

The West Wing Weekly
3.21: We Killed Yamamoto

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hi, friends! You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm melting.

JOSH: Yes. One of us is topless and one of us is wearing pink headphones. You work it out.
[Hrishi laughing] But say your name. I interrupted you.

HRISHI: I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: I knew that.

HRISHI: And it's very hot where I am. We are in a heat wave.

JOSH: [sung] Heat wave.

HRISHI: And today we are talking about "We Killed Yamamoto". It's the penultimate episode of season three of The West Wing.

JOSH: This episode was written by Aaron Sorkin. It was directed by Tommy Schlamme and it first aired on May 15, 2002.

HRISHI: I'm going to read the synopsis from T.V. Guide because I like the way they end it.

JOSH: Ah. Exciting.

HRISHI: While Barlet, Leo, and Fitzwallace grapple with terrorism and moral absolutes, Josh and Amy grapple with each other over a welfare reform bill. Meanwhile, Donna represents the White House at a North Dakota state party caucus, Toby doesn't want the President to go to a New York fundraiser because Governor Richie will be there. Charlie is tasked with finding candidates to replace Mrs. Landingham. And C.J. discovers that Simon Donovan is a *very* straight shooter.

JOSH: Nice! I gotta give a little hat tip to T.V. Guide. I mean they are not just phoning it in.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: You might find it a little corny, but the work is being put in.

HRISHI: Exactly. They've got some parallel structure.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: They don't have any floating opposites, but you know it's good. It's nice.

JOSH: Well, they have yet to employ Zoogma [cross talk] in there synapses but one can hope.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right....The one at the end is different. [Josh laughing] "A very straight shooter." They are just loading up some innuendo in there.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: Tommy Schlamme usually directs the finales. He didn't direct the finale of season three, but rather this episode.

JOSH: So I went ahead and I wrote to Tommy and I asked him about the situation and he was gracious enough to reply. And here's what he had to say. "Jessica Yu was supposed to direct that episode [Josh: that being this one]

HRISHI: Right. Jessica Yu who directed "Someone's Going To Emergency, Someone Is Going To Jail"

JOSH: Right. So she was supposed to direct "We Killed Yamamoto." "She was still a part of John Well's Diversity Program, and had done a fantastic job the season before. We all just wanted her to continue her success with us 'cause she's a wonderful director. As is often the case, as the season got near the end, the scripts were a bit late. I could tell as we approached prep that she would not get her script until days before shooting. I called her and I said we would love for her to direct an episode next season, but my professional advice was to not direct this one. We would even pay her. I just wanted her to succeed and felt without adequate or at least some prep, we were setting her up for failure. She graciously understood and was appreciative and I jumped in." And then he says, "By the way, I think I got that script the day before shooting."

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Which is insane. I mean, my understanding, I've never directed episodic TV myself, nor anything else, but I think normally you have a couple weeks preparation. You get the script and you have to start breaking down: how many extras do we need, how many locations, which locations, let's go scout locations. I mean, there are days and days and actually weeks of work to do. So, I'd like to get him on mic to talk us about how you even go about directing an episode the day after it's been put in your hands.

HRISHI: Yeah. Usually, your prep at least involves enough time to read the script.

JOSH: Yeah. Right, there you go.

HRISHI: I asked if he was planning to direct "Posse Comitatus" the season finale, by chance, cause he usually directs the season finales. [cross talk] seasons finale. And if the last minute switch, if that changed the plan, you know, suddenly now he is not going to do the last episode because he is doing the second to last episode instead. Or was Alex Graves always going to do that one. And he wrote back that "by the middle of season three, I was profoundly aware of the amazing job that Alex Graves and Chris Misiano were doing. I thought it was only fair to have one of them do the finale, and the other one do the next season opener. At least, the executive producer in me thought that it fair. The director in me struggled a bit more with it."

JOSH: Huh, that was generous of him.

HRISHI: Yeah! Really.

JOSH: That was a magnanimous gesture.

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: Very cool.

HRISHI: Let's start at the beginning of the episode?

JOSH: Yes. This is a good one and it's right in the middle of a bank of good ones. I mean, right? This is just a great run of classic West Wing.

HRISHI: This episode might be my favorite of the season three end pack.

JOSH: End pack...that's good! I don't know if that is going to catch on to the extent flentl did, but end pack is good.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I just put syllables together. Well, first off, it's casual Sunday at the White House.

JOSH: Is that right?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Did I miss a sartorial detail?

HRISHI: A lack of sartorial detail. Everyone is dressed down a little bit. Not so much the military commanders in the Sit Room, but the President himself is wearing a nice little men's knit number.

JOSH: It's funny that you mention the Sit Room and how they're not casual there, but I had noticed one little detail of casualness, which I thought was a great tiny little thing that added to the whole ambiance of the scene. Kurt Fuller plays, I think, the civilian advisor in the Sit Room, and I'm not sure if in the initial scene, but in a later scene, when it's cramped and seems to be hot there, and it's stuffy, and his top button is open. And it's just a tiny detail that gives you a sense that they have been in this room for a long time. So long that the normal formality that would be called for has started to ease.

HRISHI: Right! Good eye....mate.

JOSH: Thank you! Should we start at the beginning?

HRISHI: Sure! In the Sit Room at the very beginning of the episode, in the cold open, the advisors are laying out their case for how they are going get Sherif; or really, the justification for getting Sherif. And the President, to me, seemed like he had an especially professorial aspect. There is a shot of him, sort of three quarters from behind, and he's got the glasses on, and he is peering down at them with this stern look. He just reminded me of like a college professor who was listening to someone's dissertation and not buying it.

JOSH: Sure. Right. Yes.

HRISHI: And the President says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

BARTLET: This isn't a cave dweller. This is Capone. You haven't got it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's a great scene.

HRISHI: And when we come back from the cold open, after the titles, we're in Amy's apartment.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And Van Morrison is playing. Two songs that I've got to add to the Cool Sorkin Jams playlist.

JOSH: It's very exciting. We have "Caravan" and later in the show, "Moondance." Yes?

HRISHI: Mmmhmmm

JOSH: "Moondance" having the distinction, little known outside of my family, of being the one tune that I could successfully play a portion of on the saxophone when I was as a kid. For some reason, I don't know, my specialty was [sung melody of song]. And that was about it. I would just play that phrase over and over.

HRISHI: It's funny. So Josh is describing this scene to Donna, and though it's the song later that's "Moondance," he says that when she is dancing she is doing a scene from Flashdance.

JOSH: Aaahhh. Hmmm. Actually, here's what I really like. I like that on the down beat of that scene, we get that their relationship has gone to a new place. He is literally lying in the bed in boxers. She's dancing in a little, I think, silk robe. They are obviously very comfortable with around other. One odd element is that he is lying in boxers on his bed talking to Donna.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I won't comment on that for now. But, watching Mary Louise's dancing, and then, actually, Brad has a little moment. He does a little shimmy that I would very much like to GIF. [Crosstalk] Did you not notice it? There is literally one in the middle of talking to her, he does one ultra-weird Brad dance move, on the move.

HRISHI: Is it a dance move or is it just a little fidget?

JOSH: No, I think it's literally a, you know there experts who can read microexpressions?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: I can read Brad's microdance moves. So it happens in a nanosecond. But I think it's a technically an attempted dance move. In their dorky dancing, they are just the perfect couple.

HRISHI: They are having the time of their lives. Dorky dancing.

["(I've Had) The Time of My Life" excerpt]

BILL MEDLEY: [sung] Now, I've had the time of my life.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Dorky Dancing III. That looks like the kind of scene that they worked on. You know, it doesn't feel studied but it feels lived in, in a good way. It feels to me that they have worked on

what that relationship is all about. It would have been fun to me to see Tommy working with Mary Louise and Brad on that whole apartment scene.

HRISHI: This is the most skin we have ever seen in a scene from *The West Wing*.

JOSH: It's nothing compared to what I have seen on *The West Wing Weekly*. But that's a fair point about the *West Wing*, itself.

HRISHI: [laughing] It's true. You have seen me with my shirt off more times than almost anyone.

JOSH: I hope there is somebody who outranks me on that list.

HRISHI: There are a very small, unfortunate few.

JOSH: I never really thought about it, you're right. This is pretty racy for *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: In fact, at one point, when Mary Louise Parker is walking out of the room in the background as Brad is talking on the phone, she's putting on her p.j. bottoms, but she hasn't fully put them on.

JOSH: Wow! I've been married for 21 years, I didn't even notice that. It's racy! It's racy.

HRISHI: It's racy. This is a new level of intimacy for the show.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Not just between the two characters, but for what they are giving to us.

JOSH: But, despite their intimacy, Brad, Josh makes a kind of rookie mistake, I think, in terms of divulging what he's working on, and what the situation is.

[*West Wing* Episode 3:21 excerpt]

AMY: They are going to vote it out of committee?

JOSH: Yeah. In fact, we are getting another billion for child care.

AMY: What do you have to give the Republican's for a billion dollars?

JOSH: Three hundred million for marriage incentives.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I mean, he knows who Amy is. You would think he would have played in closer to the vest, as it were, in terms of the deal that's being made to get this bill passed.

HRISHI: That's true. In a lesser show, this would be a moment where someone cheats on another character. The partner doesn't know, and their life will be easier if they just never say anything. But the eventually of course they always say, "Ugh, here what's happened," and then things fall apart. But here, it's he's got another legislative agenda behind her back.

JOSH: That's very astute, actually. I think it is the West Wing version of what you just posited. I wouldn't have thought of it that way.

HRISHI: She eventually finds out that Josh, you know, in order to make a compromise takes a position that she can't condone. And then Amy goes full "Art of War" on Josh.

JOSH: That's really what, I think, he should have foreseen.

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

AMY: This bill isn't going to pass.

JOSH: Yes, it is. It's locked up. I have the American's Children Alliance behind it.

AMY: Not for long. [On the phone] It's me, Scott. Everyone who's in the office should stay there. I need Legislative Affairs to put together a meeting with Regina King.

JOSH: And we are back to square one.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] She literally cuts his communications. It literally is like warfare. She is not above, you know, throwing his phone in the stew and cuts his phone cord. Yeah. This is some guerrilla tactics. But, she is clearly going to ramp up and figure out how to best to fight Josh.

HRISHI: Yeah. The part that, actually, I understand and also find most infuriating is when Josh then tries to sell Amy on the compromise.

JOSH: Yeah. Good luck with that.

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

JOSH: You know what? Every, single studies...every one, shows that kids do better in two parent homes.

AMY: Kids are better off if they are raised....[fades out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean, at this point, I don't know why Josh doesn't take the tactic of "I know this sucks, this is a bitter pill that we have to swallow. But the cons don't outweigh the pros and I have to make a calculated decision. And I know that you are going to have your position" You know...

JOSH: And that is closer to what he will say to her later on down the line.

HRISHI: But at first...

JOSH: But you're right,

HRISHI: He goes right into a defensive position and starts doing even a devil's advocacy...

JOSH: Trying to win on the merits. Yeah. It's a mistake

HRISHI: And I think that is the strategic mistake because that sends Amy off, you know, in the opposite direction with even more velocity.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: [laughing] You know, when she drops the phone in the stew and she cuts the cords, at first I was like "Wait, they are in Amy's apartment, right? She didn't just do physical damage to Josh's apartment" although she did just destroy his phone, so whatever.

JOSH: I have this thing where my mom [laughs] is very fastidious and neat and keeps a lovely home. And she doesn't like watching things where the room is very very messy. [Hrishi laughs] I can't stand wasted food. And so I literally cringed when she throws her phone into the stew! You ruined the stew!

HRISHI: Yep. Yep. It reminded me a little bit of Game of Thrones. Or really any kind of scenario where two people are training in how to fight. And one of them approaches with a kind of more conventional way of like "Oh, you stand like this", and the person who is teaching them comes up and throws dirt and their eyes and kicks them in the crotch.

JOSH: Sure. Yeah! It's like the Indiana Jones moment where he just takes out a gun. [crosstalk] the guy with the smotard has all these moves and Indy just takes out his gun and blows them away.

HRISHI: [crosstalk: laughing] Right! Exactly. And shoots them. Exactly.

JOSH: This is a good iteration of that.

HRISHI: Yeah, lesson one: never drop your guard because the person on the other side is going to use everything they can all the time.

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: I just feel so bad for Josh. I mean, this episode, I feel so bad for Josh throughout this episode.

JOSH: I guess it's Brad, but I can never feel bad for Josh.

HRISHI: [laughing] I mean, he really has this terrible moment that we know will always spells doom for characters which is they celebrate their day off or something. He says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

JOSH: This is going to be a good night. My woman, a fine stew, and a Mets game on national TV.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's never once worked out for anyone who's ever talked about how they are going to have leisurely time.

JOSH: Although I like that he is a Mets fan. I give him that over Toby.

HRISHI: Mmmhmm. Toby is a Yankees fan.

JOSH: Booooo hiss.

HRISHI: But then don't you feel bad for Josh when the President jumps up and down on him.

JOSH: No, I love it.

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

BARTLET: True or false, Josh, my life would be better right now if you and your girlfriend swapped jobs? Why is it for good thing you do around here, we've got to endure three screw ups?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But he was unfairly harsh to him.

JOSH: The President is in a mood and he's got some heavy affairs of state weighing on him so I understand why. But I kinda love it. I like watching Josh get beaten down. I think he maybe have had it coming.

HRISHI: But he didn't, is the thing. Josh ran these things through Leo. The President says, you know, sorry doesn't get him 218. It doesn't get him the votes for the bill that they are trying to pass. It doesn't get back the ad that slipped through your office. Which is kind of like, that was Sam. Sam did that.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: Josh told him not to do it.

JOSH: True.

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

BARTLET: It doesn't get back the ad that slipped through your office any more than it gets back tobacco which you gave away for lunch money.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which, again, he's right about that and Bruno points out why they were wrong. But it wasn't Josh who acted alone. Leo's told them "light 'em up"

JOSH: That's true. Look. And Leo shows up later to, as the President puts it, stand in front of Josh, which I think is a lovely way to put it. [crosstalk] I love that phrase.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right. It is.

JOSH: I've got to work that into my life somehow.

HRISHI: [laughing] But, with the thing about vote: the scheduling the vote, cancelling the charity, Leo signs off on all of that. But Josh is just sort of the closest body in I think ...

JOSH: And yeah that's true. And I think the most traction President Bartlet gets is on the bill in front of them because I think Josh did make a terrible strategic mistake. [crosstalk] You don't tell your girlfriend who works for the Women's Leadership Coalition about the marriage incentives. You know, that would be something to keep to yourself for the greater good. And I guess also, it's a nice antidote, to me, to how well everyone usually gets along. [crosstalk] I like when there is a little bit of flint. And sometimes, first of all, sometimes the boss in a bad mood. And on this

day, the boss is in a bad mood. And also, sometimes, even if it's a little bit unfair, you've got to get on people. Even if it's a little bit much. Or even if you've talked it all out and not all the blame belongs on him. It's a motivator. And I just like to see that it is not always shoulder to shoulder, swaying and Kumbaya. Also, sometimes the President gets pissed off and has this to say.

HRISHI: Yeah, my heart does break for Josh and then as they show us his face as he is just sitting there being berated.

JOSH: It's good acting, all around.

HRISHI: It is. But you can also see it sets up him for having to do, he realizes his tactical mistake and it sets up for what he has to do later on, you know, not in this episode. But it sets him up for what's going to happen next.

JOSH: Yeah. No. Absolutely, exactly. In a sense, I think it's good managing, if not the nicest interpersonal relations. Because the President wants something from Josh, and Josh gets the message loud and clear in this scene. And does resort to different kind of tactics, and you know, I like that Amy is able to see, in Josh, immediately, in that scene later in the episode, that something is different.

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

JOSH: Amy, when these things are over and we win, you know whose job it is to pay a visit to the people who weren't with us?

AMY: What happened?

JOSH: Nothing.

AMY: You just threatened me, honey. What happened?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that scene.

HRISHI: Yeah, in that scene, when Amy says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 Excerpt]

AMY: Jed Bartlet, not quite as mean spirited as the other guy. Doesn't really send me running to my polling place.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought, Hillary, aye, aye, aye.

JOSH: Yep. Mmmhmm. Yeah. Absolutely.

HRISHI: I felt bad saying that, but...

JOSH: No, the thought crossed my mind as well. And it didn't.

HRISHI: I feel like they didn't make the narrative compelling enough to make it the slam dunk that really ought to have been.

JOSH: I couldn't agree more. And I frequently think the Democrats have some major messaging problems, because if people solely voted self-interest, I don't think Democrats would lose another election.

HRISHI: Right. I feel so bad for Josh, I think, because even though he had some strategic errors, I mean really the best thing he could have done would be to not to mention the bill at all to Amy and then get it passed. But he would have still had to deal with the consequences, you know, at that point.

JOSH: Oh, absolutely. But isn't that a very simple equation? I could get the really important thing taken care of and then have an uncomfortable conversation, or I could have an uncomfortable conversation that might prevent me from getting the bill passed [laughing].

HRISHI: Right. Absolutely. For sure. But the reason why I feel bad for him, is that Pentaro has come in to his life, and essentially served him a [expletive deleted] sandwich. And he can either, you know, eat it quickly and with these condiments, or on another day and divide it up. But, you know, either way he has to deal with this now. It's been handed to him. It's just it's not really his fault that he is just in this job, at this time. And it feels a little bit Jobian, or something to me, that he just has to be this guy who has to carry this ball over the end zone. And he is going to get knocked around, no matter what.

JOSH: Well, look, the amount of time spent on whether this deal with the devil is worth it is zero. They are immediately willing to take this deal. So, yes, it is not the dream deal by a long shot, but I think they have figured out what they need, and the likelihood of getting it, and here is someone is saying, "Here's how you can get it done," and immediately they are willing to make it.

HRISHI: Right, right. No. That's a fair point. Amy's position that you are going to sell out poor women in order to get this victory is not worth it. You should have taken another tactic; you should have just said no, we are going to figure out another solution.

JOSH: Right. And I think she'd be furious to realize that there wasn't even a discussion, at least as it's depicted in this episode. It's a done deal as soon as Pentaro offers it. It's taken. And yes, it's going to make for some discomfort at home but there is no pause to consider.

HRISHI: Right. This guy Pentaro is terrible. Not to mention, his description of War of the Roses [laughing]

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

PENTARO: Kathy and I saw it in London. It's fantastic. It's like no Shakespeare you have ever seen. There is music, they sing.

JOSH: And that's great...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I already hated the guy.

JOSH: And the funny thing is, I want to go see that. [Hrishi laughing] I'm not saying that the way that guy describes it is ideal. But I so want to go see the Wars of the Roses.

HRISHI: Well, you like West Side Story. This is it. You know, you're like "Romeo and Juliet, that's alright, but what if they sang!" [Josh laughing] "What if they danced?"

JOSH: Yeah, I guess. It is not the concept of the singing and dancing. I don't know if there is any dancing mentioned, now that you mentioned it. It's more of this marathon epic performance.

HRISHI: Mash-up?

JOSH: Yeah, Mash-up of all the Henry's. It just sounds interesting and cool to me.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

JOSH: And I like long long great theatre.

HRISHI: I just, you know, because that's what usually people say about Shakespeare. It just needs a little sprucing up.

JOSH: I saw a production of the Merry Wives of Windsor at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival this summer that included multiple 80's pop numbers.

HRISHI: Oh. Baz Luhrmann effect. Alright. Next subject.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Broasted.

JOSH: Broasted!

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

JOSH: "Better to look chicken than to get broasted," my mother always says.

SAM: What's broasted?

JOSH: I've never really known, but it's what they do to chickens.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It actually made me pause and think, "What is broasting?" And I looked into it and it is a trademarked technique for pressured deep frying, I guess, generally chicken. And, it's a technique that was pioneered by L.A.M. Phelan, and as I said, it's a way to pressure cooking, that supposedly uses less oil, and there is less flavor transfer. And if you want to claim to be serving broasted chicken, you have to be a licensee. [Crosstalk] It's true.

HRISHI: Wow. You need to pay in.

JOSH: Well, I think there is specific equipment involved for broasting. And I think it's at broaster.com you can input your zip code and find the closest broasting establishment near you. I've looked and I've yet to find a kosher broasting establishment. I'm sure one exists somewhere. Please, crowd source this for me, folks, and let me know.

HRISHI: See. That puts a hole in my theory. I thought it was when Dean Martin got really douche-y while insulting one of his friends.

JOSH: They aren't going just roast that guy. They are going to broast him.

HRISHI: It's a technique patented by Jeff Ross.

JOSH: Ha. Very nice. The broast-master general.

HRISHI: I really love the way that this episode sort of respectfully acknowledges Mrs. Landingham as it starts to make the transition to the idea that there might be a new executive secretary. It isn't sort of like just a Dick Sargent/Dick York switch-a-roo; or just bringing in Oliver the new cute cousin on the T.V. show for a ratings boost; is not "That's so Mrs. Landingham.." [crosstalk]

JOSH: Also, if you're keeping score at home, that's two consecutive West Wing Weekly episodes in which Hrishikesh mentioned Dick Sargent and Dick York. [Hrishikesh laughing] So, you're saying, yes, that they are giving us a moment to visit her graveside.

HRISHIKESH: Yeah.

JOSH: To make peace with the idea, I guess, of moving on. That's a very nice observation.

HRISHIKESH: Yeah. There is even a moment, besides the visit to Arlington. One, it's a nice detail to show that she is buried at Arlington.

JOSH: Right, because her husband served.

HRISHIKESH: Yes.

JOSH: And, is that, indeed, Arlington?

HRISHIKESH: Yeah. I thought that it might be the cemetery in Westwood: Los Angeles National Cemetery.

JOSH: It may indeed be.

HRISHIKESH: I thought that may have been where that was shot. It's interesting that there no dates on her gravestone.

JOSH: Why do you think that is?

HRISHIKESH: Leaving it open ended for her to come back.

[Both laughing]

JOSH: Wow. She might have died in the future. Wait, what does that mean? Maybe Kathryn Joosten didn't want to divulge her age. Although, that didn't make sense. [laughing] She is a fictional character.

HRISHIKESH: But so, there is a moment there at the cemetery, but then also when the President actually, finally suggests maybe it's time to organize a search for a new Executive Secretary. He says to Charlie:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

BARTLET: I may not like the first couple of candidates. It may take a while.

CHARLIE: No. I don't imagine you're actually going to hire anybody, sir. But this is a step in the right direction.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We have another moment there where it's on the President but his face is just turned toward Mrs. Landingham's desk. And he doesn't say anything [crosstalk] and he just takes it in. [crosstalk] And there is another moment of acknowledgement or I almost took it as like by way of an apology for moving on.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Mmhmmm. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. I also, they don't shine a light on it, but we discover that it's been a year, and he hasn't replaced her.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So, it gives some insight into their relationship. And I think at the gravesite he says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

BARTLET: I just can't believe it's been a year.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it's hard to tell because there's no date.

JOSH: [laughing] There you go. And so, he has felt that she is irreplaceable for a year now.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I think Charlie, who seems very motivated to find a replacement that he will accept, I think there is some understanding there that it will help the President move on. Get on with things, in a way, maybe that perhaps he hasn't yet.

HRISHI: Right. That it's the next step of the grieving process.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: You said, "shining a light on" and another thing they shine a light on, and I thought was very cool is Leo says they use an infrared beam to listen in on the conversation. And I thought

that was pretty cool. I know that's real technology that really exists. And it's been around for awhile. Obviously, this episode is 15 years old. But I still think it's pretty cool.

JOSH: But the Sheriff don't like it.

HRISHI: [laughing] I think you and I are going to clash on that.

JOSH: Ahhh. Nice.

HRISHI: Anyways, I think that is really cool.

JOSH: I do too.

HRISHI: That you can use light to hear sound. That's so cool.

JOSH: At least in the world of the West Wing. Aaron might have made it up. No.

HRISHI: No! You really can do that. What did you think about the line from the President, when he says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

BARTLET: Fellas, this guy is going to stand trial in the U.S. Court and if have to stick heroin on his plane to get him there, that is what we are gonna do.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I liked it. I think in this episode what's really getting his back up, or what's most holding him back is this feeling that they are all contemplating extra legal maneuvers. So when he makes heroin line, I don't think he is saying let's do something illegal to get this guy, cause I think that President Bartlet is the one who's most objecting to that line. Why? Do you not like that line of dialogue? I kind of like it.

HRISHI: I don't like it. It feels like it's some dramatic icing just for the sake of being dramatic that really goes against everything the President has been saying and doesn't solve any of the problems. You know, they are talking about how he has diplomatic immunity and so the fact that he tried to plot to blow up the Golden Gate Bridge, they can't use that to get him to trial. So it's like, well what good does it do, even if they were literally to stick heroin on his plane, he would still have diplomatic immunity.

JOSH: Well, that's why I don't think he is speaking literally. [crosstalk] I think it's just one of those emotional, one of those things that doesn't exactly track and doesn't exactly make sense. But that you just say when your adamant and emotional. And...

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I know. I want him to have a slam dunk of a line there, [crosstalk] I think is the thing, and the instead...

JOSH: [crosstalk] I see. You would like them to have beaten that line.

HRISHI: Hmmhmm.

JOSH: For a button.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: A better button. That happens a lot in, there is a lot of discussion, I think, in writer's rooms like, "Can we beat this button?" Like, you know, "We need a better final line."

HRISHI: But despite my little nitpick there about that line, this episode has some of my favorite dialogue.

JOSH: Hit me with some of it!

HRISHI: Well, after they have decided that there are no real legal means by which they can prosecute Sheriff, you've just got Leo and Fitz in the Sit. Room. I already like when it's just the two of them in the Sit. Room. You know, they are just sitting there and Leo even says, "This is always where you say something," and Fitzwallace is just like, "Nah."

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: But, then he comes in and says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

FITZWALLACE: Have you changed shampoo? You have. I can tell, 'cause your hair seems bouncy and more manageable.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that whole exchange.

JOSH: Yeah. They're another couple who seem to have a real history.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: The actors are just so good. John Spencer and John Amos are just, they make it real. You feel like these guys have been through a lot together. And they are comfortable in their silence and they know each other's silences. And Leo knows Fitz has something to say.

HRISHI: Mmmhmm. That's one part that I really love. The other part that I really love is the whole exchange at the firing range.

JOSH: That's a great scene.

HRISHI: Between C.J. ...I mean that's just amazing.

JOSH: That's a wonderful scene.

HRISHI: I mean really, I could point to every line of dialogue; I think and say "I love that line," and "I love that line." I guess this more about her delivery when she says, "Tough talk, I like that."

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: You know, when he says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

SIMON: They do when I'm guarding you.

C.J.: Tough talk, I like that. Give me your gun.

SIMON: Let me get you a .25 caliber.

C.J.: What's wrong with yours?

SIMON: It's a 357 Magnum.

C.J.: I've heard of that. That's a good brand.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love it so much!

JOSH: It's a terrific scene. It's romantic, it's flirty, it's funny.

HRISHI: Uhhh!

JOSH: I love when she questions his marksmanship. You know, “How good are you?” kind of thing. And he says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

SIMON: Well, I can fire a gun without falling down, if that's what you mean.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly.

JOSH: That's such an Aaron line to me. That makes me laugh.

HRISHI: I always think about “I've heard of that! That's a good brand” for that, like, I just really appreciate that kind of joke. As you know, I don't drink, but then when Lindsay, my wife, will sometimes want to get a bottle of wine, sometimes I have to go get the wine for her. So I always ask “What flavor of wine would you like?”

JOSH: [laughing] And then when she chooses one, you can use the “That's a good brand. I've heard of that.” Now I'm imagining your relationship. Do you use West Wing references that fly over her head all the time? Or is she down with all your..?

HRISHI: Oh, not just with her. Half the time when I'm speaking to anyone in the world, I'm using a West Wing reference and they have no idea.

JOSH: And do you care, when you launch one, whether the intended target is likely to pick up on what you are laying down?

HRISHI: I don't mind that they'll miss it, but I get a lot of delight when they catch it.

JOSH: I see. Otherwise, it's just an in-joke with yourself.

HRISHI: [laughing] Most of my life.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: [singing] *“Getting to know you...”*

HRISHI: I can't stop it. I mean, that's what I really feel like is the whole instinct behind puns. I mean, it is an instinct, I can't turn it off. I know you probably feel the same way. Half the time, the struggle is not to come up with something..

JOSH: The struggle is not to share it.

HRISHI: Not to say it. Yeah. I'm always having an in-joke with myself and sometimes I'm like "Maybe other people would like to hear some of this garbage."

JOSH: Thank God we found each other.

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly! That is what I'm saying.

JOSH: Let's say we take a quick break and come back later.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Ok. So back to this scene with C.J. and Simon Donovan. Again, as you've pointed out, Allison Janney is great at a pratfall.

JOSH: Yeah, she is.

HRISHI: To stop and examine the mechanics of that scene, not just enjoy it as a piece of entertainment, but be like "God, she had to shoot that gun, and fall over backwards, out of frame." You know, you think "How did they do that? How much kick was really in the gun?" It is a feat of physical acting that is remarkable.

JOSH: That is true. See, I watch it and I think, "This is legitimately dangerous. She could have fired again. She could have killed him."

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: She swings the gun early on and she says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

C.J.: This is cool.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It made me very edgy watching this scene. I was really on edge. This is not proper gun etiquette.

HRISHI: No. And it's definitely not good trainer etiquette to just be like, "Alright, I'm just going to back away and let you fall over."

JOSH: And that is when you can tell he is really besotted.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He must really like her.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then, again, this has that wonderful moment that we talked about in our last episode with Mark Harmon. When C.J. then does have to say something nice to him, and I love that moment when she puts her hand up to her hair.

JOSH: Yeah. That's a great gesture. It's a great moment altogether. Aaron is very good at catching you off guard between sort of comic moments and then things that land more palpably in an emotional way.

HRISHI: Mmhmm. There is a bit, right in that moment when she gets ready to give him the compliment, she settles in and says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

C.J.: Yes. Yes.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the music starts and she goes into it. And there is something about, I could not tell you what, but there is something about that little bit that reminds me of *The Princess Bride*. I think it's maybe the moment in *The Princess Bride* where Fred Savage says to Peter Falk:

[*The Princess Bride* excerpt]

GRANDPA: Now there is kissing again, you don't want to hear that.

GRANDSON: I don't mind so much.

GRANDPA: Ok. Since the invention of the kiss, there have been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think it's something about the character setting you up for what, you know, is going to be a moment. This is going to be an emotional bit. And rather than try and like sneak it up on you or something like that. They set the scene with a little bit of dialogue, then the music comes in, and then they make good on the promise.

JOSH: That's funny. I feel like I fleetingly thought of *The Princess Bride* while watching this because the word marriage get said so often and I kept thinking of Peter Cook saying "mawwiage" (with a lisp).

TOGETHER: [laughing] Mawwiage incentives.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: There it is.

HRISHI: Another line that is one of my absolute favorites is Toby's:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

Toby: Is there anyone you'd rather have as a blood enemy less than Sam?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that line and I love the insight that it gives us into Sam. That the sweet guy who, you know, has been the idealist, the starry-eyed member of the crew. Everybody is saying, "Let's cheer him up. Let's get him up off the mat." And Toby is like, "No, this guy is a viscous killer if you are on the wrong side of him."

JOSH: Right. And he checks in with him later like "Are you still mad? Are you still angry?" And I like the look Rob Lowe gives him.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It isn't a big, yes. It's a subtle like "Oh, you know it."

HRISHI: Yeah. It's gotta be hard when you are an actor to know that you have nailed a moment like that, that has no verbal execution, and you can't see your own face. He nails that moment in that scene. The look that he gives Toby. I guess that's why you have a director.

JOSH: That's true. And yeah, and also, half the job is acting from behind the camera. So Richard Schiff is off-screen when we've got Rob Lowe's single. And so you know if you've connected with the other actor, too. It's not like you necessary know exactly what your face looks like. That's not supposed to be where your head is. But you kind of know if the moment is there between actors.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Another technique thing that I was reminded of watching this episode is that, and I think we have discussed it before, Leo and Bartlet have scene where they walk up stairs:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

LEO: Josh met with Rick Pentaro yesterday, on the Working Toward Independence Act

BARTLET: Do you suppose that could be any more patronizingly named?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And then they get to the top of the stairs and they continue walking and continue talking. And those are just two different locations. Those are two different sound stages. So there is a real challenge when you are having a walk-and-talk and a conversation and you're acting and you're in a scene. And then you have to stop and maybe it's two hours later, or maybe it's four hour later, or maybe it's another day entirely when you continue that same little stroll you were had because you have to go to another sound stage. That's just one little piece of West Wing geography I remember that you walk up the stairs and then you're done and you have to continue the scene another time. And it's important and it can be very difficult to keep the same sort of feeling and pace and energy that you had, possibly on another day.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

JOSH: And you kind of have to ramp back into it to continue the scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. In a moment like that, do you get to watch what you did earlier? Do you get dailies?

JOSH: Not to my memory. But the technology is there to do that. And I've certainly done reshoots on Scandal where... Yeah! A reshoot, where you are revisiting a scene and you've decided we need this piece of dialogue that wasn't in the original scene. You will watch it, generally someone's got an iPad there and they've cut together, even if it's just roughly, the scene that you've shot. And you can look at it and get the feel and get the sense of where you were. I think more than anything it's kind of the energy the scene has that you need to match if you're then going to shoot additional material to be inserted. So, I don't remember doing that on The West Wing, but I suppose it's possible.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It is a helpful approach.

HRISHI: Right. We get a nice moment in this episode as Charlie is contemplating who could be a good candidate for the Executive Secretary, a subtle callback to his first episode.

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Well, she need these skills: 110 words a minute and discretion, obviously. A willingness to put this first no matter what. But there is an x-factor, right?

JOSH: Yes.

CHARLIE: What is it?

JOSH: It's unknown. I think that's why it's called an x-factor.

CHARLIE: Yes.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is funny enough. But that sparks something for Charlie. He has an idea suddenly, because of this discussion, "Oh, the x-factor" and I suddenly remembered *A Proportional Response*, when we first meet Charlie. He's applied for a messenger job, you remember? He didn't apply for the job. But Mrs. DeLaGuardia, who had hired him, she's on the lookout for an x-factor. So she saw..

JOSH: [interrupting] The same phrase?

HRISHI: They don't use the same phrase, I don't think. But..

JOSH: ...it echoes.

HRISHI: She meets Charlie...yeah, she meets Charlie and she flags his resume and she sends him up to Josh to meet about the body-man job. That's just something that she catches, that she's like "There's something special." And Josh says it in the episode:

[West Wing Episode 1:3 excerpt]

JOSH: Personal Aide to the President. Traditionally, a young guy, twenty, twenty-five years old, excels academically, strong and personal responsibility and discretion, presentable appearance.

CHARLIE: Sir.

JOSH: They obviously get quite a few candidates who meet those qualifications. So, the rest is just gut instinct.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I just like that that is what sparks, you know.

JOSH: Yeah. That's nice.

HRISHI: Especially as this plays out.

JOSH: You notice how we always see, there is a power play a work here. We always see different members of the staff come to each other with their problems and they usually get a lot of help. Charlie gets nothing from anyone. He mentions it to Sam. He mentions it to Josh. And they have absolutely no interest in engaging with him on this subject.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah.

JOSH: They offer him nothing by way of help.

HRISHI: It's true. The Toby/Sam dynamic, that's another duo that we like a lot.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: But I was thinking, when he is talking to Sam, not cheering him up, but still giving him his own version of a pep talk that will keep his blood boiling, he talks about the Bronx Borough President election that he worked on.

JOSH: Right, where the guy passed out.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I thought, I would love to hear about every single one of the elections that Toby's lost. Because when we see Toby in the flashback, in New Hampshire with the President, you know, when he is getting drunk at the bar. The woman asks:

[West Wing Episode 2:01 excerpt]

WOMAN: How many elections have you won?

TOBY: Altogether? None.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] That's right.

HRISHI: Professional Political Operative but he has won zero elections. He, I think, has worked on nine, he says. This is the first time that a candidate he has worked for actually won. So I would just love to have like a miniseason, webisodes, something else...

JOSH: This is just more fuel on the fire of The West Wing Prequel: Origin Stories.

HRISHI: All the origin stories, all the different...

JOSH: I would watch it in a second.

HRISHI: It would be great.

JOSH: But I would argue that you would still have to cast Richard Schiff as the young Toby Ziegler.

HRISHI: Absolutely. Hey, is there any doubt that he couldn't play it?

JOSH: No. Last episode, we talked about that strange moment in the scene in Barney's when C.J.'s in the dressing room and Special Agent Simon Donovan and Hogan are talking, and he puts his hands on her shoulders. And we thought that was a little bit creepy, a little odd. I had another moment, following up on that, in this episode, where Simon tells C.J. at one point, briefing her on the situation. He says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

SIMON: He thought you looked good in the black Vera Wang.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I had this thought [laughing] that it was going to be revealed that Simon Donovan is the stalker. I was like, "Wait a minute. You were there. And you thought she looked good in the black Vera Wang." It's just in a bizarro West Wing universe, it would then be revealed that Simon Donovan is the stalker. "The call is coming from inside the house!"

HRISHI: [laughing] Right. Yeah. There was another possibility of a crazy reveal, as well. Remember, when we were talking about the pager, earlier, that the President pulls out from Leo's...

JOSH: Right. Mr. Moto.

HRISHI: "Aha, Mr. Moto" Well, it turns out his first name is Yama.

JOSH: Mmmm. You know, that's good. [laughing] That's very good.

HRISHI: And they killed him! [laughing]

JOSH: Very good. We killed Mr. Moto. They should have called it "We Killed Mr. Moto"

HRISHI: Speaking of killing, here is a light transition.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Ok. To get serious for a second, there is this discussion of moral absolutes. You know, the end of the episode, the President says there are moral absolutes. But I think that the entire episode he gets it as almost, he gets it as, that's his last line "There are moral absolutes, make the call." There are moral absolutes, but he is violating those absolutes. But still, that is his belief and that is the framework he is operating in. But I think, throughout the entire episode, that notion is getting chipped away at and undermined in little subtle ways, and maybe not so subtle, but the contrast was especially profound for me in these two moments where Leo says, they bring up the possibility of going to war with Qumar, and Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

LEO: We can kill all the armed teenagers we want. We still won't have Sheriff.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: There is a line earlier when Simon and C.J. are talking and it's a touching moment between them as he is talking about his actions at Rosslyn. And C.J. regards him as a hero in a new way, like she has a real appreciation for him. But, what he is describing is killing an armed teenager.

JOSH: A fifteen year old. Mmhmm.

HRISHI: Yeah. He's like "Yeah, I shot and killed this fifteen year old." And it's presented as this moment of heroism.

JOSH: Although, I feel like it's leavened at that moment with a nice performance by Mark Harmon and by Allison, and that he doesn't feel like a hero, I get the sense. I mean I do feel like there is sensitivity in that scene to what he did and felt what he had to do, but that it didn't give him great joy. He seems to carry at least a small burden, I feel.

HRISHI: No. No, I agree. It just, in a very rich way, points out that there aren't moral absolutes.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. Or I way I thought about it, I think, as I watched, is that Leo frames the decision to kill Sheriff without explicitly, not in the same words, but as a moral absolute. He says as one point, "the village idiot comes to that conclusion." In other words, he is trying to position that the calculus, and the lives lost, and the numbers suggest there is sort of an absolute decision to be made here.

HRISHI: I think the conclusion is drawn. But it's this idea it's absolute right. I think the President is going back to "Thou shall not kill" as a moral absolute.

JOSH: Right. But if you walk into that job as Commander-in-Chief, and that is your moral absolute that you hope to live by, you can't do the job.

HRISHI: Exactly. No, that's why I really like this juxtaposition of the President is holding fast to this. But at every point from these different sides, he has to be, and really we kind of are told how that's not really valid. Because, it's not an absolute, and the village idiot comes to the conclusion that the guy who is going to kill innocent people has to be killed.

JOSH: Right. Essentially, you are saying that the village idiot comes to the conclusion that there are no moral absolutes.

HRISHI: Right. Exactly.

JOSH: And you're right.

HRISHI: I really liked that part of the episode. I don't think until this viewing had I drawn out the connection between the kid that [crosstalk] Simon Donovan kills and this.

JOSH: [crosstalk] No, no, That's excellent. I didn't.

HRISHI: Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 3:21 excerpt]

LEO: This is the most horrifying part of your liberalism.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That is a great line.

HRISHI: It is a beautiful line. But it isn't just about his liberalism. I mean, they don't talk about his Catholicism or his religion really here either, but I think it's also certainly a part of that.

JOSH: [crosstalk] For sure.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I mean you can't separate the two in a figure like Bartlet, President Bartlet.

JOSH: [laughing] Now we're back to that.

HRISHI: [laughing] Alright, should we wrap it up?

JOSH: I guess so. So that does it for another episode of the West Wing Weekly.

HRISHI: We hope you'll join us next time. Next time, in fact, we are presenting a special episode. It was taped live in San Francisco with some very special guests. And that will be coming up next week.

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly is a proud part of Radiotopia, brought to you by PRX, and a generous grant from the Knight Foundation. Radiotopia is a cavalcade of curated podcasts. I think you'll like them. Check them out. You can find them at radiotopia.fm.

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HRISHI: Or by typing in thewestwingweekly.com/merch into your browser window. I really like making merch for this show.

JOSH: Let us know what you want, people! We hear a lot of requests for cufflinks. I think a coffee mug would sell. I still want to put out, I think we are going to wear you down, cause we made the poster with Lindsay's fantastic piece of art on it, depicting us. I think, some day we gotta put out a shirt that has all the little phrases and things specific to our podcast. On the back there'll be a flentl.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: What's next?

[Outro music]