alison. And Alison, like even her stills, even when we were sitting in village, watching her stills, I was so moved by how, how carefully she considered everything. Both she and Angela, like, went to war for us, like really plotted out every—like, had more plans in their office on how they were going to shoot things than shots, probably.

But I want to give a shout-out to Terrance, who ran our department with a good deal of help from Sharonda Sheppard, who is my favorite writer/costume designer/accountant. What can't she do? She can write, she can act, she can sing, but she gave her talents to our department and made sure that costumes were on-point.

Danny Hernandez in stunts? Whoo! Whoo! To come off Woman King and just, like, oh, have leveled up from Woman King and then share that in our choreography. Shayla Cabrera. We could not have made IRONHEART without Shayla Cabrera. Shayla, Je'Vonda, and Chris Styron

were the first on-set every day and the last to leave. And they cared about everybody so intensely and—

Paola Mardo: What was her role?

Chinaka Hodge: Shayla was PA. And Shayla was a PA who, like, kept coming back because she loved the work. I found out very late into it that—that the work was not guaranteed for her, but she kept showing up every day because she believed in the vision. Zhalarina Sanders but, like, the list is just—so many people showed up—Arielle Lathan—so many people showed up to, to help bring this vision to life, and everybody gave their absolute best. But what makes my heart sing is that, after this, they have more opportunity to do more. So many times we're told, "Oh, you haven't worked on a big enough budget show," or, "You haven't worked with enough cast," or, "You haven't worked with a big enough name," and after this show, they can all say they have. So I'm elated. I'm elated—elated that we got—got the stand-ins for Shea! Oh, the stand-ins for Zoe! Like, we, we got to put together the very, very best cast and crew. Yeah, I think because each of us has sort of been underestimated for so long, that every woman who showed up on set knew to bring, you know, their AAA game, and because of that, we had an AAA team.

Paola Mardo: I love that. And actually, and folks will hear it in the next segment of this episode, but you told Sev that you were really excited about, quote, "how many Black and Brown people will live in the MCU after our show is over." And it sounds like it's the same even behind the scenes. What do you want to say about that now, hearing that line?

Chinaka Hodge: I'm thrilled about how many Black and Brown people live in the MCU after our show. I'm thrilled that there's an outpost for magic in the MCU after our show.

Paola Mardo: So good.

Chinaka Hodge: I'm thrilled that—

Paola Mardo: I want to see more of that.

Chinaka Hodge: I'm thrilled that queer people are, like, part of the MCU like they're part of the real world. I'm thrilled that we have, like, so many different kinds of Black women onscreen, that, like, Clown is not the same as Zelma's not the same as Riri's not the same as—like, we just have—we have a prismatic approach to Black womanhood, which I haven't seen very many times onscreen. So, yeah, I'm really—I'm proud. I'm proud of Alden Ehrenreich being in the MCU, though! Like, let's keep it a buck—I'm really proud of—I'm really proud of it.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. You have so many characters that are—I hate to use the word "diverse" because I feel like it's so overused, but, like, so many different backgrounds, perspectives, voices, powers, which you'll see? Thank you, Chinaka!

Chinaka Hodge: Thank you, Paola.

Paola Mardo: Appreciate this. And everyone's going to hear the next part, conversation with Sev, right after this.

Chinaka Hodge: Thank you.

Paola Mardo: Awesome. Thank you.

Chinaka Hodge: Thank you.

Paola Mardo: That's a wrap!

[45:46 - In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[Music/Old Radio Sounds by Ken Nana]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're listening to P-R-O-X.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Sev Ohanian: Hey, I'm Sev Ohanian. I'm a producer, sometimes writer, cofounder of Proximity Media, and I'm here with my good friend, Chinaka Hodge, in her office in Atlanta, Georgia, as the head writer on Marvel's IRONHEART. I'm surrounded by what looks unlike every other office in this building. All the producer offices are here. My office is here. Our Marvel exec, our line producer's office, and what all of the offices have in common is concept art from the show, you know, the production calendar, reminders, and things like that, but then I walk into your office. Can you describe for our listeners, like, what we're looking at around us?

Chinaka Hodge: I guess I should start by saying there's an old superstition in writers' rooms that if you decorate your office, the show will get canceled. And someone told me that on my first day, and I completely threw it out the window. So most writers keep it very spare, just their nameplate on the desk and, like, a stack of scripts. I've gone all out. So I have all of our actors, and there's headshots on the wall.

Sev Ohanian: But it's not just the actors' headshots because we have that. Describe what you have.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah. These are emotive, black and white, very artistic shots of each of the actors. And I tried to capture photos of them that existed on the internet already, but as if they were already in their character. So, like, Shakira Barrara's up there, and I found the strongest picture of her possible because she's a bruiser in our show. The walls are also decorated with one of your past projects, a nod to it; one of my future projects, and what brings us all here today, which is Black Panther and the world around it.

Sev Ohanian: Can you talk about what's behind you?

Chinaka Hodge: Behind me is actually my altar, and I build an altar wherever I go. So it's a remembrance of my ancestors and the people that have inspired me. I didn't know that Nichelle Nichols would be an ancestor when I put her up there. She was still a living inspiration when I built the altar, but she's now one of the ancestors. I also have art inspired by Octavia Butler. I have some art inspired by Ororo Munroe, AKA Storm. I have Mae Jemison, the first Black woman in space and Bessie Coleman, the first Black woman to fly a plane. And I also have a crossover episode where Nichelle Nichols' character, Uhura, meets Mae Jemison on the Starship Enterprise. It's dork Black nerd girl central in here.

Sev Ohanian: It makes perfect sense why you are the head writer on IRONHEART.

[47:50 - Good times by Ludwig Göransson]

Sev Ohanian: You and I go way back, like way, way, back.

Chinaka Hodge: Way, way, way, way.

Chinaka Hodge: We met at USC. Ryan was well-known. People kept telling me I needed to find Ryan, and everywhere I went to find Ryan, you were nearby. And so I got to meet you on a number of occasions, and every time I met you, I was like, "This dude has it together." And I'm not going to lie to you, Sev, I thought you were a professor.

[LAUGHTER]

When, when I met you at USC, I thought you were a professor. And so the first couple interactions, I don't know if you remember, but I was very respectful, and I would, like, talk to you and then, like, walk away. I'd talk to Ryan, and I'd walk away. And it took maybe two weeks, and I was like, "Wait, this kid's one of us? Like, that's amazing. He knows everything."

And so, when you asked me to read your script, Animal Heist, which I still think is a flawless piece of writing—it's a piece of literature that I can't wait makes it into the world—I took it so seriously. Like, I was so honored that you had asked me to give notes. I was like, "Sev doesn't need notes from me. Like, he's got it all figured out." And the way you went through my notes with me made me feel so honored and so respected. Like, that's the moment I felt like I was a real-life professional writer, was the way you took respect with the notes I gave you.

Sev Ohanian: Wow. That's so cool to hear. I mean, let me, let me paint that picture a little bit. So we went to USC grad school. You were in the screenwriters program. I was in the production program, which is kind of like a more catch-all, general filmmaking. And my writing partner was Aneesh Chaganty. He and I wrote a script that we had no business writing. It was a way-too-expensive, larger than life heist movie about a group of people who wanted to save a gorilla from the L.A. Zoo by, like, literally pulling off a heist to steal a 400-pound animal, and it was over-the-top and very, like, fun.

By the way, we were convinced—like, I remember Aneesh would be over at my house. My dad was there, and we'd be telling my dad, like, "We're going to sell this thing for half a million

dollars. Dad, I'll buy you whatever you want." And he would laugh, and he'd be like, "I'll pay you guys \$200 for it right now." And we were like, "Dad, you're crazy, man!" Like, "Man, you're going to miss out!"

We never sold it. We tried to get my dad to buy it later for \$200. He laughed in our faces, but at the time, we were like, "Okay, we're done with the draft. We got to now get it to some real professional writers." And Aneesh was like, "Who do you got?" I'm like, "Well, I got Nak."

Chinaka Hodge: That's so funny. I think it's really about how you see yourself and how the world sees you because to me, you were, like, the most professional. You had done the—can you talk a little bit about My Big Fat Armenian Wedding because, I mean, you really never told me the story in full, and all I know is, like, you showed up, and you had financed your own movie as an undergrad.

Sev Ohanian: Oh, my gosh.

Chinaka Hodge: Who does that?

Sev Ohanian: Not to get too long, like, when I was growing up, I wanted to be a filmmaker, but I was very much intimidated by the entire idea, especially as a child of immigrants, an immigrant myself. Like, we were very much expected to do doctor, lawyer, all the usual stuff. And when I was in college, in undergrad, just for fun, I had shot a little YouTube video of my friend making fun of his own father out of love and kind of recalling an anecdote of him coming home late one day and his dad kind of berating him.

If it was today, it would be a TikTok video, 10 seconds, you'd never think about it again. But this was like 2007. I made this video, put it on YouTube for, like, my 20 friends to watch. To my shock, over 100,000 Armenians from around the world immediately liked the video, shared it. It went viral, all that good stuff. I don't even think viral was a term then.

Chinaka Hodge: It wasn't a thing yet, yeah.

Sev Ohanian: I was so shocked by this, I was like, "Let's make a sequel." And this one was about, like, a young Armenian girl who's, like, trying to date, and the parents are like, "No way!" Like, it was just all the usual fun stuff, and that also went kind of viral. And there was such a demand for more of these videos. You know, I grew up in Los Angeles, and there's a very prominent Armenian community down there, especially. And everywhere I'd go, Armenians who I'd see, like, in a city called Glendale, would be like, "When's the next one coming out?" And I thought, "Well, why don't we just make a movie?"

I hadn't really thought about, like, what that would mean, which is probably for the best. I wrote a movie over a summer. I remember, like, spending all my summer school classes in the back, just writing a script. And, like, when I say "writing a script," I just downloaded some scripts. I, like, pirated Final Draft, and I just, like, figured out how to do it, shot the movie over a summer, used my dad's home video camera. And the crew was myself as the

writer/director/producer/editor, everything. I did every job except for makeup, and then the makeup artist quit. So then—

Chinaka Hodge: So you kept that eyeliner.

Sev Ohanian: I—I did that, too, and it was awful. And it's called My Big Fat Armenian Family, and it's about two Armenian parents, both played by the same guy, who are very old-fashioned, and their younger children, who are very Americanized and progressive and that cultural clash and how it comes to a boiling point over a weekend trip to “Palma Springs,” as we call it. Shot it for \$800. Most of that money went to Taco Bell, and I finished the movie—I was in Glendale, huge Armenian population. I screened the movie. I booked the theater, sold DVDs, and somehow, in just a few months, it made a ton of money.

And I wasn't anticipating that. I didn't have a business plan. It was just kind of like a total shock to me. But more than the financial success, it was the fact that complete strangers were showing up, buying tickets, and just laughing and crying and loving the movie, that empowered me to pursue this as a real career.

Chinaka Hodge: As you were describing the story, you sound like E-40. Do you know who E-40 is?

Sev Ohanian: I'm familiar with—yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: I know you have, like, a business partner or two from the Bay Area, and E-40, Earl Stevens, is the Bay Area's—one of its, like, most reputable businessmen, but he did it all on his own. He, like, started his record company, sold it out of the trunk of his car, saw a need, filled the void, and, like, basically flipped it from \$800 to a multi-million-dollar industry, like has a wine and watches and, like, seats to the Lakers and Warriors, like, everything. He's, he's like the dude, but he started in the same way that you did, just, like, seeing a void and filling it. So I don't know. I never thought of you as, like, the ballatician that you are, but you are a ballatician.

Sev Ohanian: Ballatician, that's amazing.

Chinaka Hodge: Ballatician, that's you, bruh.

Sev Ohanian: I mean, look, I was just trying, but, I mean, speaking of people's past, like, your reputation was preceding you, as well. The word around campus about you was that you were a big-shot poet and that you had been around, you'd been performing, you'd been really doing some big things, and that you had now transitioned to screenwriting, which, some would argue is almost the lesser art form. Can you talk about your, your upcoming as a poet?

Chinaka Hodge: Absolutely, so I'm from the Bay Area, and I started writing poetry as a high school student. I met this organization, Youth Speaks, The Living Word Project. We worked with upwards of 40,000 young people in the Bay Area and internationally, and I worked with them for like 20 years, for real. I was probably in year 15 when I moved down to L.A., and in my head, I

was just—I was a poet, but I was just a poet, and I felt like an imposter in the screenwriting space.

I—I wanted to come—all right, I'll give you guys the real real because you're Proximity, and we're friends. I got dumped. I was in a serious relationship. I thought I was going to marry this guy. He dumped me casually on a Friday. He moved across the street from me, and I just tried to figure out how to start my life over again. I had plans of being a wife and a mom and kind of sitting in my house and writing poems for the rest of my life. And that wasn't going to work anymore.

And so I was like, "Well, I'll go to grad school. I'll apply to grad school." And I applied to UPenn on a Library Sciences scholarship, and I applied to USC. And the application for USC was probably due at midnight, and I think I started it at 8:00 p.m. Like, I was just "hail Mary, change my life, let's go." And I wrote down an essay that kind of flew out of me about a friend of mine that I wanted to make movies in remembrance of, and we had to write this elevator scene that USC is notorious for. And I got it off, and I just said a prayer, and I was like, "If it's meant for me, it's meant for me."

Two weeks later, I got a call from Annenberg. They said they were giving me a fellowship, and I was going to come down and study screenwriting. So I think I was walking around the school very much feeling like, "I don't know how I got here. These people must see my heartbreak, like, leaking off of me. I don't quite know why I'm here except for I feel like God has put it in my path, and I'm going to write the stories I know how to write."

And I—very quickly, I saw that SC has a pretty scaffolded system of how writers can interact with the producing students, and there's basically one big film project a year, and all the writers fight each other and vie for it, and most writers don't get it. One writer does, and everyone else doesn't. And so I thought, "I'm not even going to apply for the 546s."

Sev Ohanian: So, like, 546, which is the, like, senior-level thesis, the big, competitive class. The school puts a lot of money into it, right?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, and so I thought I'm going to go to all the other producers that didn't get their 546 made and go to all the other writers that didn't, and we're going to make the movies we want to make.

So I ended up working with a bunch of folks who ended up being great. I met Steven Caple on day one. I met Ryan pretty early on and would follow around. And I remember just being like, "These people don't know that I'm not good enough yet. So I'm just going to get good enough. And I'm gonna beat them, so once they figure out that I'm not good enough to be here, I will be," was kind of my—my goal.

And I just wanted to make myself available so when we got out of school, they'd hire me. So the clearest thing I remember about grad school is following you and Ryan and being like, "Hire me. Hire me, hire me! Hire me." It worked out for me pretty well. You guys hired me.

Sev Ohanian: I mean, we did. I mean, we'd been trying to, too.

[56:29 - Juno Arp Sting by Ken Nana]

Sev Ohanian: What's funny is, you know, you were, like, my go-to, like, real writer that I would release, like, my first script to to get notes. I remember that day, like, taking your notes and, like, Aneesh and I were just, like, scribbling them all down, and if Nak likes it, then we're good. But it always felt to me somewhat predestined that we would work together—I'm not somebody who necessarily feels like things have to happen right away. I know that things will happen.

I went up to Oakland to help produce Fruitvale Station with Ryan, and obviously you are Oakland to me. So I know there was a lot of conversations we had there. I know you—you also wrote a play, CHASING MEHSERLE. I remember you telling us about it while we were still in production. Like, can you speak about that? Because we talked about you as a TV writer. We talked about you as a poet. What's Chinaka as a playwright?

Chinaka Hodge: That's where I went from poetry. So I started with three minutes of space and basically telling first-person narrative, and felt really limited there, and so branched out slowly into poetry, basically similar to you and your first film. I just wrote chunks. I didn't know they were scenes yet, but I just wrote little story nuggets. They were mostly poems, and started just fitting them together.

The first play I wrote was called Mirrors in Every Corner, and it follows a fictional Black family living in Oakland between 1998 and the present, which at the time was 2008. And there's a daughter that's born naturally to the Black family, and she's born white. And it's about the way the family encounters race, class, and privilege over the next few years as the girl grows into a woman.

The role of the older brother in that first play was originated by Daveed Diggs, who went on to star in Hamilton. I wrote a sequel for him to basically play a young man named Watts who, at the age of nine, sees Rodney King on television and decides, "If that's what life is like for Black men, I'm never going outside." He makes the resolution to take his first steps outside on January 1st, 2009, which is the day that Oscar Grant is killed in Oakland.

And so that's the premise of the play, and I remember bringing it up to you and Ryan because I felt like it dovetailed eerily so with the work you guys were doing with what was called, at the time, Fruitvale Station. Ryan and I are both from Oakland, and we saw the same tragedy in real-time and had the artistic responses that we did. I'm pretty sure we both started around the same time, and the movie came out just before the play did. And I was able to see the play sitting next to Ryan and Oscar's family.

The play really explores agoraphobia and what happens when trauma isn't addressed in Black people, which I think is—one of the many outcomes is the senseless death of Oscar Grant. The play itself, I think, is an incantation. It's a spell. It requires everyone who's played this character of Watts to go really deep and to investigate their own mortality. It's the hardest play I've ever written, and um I won't do it anymore. We did it at the Kennedy Center, and I think it did what it

was supposed to do. Ms. Johnson, Ms. Wanda Johnson came to see the show and gave us her approval.

Sev Ohanian: That's Oscar's mother, yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, She came once, and Tati came once, and—

Sev Ohanian: Oscar's daughter, yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, when Tati said, "Is this the part where my dad's going to die?" I was like, "Hm, I never want to write another—something that ends this way." I want to write way, way more joy into what we're doing. I want to write way more levity and way more light. I'm looking forward to working with you to bring it back around and I'm looking forward to working on a project with you that forefronts joy or magic in some kind of way.

[LAUGHTER]

Sev Ohanian: I can't wait.

[59:35 - KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

Sev Ohanian: Let's talk about IRONHEART because I often remember the first day of the IRONHEART writers room. We had this incredible room with yourself leading it, and six very talented screenwriters who joined the project. And, you know, it was myself—we had our two execs from Marvel, Zoie Nagelhout, Kelsey Lew. But I'll never forget that first day because you set such an amazing tone, and that was your first time running a room, right?

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: Can I read this email that you sent to us a few days before? Is that okay?

Chinaka Hodge: I'm really embarrassed, but yes.

Sev Ohanian: Okay, check this out. So this is an email you sent, like, literally a few days before the room started, sent to all the writers, you know, cc-ing the producers. And you said, "We're thrilled and truly excited to take the story journey with each of you. What luck to be in the room with this particular team of gifted, thoughtful, and generous writers in hopes of building camaraderie and vulnerability between us. Despite the challenges of a virtual room, we'd like to ask that you prepare for our time on Monday with your answers to the following three prompts. Number one, Your name and its origin." Number two was, "Your people as defined by you. Who is your community?" And number three, "Be prepared to tell a story from your life that exemplifies heroism or villainy." And you said, "Don't stress about this homework too much. This is designed to be a low-stakes way of getting to know each other."

Chinaka Hodge: Hmm. That was pretty good. I'm impressed with myself. That was almost two years ago, first of all.

Sev Ohanian: Oh, my god.

Chinaka Hodge: That's how long we've been on this project. But second, it's my first time running a room. So there's, like, the benefit of not knowing what I'm doing wrong. So I feel like I went into it, and I tried to run the room much like a poetry writing workshop, which is where my background is. I did it for 20 years and always thought, like, if we gave Hollywood writers the same tools that we give poets and tell them, "It's okay to make a mistake. It's okay to have a wrong answer. It's okay to be vulnerable," what would come out of it?

We also had the challenge of trying to run a room during a pandemic and shelter in place in California, and our writers were actually all over the country, and I was actually out of the country while we did it. And so it's trying to figure out a way to bring Toronto, Atlanta, NorCal, SoCal together and make it feel as intimate as a writing room would feel on a lot. That was the goal. And so I—I tried to ask questions where I would have to be vulnerable on the first day. And then, when I think about who was actually at the table, like "gifted and generous" is such an understatement for the Malarie and the Christians and the Jaquies and the Frans and Amirs of that room. Like, man, like, what a wonderful group.

And, like, it's really nice to hear my words back after all this time and having gone through the experience of that five months with them. It feels so far away, but I remember the excitement of writing that email and, and knowing that we're bringing together a room that was mostly Black women, that was brown people, that was immigrants, that was mixed people, that was queer people. Like, I've never been in a room like that before, and I was so honored to have been in a room that was as generous and as kind and as communicative as that one was.

I've never been in a room where no one cut off the Black woman. Like, I'm constantly in a room where people don't get to finish their sentences, and, in our room, that rarely, if ever, happened. Like, we all were allowed to pitch our stories in full and sort of live in them. Yeah, I just felt so honored to be able to bring together what I think is a really ground-breaking group of writers.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah, I mean, let's, let's talk about that for a moment because it was, as you said, it was a really unconventional room in so many ways. I mean, from my experience, IRONHEART was a show that, you know, our company, Proximity Media, was lucky enough to help develop with Marvel, and obviously Ryan Coogler's movie, BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER introduced the character to the MCU. And we had the opportunity to kind of take her beyond that.

And I think it really took a writer like yourself to see that as the opportunity that it is, and you created such collaborative, established foundation of how the room can operate, and honestly, it's credit to you because I'm so proud of the scripts that came out of that room. I'm so proud of the episodes we've been shooting. By the way, we are on the last week of filming in Atlanta and uh, it's so crazy to think back to that early day.

Chinaka Hodge: When I think about what our original, like, pitches were, even what the first break of the story was, the characters that were in it, it feels so far away from the story we

ended up with, but the themes feel right on point—right aligned. Like, we got to good and evil, magic and tech, big ideas in the MCU, and I think I'm more or less a Marvel novice, and I love the idea of, like, being able to enter into each of these character's worlds for the first time.

We basically did a origin story for every person we have up on the wall here, and um I'm so excited about how many Black and Brown people will live in the MCU after our show is over. I'm excited that we've created outposts, places that people can come back to time and time again independent of Riri, that we have someplace close by that we can have experts in the MCU fields. I'm really happy with the new ground we've created in the MCU.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah, and, like, having been on the other side of the process in which you came to Marvel and you came to us with this idea, it was interesting because, you know, while we had begun developing a show—and, again, credit to Marvel for really putting in all that work, you came with a pitch that, like you said, the plot of your pitch has drastically changed because it naturally will, but the voice that you establish for Riri, I would argue, is exactly the same as it once was, and, like, the theme of what the character represents.

And, more specifically, I think what's really exciting about Riri for me was just kind of how—it's less about what she is and more about what she's not. I think what is so great about the show and what you've done is it all works to tell a really engaging and controversial at times, but really hell of an entertaining story that puts all that stuff kind of like in the subtext and not at the forefront, which I do feel like we've seen sometimes be not as successful.

And I remember that first day. I mean within an hour of starting this session with these people that we'd gotten to know over the weeks prior as we were kind of interviewing and hiring them, but, you know, everyone was talking about their biggest fears. I remember I embarrassingly was asked like, "What's your greatest fear?" And I said, "Entropy?" And to this day, it's become like this ongoing thing.

Chinaka Hodge: Which is probably my biggest regret as a writer and, like, someone who ran a writers room, like ask you your biggest fear and then poke you with it for the—for the foreseeable future.

Sev Ohanian: But what I loved is, as people were talking about, like, their greatest fears or, like, moments of villainy or whatever, you were just steadfast writing notes. And, over the next 20 weeks, whenever an opportunity presented itself—let's say we were all struggling with how do we end Episode 4, and we need something to happen, and you were like, "Oh, right, entropy. Like, this climax at 104, we can incorporate an element of that."

And it was because I think you understood that, for everyone in this room, things that were very honest to us and truthful would find a way into the show in a way that was organic and less, like, artificial and engineered. And, I bet if we had the time, you and I could watch all six episodes, and really point to where that very first day came into effect and I do want to ask you, like, did you expect that to happen over the 20 weeks? Because that was your first time running a room.

Chinaka Hodge: I absolutely expected that to happen, but that's only because I've spent 20 years with 20 or so writers after school in three to four 5:00 hours, asking their fears and vulnerabilities. As adults, we're not offered that very often, and I think, for most people, the last time they can remember even having a writing prompt or touching something like that is probably when they were 12 or 13. So I like to offer that almost all the time when I'm in a room with adults. I think people want to be told, "What you have to say is important," and I think everyone enters a writers room with immense amounts of fear.

I won't say who, but in my first writers room, the number two most powerful and arguably the one who actually ran the room was about 40 minutes late on the first day. And she was a woman. She came in, and she said, "I'm going to be honest with you guys. I've been outside since an hour before the room call just crying. I'm just nervous. I'm just nervous and scared. I'm nervous, and I'm scared, and I'm not sure I know what I'm doing. And I'm 20 years in the industry, and I always feel like that. And I feel like I should tell you guys that so we can work together."

And I feel like that was my version. You know, what we did on the first day was my version of saying, like, "I'm scared. I've never done anything this big. I can only tell you my name, my people, and what moves me, and I hope that you'll do the same." And I think the next set of questions was: what's a hero, what's a villain, or name a time you were a hero or a villain? And that's where we really got into, like, we're all not so great, we're all not so bad. We're trying to write an antihero in Riri, and so getting to our own anti-heroism on day one and two, I think, made like the foundation for things moving forward.

[1:08:13 - Prox Recs Theme by Ken Nana and Ludwig Göransson]

Chinaka Hodge: We're supposed to come up with some recommendations for our listeners about how to move through a production. We're supposed to recommend some books, movies, etc.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: So, if we were going into second season of the IRONHEART room, and you were telling people to read some books along the way, what would you suggest for our writers room?

Sev Ohanian: I'm not going to lie. I'm a very pragmatic guy, as you obviously know, and I would really recommend every single book on screenwriting that you can afford or you can get from your library. Like, I—I followed that rule myself as a writer. I've read every single book. I mean, Save the Cat's a good starting one, but there's endless ones because I don't think you can go wrong, and the only thing you have to give up is a bit of your time. I'm also a really big believer in reading tons and tons of scripts, especially by the greats.

I think a trick that I learned way too late in my career was if you're gonna go read, you know, an Aaron Sorkin, let's say, movie, for example, read every single Aaron Sorkin movie in the order that he wrote them because subconsciously, you'll find yourself, after page 30 on the third script,

you can probably say the line that he's about to write because it just—it's an easy way for your body to just, very literally by osmosis, understand a writer's taste and voice, like we always talk about. That was really helpful.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah. Aaron Sorkin suggestion actually reminds me, when I was a poet, back in those days, um, I had writer's block. And the main thing I would do to do—to beat writer's block is I'd try and emulate the style of another writer. So I'd literally, every time I'd get stuck, I'd be like, "How would Toni Morrison write it?" And after like 10 minutes of being like, "I can't write like Toni Morrison," I'd invariably go back to writing in my own voice.

So I tried it, actually, with Sorkin early on and did it with, like, *The American President* and *West Wing* scripts, too. So I would say, on this show, uh, we've leaned heavily into the graphic representations of W.E.B. Du Bois, so I would definitely recommend that book. For all writers rooms, I recommend a refresh on *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. I think just brevity helps a script. Being able to say something in three words is better than saying it in 10.

Sev Ohanian: My partner, Aneesh, swears by that book, yeah.

Chinaka Hodge: Yeah, I mean, it's—you hate to read it. It's like the vegetables of books, but every time I read it, I get a refresh on what makes things great. All of Octavia Butler's catalog, starting with *Lilith's Brood* and the *Parable* series. I also referenced Kimberly Drew's *Black Futures*, and then extra bonus point, I would add uh Saba, the musician Saba. He—he provided a tone and a vibe for this whole thing, and most of the scenes that I wrote that turned out well, I was writing along to Saba's music.

[1:10:50 - Juno Arp Sting by Ken Nana]

Sev Ohanian: We're literally in your office, three days from wrapping principal—

Chinaka Hodge: Crazy.

Sev Ohanian: And it's insane. It's so insane. I'm so proud of the show. And, you know, I've watched everything Marvel has ever done, and I think this is going to be really, really special.

Chinaka Hodge: I know the show is special just, just—by virtue of who we have in the show. I know the show is special, but I haven't had a chance to, like, really look you in the eye and thank you. I'm just so thankful. Like, I see you as, like, my little big brother.

Sev Ohanian: Oh, my god, same right back to you.

[1:11:10 - In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media. IRONHEART is produced by Proximity Media and Marvel Studios. If you like In Proximity, help us spread the word. Share this

episode with a friend or loved one. Follow, rate, and review the show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app. It helps other people find the show.

Follow us on social media. We're @ProximityMedia on Instagram, TikTok, and more. We're also on YouTube. You can watch this episode in video on our YouTube channel. You can also find this on our website, proximitymedia.com, where we have transcripts and great behind-the-scenes photos there, as well.

In Proximity executive producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, Sev Ohanian, and Paola Mardo—that's me. I also hosted, directed, and produced the show. Ken Nana is our Editor, Sound Mixer, Sound Designer, and Mix Engineer. Jonathan Chung is our Director of Photography. Isabella Miller is our Production Assistant. Alexandria Santana is our Social Media Coordinator. Our Production Intern is Jun Sawada.

Special thanks to Patrick Epino, to the Proximity Media team, and to you for listening to In Proximity.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Sev Ohanian: Harry Potter is obviously a major influence on the show for you, correct?

Chinaka Hodge: It's a huge, huge influence. Everything that Harry's done, I—what's Harry Potter's last name? Is it Potter?

Sev Ohanian: So, for our listeners, in our long writing room sessions, every now and then, Nak would pitch some incredibly cool idea, and somebody would be like, "Oh, yeah, like from Harry Potter." And Chinaka Hodge, ladies and gentlemen, has never read Harry Potter.

Chinaka Hodge: I read the first chapter of the first book.

Sev Ohanian: That's not enough, man.