



BLACK PANTHER: AN AFROFUTURIST SUPER HERO AVANT LA LETTRE

BLACK PANTHER WAS A SYMBOL OF POWER AND TECHNOLOGY FROM THE BEGINNING.

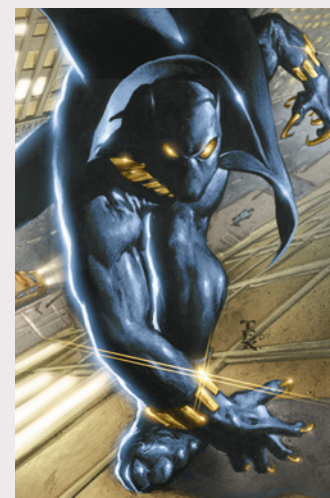
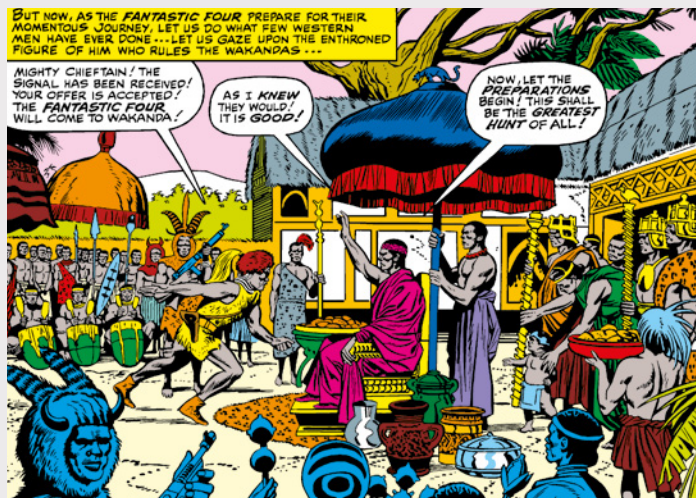
Black Panther, king of the African nation of Wakanda, has worn the same basic costume throughout his career. But before he assumed his monochromatic garb, Jack Kirby had proposed two different costumes, both of which were cast aside until the Black Panther made his official debut in *Fantastic Four* #52 (1966).

His first costume, for the proposed character Coal Tiger, was a standard colorful super hero outfit with a yellow bodysuit, black tights, and a cape. By the time the Panther finally made his debut in the pages of the *Fantastic Four*, he donned the beginnings of what would evolve into the classic Panther costume today: no cape and an all-black bodysuit that covers every inch of his body—a clear reference to the sleek and ferocious panther whose name he shares.

Panther's all-black costume gave him a distinctive look in a sea of multi-colored super hero contemporaries. Kirby imbued Black Panther with power and athleticism through

his dynamic illustrations, a style that has followed the Panther throughout his life. In Kirby's early drawings, Black Panther moves fluidly; when in action, he hunches low, crouched like a hunting cat before leaping hands-first into combat.

Black Panther's story is as much about his fictional homeland Wakanda as it is about the super hero himself. Stan Lee and Kirby depicted Wakanda as a futurist civilization whose technology was far more advanced than that of the United States. Wakanda's landscape combined the African jungle and plains with high-tech facilities, stations, tunnels, and buildings, all rendered in bold colors. This techno-utopian vision established *Black Panther* as an important visual evolution for a comics industry that was glaringly white. The Panther's depiction as an Afrofuturist character followed him as he made appearances in later issues of *Fantastic Four* and *Avengers*, and later his own eponymous comic.



Black Panther's visual evolution is just as much about his homeland of Wakanda as it is about the character himself.