

The West Wing Weekly
5.02: "The Dogs of War"

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. Hold for applause. Nothing.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Oh, I miss the live shows.

HRISHI: We're back in our [cross talk] own homes.

JOSH: [cross talk] The silence is deafening. That's right, our respective homes, watching each other over Facetime. The tour was great!

HRISHI: It was great.

JOSH: Right? That was a lot of fun. It was very cool to meet fans of the show, and "the show," around the world. Ish. And across the country. Ish. Yeah, it was a blast, and I hope people have enjoyed the live episodes. I know there's a small, I think, minority of people who are annoyed by them, who are like "I get it, we weren't there, it was fun, Ok."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: But I hope most people have enjoyed these episodes, as we have.

HRISHI: But here we are, back at home in different parts of L.A. Just you and me. Old school. No guests.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Only we're talking about an episode that I've only just watched for the first time.

JOSH: Yes, which I ... I don't want to beat a dead horse, but I don't think we've covered it enough yet, and I see people responding to the latest episode -- as we record this the latest episode is the Season 4 retrospective with Aaron Sorkin and Emily Procter that we recorded at Town Hall in New York City -- and people are, many people are, aghast to discover that you have not watched beyond Season 4. I find myself intrigued, or re-intrigued, by the notion of your having dropped the series after Season 4, as I re-watch Season 5. Because, and there's plenty to talk about, I'm sure we'll dig in about the changes and the contrast, but they're interesting. I'm intrigued, I wanted to know what happened, how the Zoey thing played out, because of course I don't remember, and I'm interested to see where it goes next.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: So I wanna dig in a little bit into why-- I feel like it's more than just the natural state of affairs in Hrishi's mind, I feel like it's a stance.

HRISHI: Well I think there's two things, I don't think it's too complicated of an answer. First and foremost, I wasn't that big of a fan to begin with of the Zoey kidnapping plot, even while Aaron was writing the show. So the last couple episodes of Season 4 are, frankly, just probably my least favorite of the Sorkin tenure. The quote-unquote "exciting" episodes for me weren't that exciting, and that one, the stakes were raised so high it stopped feeling like *The West Wing* in many ways by those last couple of episodes. So I wasn't that invested in the plot, to discover what's gonna happen next, and then all the other stuff, you know the

little bites that I get of the things that I really do enjoy, it didn't have the same, kind of, electricity - that specific Sorkin electricity. Or maybe they're even they're still good, but I wanted a particular flavor that is distinct and, you know it's like reaching for a glass of milk and taking a sip and discovering it's orange juice. It's not that orange juice is so bad, but when you are looking for one flavor and you get something else, it seems suddenly all the more repulsive, or something.

JOSH: I guess. To me it's more like trying a double scoop of [expletive deleted] mint chocolate chip and going "Oh yeah, this isn't Breyers or Baskin Robbins, but it's still mint chocolate chip. I love mint chocolate chip!"

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Look, I guess I... it's just different approaches. I will eat that cone.

HRISHI: I think you're probably right about the stance part.

JOSH: That's what I think, I feel like you must have felt betrayed and a little bit pissed-off because, I don't know, these characters...and I get that the quintessence of what drew you to the show was Aaron's writing, and I think that's the case for many... but these characters, and this world that jazzed you so much that you can quote things and cross-reference and remember that this character showed up in Season 2 Episode 3 and then comes back at the end of Season 4 - you're just like "Ah, [expletive deleted] it, I'm really not that interested."

HRISHI: I mean...

JOSH: You left us Hrish, that's what I'm saying. You. Left. Us.

HRISHI: I also have never seen the first three *Star Wars* movies. The prequels.

JOSH: And you were a big fan of the original three, the first three put out?

HRISHI: Yeah, of course, but when those three came out I just said "You know what? These are not gonna be good, and I'm never gonna watch them." And then all my friends went to see the first one, I remember, and they were like "Yeah, it wasn't good." and I was like "Yeah, I'm not gonna see it." and there was some sense of "Well someday you're gonna see it, right? You'll watch it at some point." No. I still haven't.

JOSH: Because then you wouldn't be able to say, "I've never seen those three movies."

HRISHI: [laughs] I mean I think part of it...yeah, there's a little bit of...

JOSH: It's a badge of honor.

HRISHI: It's something, yeah.

JOSH: Alright, well I'm glad we have this podcast then, it's forcing you to watch the final three seasons.

HRISHI: Alright, we'll do our *Star Wars* podcast after that and then you can make me watch those.

JOSH: Yeah, maybe. I have some gaps in my *Star Wars* viewing.

HRISHI: The Jar Jar Bink-Cast. Today we're talking about Episode 2 from Season 5, it's called "The Dogs of War."

JOSH: It's the second of the Sorkin diaspora episodes. It was written by John Wells. It was directed by Christopher Misiano. And it first aired on October 1, 2003.

HRISHI: I like that, you know, John Wells has taken over writing for both of these and Alex Graves and Chris Misiano are doing their sort of tag team thing with directing an episode each. Here's a synopsis from NBC:

"The international crisis concerning the terrorist abduction of Bartlet's daughter Zoey reaches a critical point as Speaker of the house Glen Allen Walken, the Acting President, orders the bombardment of Qumari terrorist camps. The kidnapers issue a 24-hour deadline for the removal of American troops from Qumar. Meanwhile, Josh fumes over his perceived notion that the Republicans will exploit and push forward their own legislative agenda. And Toby visits his newborn twins, even as he oversees the drafting of two Presidential speeches, that hinge on Zoey's fate."

JOSH: We'll know, as an audience, that the post-Sorkin seasons have won HrishI over when he composes a hrynopsis, for a Season 5, 6, or 7 episode of the show.

HRISHI: I think I did for season...for the last one, for 5.01.

JOSH: Nevermind. We've got him folks!

HRISHI: [laughs] We start with a tire-screeching flentl.

[sound effect of screeching tires]

JOSH: I wrote those very words.

HRISHI: Tire-screeching flentl?

JOSH: No, I wrote "screechy-tire frontl."

HRISHI: Oh my God, I've forgotten how to do this show.

JOSH: Right. [laughs]

HRISHI: Wow. Yeah, we have a frontl of tires screeching. It's Leo's car entering a shady parking garage straight out of meeting "Deep Throat."

JOSH: Yeah, Deep Throat's on one level, and he's like "Ok, I've got another meeting," [makes screeching sound] and he screeches up to the next level to meet Angela Blake.

HRISHI: Angela Blake who's played by Michael Hyatt.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: From *The Wire*. I love her. She plays Avon Barksdale's sister - D'Angelo's mom, in *The Wire*.

JOSH: Yeah, she's fantastic. She's done a lot of great work, and at least we see, certainly the tradition of great small part casting continues.

HRISHI: Yeah, and she has a couple of bombshell lines in this cold open. So Leo's gone there to meet Angela Blake. She is a pollster but, you know, it's not Joey Lucas. It's very clearly...this is not the same kind of gig that they call Joey Lucas for. This is someone who has...who is ok with a little bit of cloak-and-dagger, behind the scenes work, and they're trying to take the temperature of what's gonna happen with the president and the presidency, and she's like their special contact for this. But she tells Leo a couple of very harsh truths.

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

ANGELA: *His numbers are gonna crater. Not level off -- crater. Like a failed Mars probe.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And so throughout this whole episode we have that, you know, looming over us that it's Zoey's life that's at stake but it's also the entire, you know, Bartlet presidency and future direction of the country that's at stake as well. But then her last line just...I said "Holy [expletive deleted]!" when she said it. She said:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

ANGELA: *If she dies, his approval ratings will go through the roof.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, that's quite a moment.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That she chooses to say that. The truth of what she's saying makes a certain twisted sense.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm quite sure she's right. The fact that she actually decides to share that piece of information at that moment is startling.

HRISHI: Yeah. But I thought it was great.

JOSH: Yeah I think so, too. It was a good final line before the credits. I feel like we need to make up a faux-Yiddish word for that. It was a compelling and effective line leading into the sweep of the main title theme, because I think also underlying this entire episode is that tension between a little respect for what this man is going through and political reality.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Especially with Josh running around going, "they're going to start pushing a hard right agenda, we've got to be ready for that." So it's a very...it's a great little touch towards what the episode is going to focus on. The other thought I did have as I listened - it would have been really funny and nervy if John Wells had introduced a new theme to the show.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Even just as a joke for one episode where instead of that big sweep it was just like [sings] "boop boop ba dee bap bap dee da diddle do." And like instead of those stills, those majestic stills of us we were just kind of dancing around like the *Friends* in the fountain.

HRISHI: [laughs] Oh, yeah!

JOSH: That would have been really funny, people would have been like, "What the hell! How dare he!"

HRISHI: You know the whole time on watching this episode I kept thinking about how strange it was, still, that Leo has his job. I mean I guess it's still just a matter of hours -- people are sleeping in their offices, it's not like it's been a matter of days -- it just feels like a long time because...because we've taken such a long time between 5.01 and 5.02. So I kept wondering, why is Leo still in his job? You know, what's the point of having these guys still acting like they're the staff to the president when the president clearly doesn't want their advice?

JOSH: Right, and they're increasingly being kept out of the loop. I thought the same thing, too and I had to keep reminding myself that this is literally an unprecedented scenario being presented to us. I kept thinking Zeljko Ivanek as Steve - isn't Steve Walken's 'Leo'? What's... why is Leo being Walken's 'Leo'?

HRISHI: Exactly. Yeah, exactly.

JOSH: And I think part of it is just that...I don't know what you do in this situation. So in that way it kind of felt credible to me that, you know, they haven't quite figured out who's what and how it's all going to play out -- given that they don't even know how long it's going to be, things are gonna be this way.

HRISHI: Yeah, and as we discussed in the last episode, Gerald Ford kept his chief of staff around for a couple of weeks, and I bring this up because it's the same reason I feel like why he wouldn't change the theme music.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: You need some kind of least initial sense of transitional continuity.

JOSH: Well that's why I thought it would be funny. It would really [expletive deleted] with people.

HRISHI: But we do get plenty of changes in this episode especially in the way of guest cast and new characters besides Angela Blake. Well it's not a new character but we finally meet Secretary Berryhill. Secretary of State, who has been referred to often in the previous four seasons and he's even really been in the room sometimes but he's never been kind of explicitly identified. There's never been a character who speaks a line and we say, "Ah this is Secretary Berryhill." So for the first time we see William Devane on screen.

JOSH: The great William Devane who is...I going to say strangely...but to me almost surprisingly gentle in this role. I think of him as sort of leathery and edgy, and he's got a very soft touch in the way he plays Berryhill here.

HRISHI: One of the nice synchronicities of casting him here is that he and Martin Sheen were both in the *The Missiles of October* together in which William Devane played JFK, and Martin Sheen played RFK.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: So put them here together, it gives it a nice...there's some kind of external fraternity between the two of them that automatically shows up and I think that helps with that gentle quality too.

JOSH: I believe you're right. And speaking of guest casting, I felt like it was a little bit of a spoiler to see Elisabeth Moss' name in the opening credits.

HRISHI: Oh! You know I didn't think about it but you do see her...the picture of her from the tape on Al-Jazeera.

JOSH: That's true and when that came up I thought "Oh maybe this is all we're going to get of her." But at the time just as a start I thought "Oh, I guess they're going to resolve it this episode."

HRISHI: That's funny.

JOSH: Or, not...I mean we could also see her in captivity. What I really thought is "I guess she's not dead."

HRISHI: She's not. Right.

JOSH: Which I also *knew*, but for people who might not have known I thought "This is a little bit of a spoiler." Maybe it's a contractual thing, but couldn't they just have hidden it, or added her name to the closing credits for one episode?

HRISHI: I mean you do have to be credited even if you're playing a corpse.

JOSH: Is that true?

HRISHI: Sure. I mean, you know...

JOSH: I guess so.

HRISHI: Terry Kiser in *Weekend at Bernie's* he gets...

JOSH: [laughs] That is...that is an extreme example but point taken. The other thing I wrote down here too, based on this opening Leo/Angela Blake scene is that it's possible that Aaron Sorkin's closed caption person also left the show with the end of Season 4 because there are some strange anomalies in this episode. Angela Blake is telling Leo about how the polling is going to go:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

ANGELA: *Today it's "He lost his daughter, what a shame, we're pulling for him." and in two weeks, it'll be, "I don't want a president I have to pull for."*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And when the closed crap...closed captions? Which is maybe apt.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah.

JOSH: When they're off, they're closed captions. "I don't want such a president." I was like...is it too much type out "I don't want someone I have to pull for."? I'm like...what is that? Did you just get tired when you were typing that sentence? And then there's another huge one later, which I think belies the concept that the closed captioning people are given the script. Isn't that what we were told? That they're working off of scripts provided to them, they're not just sitting there listening to the show and then writing what they think they hear?

HRISHI: Hm. I thought so.

JOSH: But this sounds like there's a hearing mistake. There's a scene where Toby is saying to Josh "You get any sleep last night?" and right after that I come in as Will and say "Oh, Haffley -- you gotta be kidding."

HRISHI: [laughing] It says "happily"

JOSH: Yeah, it says "happily" and I thought wow...he's not...he's asked Josh if he got good sleep and Will is like "Happily, I had a terrific sleep. Anyway what were you talking about?" Twice I had to go "why am I saying 'happily'? That's strange." [cross talk] It's "Haffley".

HRISHI: [cross talk] Because you took the caption to heart.

JOSH: Well that speaks to, I think, I have a little bit of trouble hearing. Possible that I mumble as a person and I guess I'm over-influenced by visual data because I kept seeing

the word “happily” and so that's how I kept hearing it. Although it just didn't make sense to me. I was like “Is this just an example of bad writing?” and finally I realize, no, I'm walking in and saying “Haffley.”

HRISHI: Oh that's great. Ok, so back to Berryhill -- who I think on the closed captioning is misspelled -- here is a little bit of writing that I took issue with, this a little thing but this is where I feel the difference between Aaron Sorkin and non-Aaron Sorkin. A lot of times, you know we've talked about it at length on this podcast, how there will be a piece of information that'll be dropped in that doesn't get revealed - the meaning doesn't get revealed until later. And sometimes those are big things and sometimes they're just little things where someone will use an acronym and then, you know, in a later scene or a few sentences further, what the acronym actually stands for is spoken by another character, you know, so you have to kind of keep up a little bit. Or if it's not - it's for something inconsequential - it's for a committee that doesn't exist and it doesn't matter what it actually is for. But there's this line here that Berryhill says:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

BERRYHILL: Doesn't it remind you a little of the Japanese on December seventh?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And there's nothing that comes later, and it's not that I want to be spoon fed. So he's...you know he's talking about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but I just don't buy that somebody would speak that way. “Doesn't it remind you a little of the Japanese on December seventh?” It just doesn't feel real to me, I think it's aiming for that same kind of like insider, you know, shared vernacular “we both know what we're talking about so we don't have to make it explicit.” But in an attempt to do that, it's a sentence that I don't think anyone would actually ever say.

JOSH: Right wouldn't you just say “Doesn't this remind you of Pearl Harbor?”

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah I think that's a very good point, although I think there is something clunky about that moment to me I didn't parse it in my mind the way you did, although now that you're saying it I think that is part of it. But also even just meaning-wise I was a little bit thrown. What is he saying? “We really should have let them know we were coming.”? “Doesn't this kind of suck, what we're doing? We're surprise-attacking.” I wasn't exactly sure what his point was as Secretary of State, it didn't seem like a terribly sophisticated thing to say at the moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. There are a few moments like that in this episode where I felt like it lacked clarity.

JOSH: Yeah and there were also, you know, I think other clunky moments at the...towards the very end, I'm not even sure why this couplet needed to be in there, but we're waiting - the core staff - waiting to go into the Oval now that the President has taken back the reins of power and Will, apropos of nothing, just says:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

WILL: Did we ever find those five Bahji sleepers?

LEO: No.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I was like "Is this just an exposition break?" One, I wasn't sure how important it was for us to get that information, but it sure felt like someone said, "Hey you know what? They need to know this information, let's just have Will say it and Leo answer it and then go on with the business of the episode."

HRISHI: Yeah, I thought maybe that was supposed to be a seed being planted for future activity from the Bahji, you know like it's the...[cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] They're still out there.

HRISHI: ...there's still a bit of a cliffhanger. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah I think you're right, clunky nonetheless but I think that is the flavor of clunk that it was.

HRISHI: It's a not-very-good mint chocolate chip.

JOSH: Mint chocolate clunk.

HRISHI: [laughs] Ok, so we were saying...so we have this meeting between Berryhill and Leo, and then they talk to the Qumari Prince who is the Ambassador and they give him a heads-up saying "We're bombing your..." not really a heads-up at all, saying "We're bombing ... we're going on a bombing run in your country and it's happening right now."

JOSH: That did make me think, why isn't he getting a phone call from somebody going "Oh my god they're bombing us!?" and also why he stops to have that extra line, you know, "Tell the president, I too have a daughter." Which is kind of a great Sorkin-ish line, but you think he'd sort of race out and make a phone call saying "I don't know if you guys know yet, but the United States is bombing you guys."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's sort of less urgency than I would have expected.

HRISHI: It's true.

JOSH: Also, by the way, I think as we now are nitpicking at little things, there's an unfairness to the way I initially watched this episode. I watched it twice, as I often do. The first time I think I was looking at it like through a super-powered microscope trying to find differences or what Aaron would have done, or how it's different, and I realized it was affecting my enjoyment of the episode. And then I watched it a second time and I'm able to sort of just go "Ok now I'm just gonna watch..." like "I'm watching my show" and I did enjoy it more and I do think...I think it's actually - I have some quibbles at the end about the way things wrap up that we can discuss later, but I think it's really a pretty good episode, and I also realize one of the initial reasons why I wasn't enjoying it as much is -- it's a bummer. I mean it's a bummer what's going on...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...obviously there's a crisis and, you know, Zoey has been kidnapped. But it's also a bummer to see these... our heroes, Bartlet of course first among them - impotent, helpless, crushed, out of the picture to a large extent. I don't know it's fifteen minutes maybe before we even see him, and then you know Toby is visiting with Andy and the twins and he only

learns about the Qumari bombing because a story comes on the TV and just made me like, argh, these are people who know...usually are in the know, all of a sudden he's watching a C.J. press conference that he hadn't been given a heads-up about, of this military action of incredible import. And I just realized it's...this is the appropriate feeling for watching this episode, it's not super fun.

HRISHI: Right. No, it's actually kind of excruciating.

JOSH: Yes, it's painful and that's not because of the episode is bad it's because it's good. They're in a horrible, painful bummer of a situation.

HRISHI: Yeah. At some point I was watching, and I just felt like "oh my God", you know, and I genuinely didn't know I was like "How long is this going to... are we going to just have to wait for news?" And there was part of me that actually was a little bit frustrated with the episode, it was like "oh why isn't this plot resolved quicker?" and then immediately I responded to myself "Actually, this is actually a really great quality of this." Because in this situation, you never know when it's going to end, and you don't...you know sometimes it does feel like that, that you are just stuck, you know, just waiting, you know. I think it was the F.B.I. didn't have any more information, they're trying to interrogate people in Saudi Arabia. There's just...and nothing is coming back.

JOSH: And that's a horrible feeling.

HRISHI: It's just an awful feeling.

JOSH: Interesting, then we went through similar experiences watching the episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I thought that was really well done.

JOSH: Also, speaking of the same press briefing that C.J. is doing, I really loved what was essentially, or maybe entirely, a silent scene with the Bartlet family watching the same press conference.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I thought that was written -- because of course you still have to write a silent scene -- very well by John and shot well by Christopher Misiano, as well as acted by, you know, beautifully by everyone. That they watch C.J. sharing this information of bombing Qumar which obviously could have disastrous consequences for Zoey, for their loved one. They don't say anything to each other and Bartlet gets not so much as a comforting hand on the shoulder.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: As one by one the family leaves him alone, and I thought that was very well done. It's kind of spot on - just right. There is implied I think in their whole dynamic that there's maybe some culpability on his part, which has been explicitly brought up in earlier episodes and it just felt right that ultimately he's left alone with his thoughts.

HRISHI: Yeah. Now we're going to take a quick break.

[ad break]

HRISHI: One of the things I thought was so well done in this episode was showing the kind of fragmented process of grief that the Bartlet family has to experience. Because they don't know what's happened to Zoey, this press conference feels like it might be signing away her life, but they don't react to it with shock and horror because they've already...they haven't

come to terms with it, but they've certainly acknowledged that if this happens, this might happen and they've been processing it and sort of stricken by this whole thing that in some ways they're, you know, the kind of numb response here where none of them speak to each other and they all kind of have individual experiences as each one leaves one by one and goes in different directions. I thought was a really compelling depiction of grief.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: I also love, jumping further ahead but on the same topic, I love the way the president reacts to the second speech, that's one of my favorite scenes in this episode is when President Bartlet goes down to Toby's office and he's looking at the speech and he asks about the second speech that he's written, the one they've written in case Zoey dies, and Toby doesn't want to give it to him, and he...

JOSH: ...doesn't even want to admit its existence.

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Where's the other one?

TOBY: What other one?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: The other speech.

TOBY: We only wrote one.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He lies.

HRISHI: Yeah, he actually outright lies, and the President of course knows that he would never do that and so he finally gets it and he starts reading it, and the way that he takes in those words and then his reaction to it I thought was really beautiful because it would be an amazing thing to, you know, in some ways it's almost like looking into the future a tiny bit these words. It's like this is a possibility and in some timeline there's a version of him that's going to say these words, and so to be able to read it and imagine himself saying it, it's like he's pre-grieving in a way.

JOSH: Absolutely, I agree, it's a very compellingly written and performed scene.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I thought it was terrific, and I also thought it was very clever, but not too clever, that he uses that speech for the basis of his remarks at the end of the episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Though I concurrently felt that where the writing...

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: ...seems most glaringly not Aaron's is in the [cross talk] actual speechwriting.

HRISHI: [cross talk] The speech itself. Yeah.

JOSH: I mean I thought "Did he really just say 'every fiber of my being'?" Like, it's just not a phrase that Aaron would deploy through President Bartlet.

HRISHI: Mm-hm. By the end of the episode, you know, we discover that Zoey has...*is* still alive so all of these moments of grief, you know, and potential grief, they get a reprieve because she's alive and they've had to process it but ultimately they don't actually have to live it. So it's a happy ending, I guess, you know, certainly it's the happier of the endings, but when we actually finally see Elisabeth Moss I mean she is...I think she does a great performance without saying a single word in this episode. She looks traumatized.

JOSH: I'm so blown away by her acting these days, and I'm sure I've said before, in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Top of The Lake, Mad Men*...just her work is so other level that it's fun now for me to go back and look at *West Wing* and see... can I see the brilliance that I see now? And I think you're right...she's got very little screen time and a pretty tough thing to play without any words...

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: ...and I think it is there.

HRISHI: Yeah. But the discovery of Zoey, I have to say, I found really unsatisfying.

JOSH: Well that's the, yeah, that's what I was referring to earlier about being dissatisfied with some things later in the episode, and I don't even really get it. I was surprised, and I feel like this is right in the wheelhouse of John Wells. I mean if you watch...you know if this show is going to go there I feel like we could have seen it. We were I feel like a little bit robbed of both an explanation as to what really happened...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know, and if we're not going to really know exactly what happened it would have been nice to see it.

HRISHI: Dramatized? Yeah.

JOSH: Right, yeah. I would like to actually have seen them bust in and just see what she was experiencing and how our forces were able to take control of the situation.

HRISHI: Yeah, we don't get the helicopter spotlight on the skinhead outside of the diner, nor do we get the Situation Room where everyone's waiting for the news.

JOSH: Right, and they didn't save a ton of money because we still have this massive scene.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: With tons of cop cars and vehicles and...

HRISHI: Overhead shots.

JOSH: ...FBI, and overhead shots and cranes are being used and whatever and whatnot, but not to as satisfying an end as I would have expected.

HRISHI: Well I also just found the whole reveal incredibly confusing. Agent Casper comes on, you know, through voiceover -- it's like on a radio -- we don't see him, and he's saying...or maybe it's a phone. So all we know now is they found Zoey. Here's the information we get. "A Virginia state trooper responded to a domestic disturbance call outside of Calverton. They both got drunk."

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

CASPER: *[voiceover]* A Virginia state Trooper responded to a domestic disturbance call outside of Calverton. A couple got drunk. He...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Let me just pause the clip right there. "They both got drunk." I don't know who he's talking about when he says they both got drunk, and then he goes on:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

CASPER: *[voiceover]* He let her out by the side of the road in the middle of nowhere, so she dialled 911 on her cell.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Ok, let's stop the clip there. I thought that they were talking about Zoey when he says "she called 911 on her cell".

JOSH: As did I.

HRISHI: And when he's like "they both got drunk", like, that doesn't make any sense. If these are fundamentalist Muslim terrorists they don't drink, you know, this doesn't...and how did she...and why would they let her out on the side of the road? You know, I was so confused as they were saying this and then...ok, let's play the rest of the clip.

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

CASPER: *[voiceover]* The trooper couldn't find her. She had wandered off somewhere to try to get out of the rain. Guy checked an old barn across the road from where she said she'd be...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then it trails off, and so... so I had to go back....

JOSH: Suggesting that there were two different incidents, right?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: There was some incident that miraculously led them to find Zoey.

HRISHI: Yeah, the "they" that both got drunk is actually the couple involved in the domestic disturbance and that's who Casper is talking about and it's the last sentence "guy checked an old barn across the road from where she said she'd be, and a white van..." We don't even get the full explanation from Agent Casper, saying "The trooper went over, he saw a white van, he radioed for back..." you know like, we don't still don't know how they found her!

JOSH: Yeah, it's pretty fuzzy in a way that I wish it were not.

HRISHI: Yeah. Mint chocolate clunk.

JOSH: There ya go. And also, I don't know, the whole thing that's odd to me is... this is even, as you say and it was a reason why you weren't even particularly interested in the storyline - it is atypical and uncharacteristic for *The West Wing*. But having gone there, why not pay it off?

HRISHI: Right. I think also because, as we both really enjoyed, the excruciating wait of trying to find out what's gonna happen. I mean there's a way where these three episodes where she's just kidnapped and we don't know what's happening or what's going to happen or what

information's gonna come in. There is a way to just lay...then lay the groundwork and like have it, you know it doesn't need to be all wrapped up and tied with a nice bow on it, but there's a way to pay off that feeling of excruciation...excruciation?

JOSH: I'll accept it.

HRISHI: That excruciating feeling...

JOSH: Better.

HRISHI: By giving us just a little bit, you know...

JOSH: Yeah, a little bit more.

HRISHI: A little bit of time to live with the discovery.

JOSH: Yeah. The truth is it felt to me like they could have really saved it to the next episode altogether, because I thought they were on a roll. They really created a very interesting, if painful, dynamic in this episode the...again the impotence of our heroes...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...and the tension about whether Walken and the Republicans are going to take gross advantage of the situation they find themselves in and the ongoing Zoey mystery kidnapping. It was all...it was a lot of balls in the air in a good way...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...that all got, you know, caught on the way down this episode and maybe need not have.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Because the...also the resolution with Steve and Josh - strangely in the men's room.

HRISHI: Mm-hm.

JOSH: I kind of like that they set it there, but that also was kind of neatly wrapped up like "oh no we're not going to, abso...that would be wrong, would be politically disadvantageous to the Republicans and just wrong, and we're better than you realize" and I ...it just all gets...I don't mind the resolution it just felt a little bit quick...

HRISHI: Yeah. It was quick.

JOSH: ...a little too soon.

HRISHI: Yeah, we get Zoey back, and the president gets the presidency back, like all that of stuff happens.

JOSH: Yeah. It made me feel ultimately that -- and I'll be curious to talk to John -- that John Wells and the other powers-that-be, felt like "Let's resolve this [expletive deleted] and get on with the show."

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. I think so. I think so.

JOSH: Which...and I mean, I can understand that feeling that they wanted get back into the regular life and vibe of *The West Wing* and not live in this world that Aaron had left them with for too long. So I do get it.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah I also understand that. But it did feel like thirty-five minutes of “wait and wait and wait and wait” and then...

JOSH: For that?

HRISHI: And then five minutes of “and... ta da!”

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: What about in the very, very end -- what do you make of Abbey's position and expression at the end of the episode? We're in Zoey's hospital room, Charlie's there waiting...everyone's kind of around and the news is playing the president's speech, but Dr. Bartlet is not looking at Zoey, she's looking out the window and she has this look of grave concern.

JOSH: Yes it's definitely worthy of discussion. It is a sort of cryptic look on her face and, of course, I like when things are not necessarily entirely elucidated for us. I took it as a nice moment that was a hedge against how handily everything seems to have been wrapped up, and it left me with a feeling of: One - maybe things between her and the hubby might not be great for a while.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know, yes obviously this is the end for which they hoped and prayed, but there's some stuff to be worked out. And also we don't know, again because as you pointed out, we've seen Zoey in quite a state, we don't know mentally what kind of trauma this has left her with and just it left me feeling things aren't as neatly wrapped up as they might appear and that was of value I thought.

HRISHI: Yeah. It was actually the one thing in the episode that I also thought kind of paid off -- the pair of lines that you brought up earlier -- we still don't know what happened to the five Bahji operatives. Because part of it I think is, part of her expression, I took to represent her internal process, you know, she's thinking about Zoey she's thinking about all these things that you just mentioned. But there's also a part it where she's just looking out the window with like a sense of alarm, you know like, what dangers out there still wait for Zoey and for her family and just in general, that she still doesn't feel safe either domestically or, you know, out in the world.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a brave new world that the Bartlet family has entered, and is there any exit from it? Mentioning the president's speech, the other thing that I was surprised was missing, and I thought was coming, from President Bartlet when he was talking about “the Lord giveth and Lord taketh away” was an acknowledgment of the loss of life. Even though Zoey was recovered, the loss of U.S. life in the military, and the bombings on Qumar and presumably the loss of Qumari life in the action that was taken, and I was surprised we didn't get that. I thought we were going to get a touch of that rather than purely like...

HRISHI: “Our daughter's home.”

JOSH: “Phew, thank god she's back.” Yeah, it was a little more short-sighted than I expected from President Bartlet.

HRISHI: But maybe, again, we only had a couple... [chuckles] a couple minutes. A few seconds actually really.

JOSH: True. By the way, while we're doing...you know while we're criticizing, I also want to point out...I thought that there are some great moments and even, you know, quotable lines. I loved the Leo/Bartlet scene that concludes...

HRISHI: Wait, can I guess which one?

JOSH: Yes, please.

HRISHI: Was it the line?:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

LEO: Dr. King wasn't wrong. He just didn't have your job.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding.

HRISHI: I thought that was great too.

JOSH: Yeah. Beautiful. Beautifully put. What a great button to that scene, that's some great writing.

HRISHI: Yeah, that was.

JOSH: I also liked, and I tied it in my mind to an earlier scene, this is much earlier in the episode Toby and Leo are walking and Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

TOBY: I know it's kinda crazy, but Josh might not be wrong about...

LEO: We did this to ourselves. Now we have to live with it.

TOBY: They're bombing Qumar?

LEO: We're bombing Qumar.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yes! I also loved that. And I couldn't help but think about what's happening right now in the news. I mean that's, of course, a perennial statement - the idea of, like, what are the causes in conflict and what we've sown with domestic policy...you know what we've sown with our foreign policy and things like that. But the idea of having to identify, as a nation, you know and have to like live with the consequences of your government's actions, regardless of, you know, who's actually leading you, is so terrifying. Of course every day, you know, we joke about things that Donald Trump does and then we have to feel like -- oh gosh, this is what people think America is like? And luckily when we were overseas enough people said to us, like, "We know your country's going through a rough time right now"

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But still, you know, the broad brush with which Israel is painted, or Palestine - just, you still have to acknowledge the "we" of it.

JOSH: Yeah. Exactly. I love these four lines and thought it just shows the...with an economy of words...John Wells can bring it. There's a there's a *lot* going on there, in what is a very brief interchange down a hallway. And even just also, to look at the micro within the world of *The West Wing*, Leo is also acknowledging something which is, I think part of what hangs

over the whole episode for me, is that they made a mistake. You know, it's ultimately resolved ok, but that Bartlet may have made a terrible error in stepping away, and I think there's a little acknowledgement of that from Leo, but being the political realist he's saying "Whatever good or bad or now...this is what it is. We did do this, we put ourselves in the situation and now it's the situation."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: We have to own it.

HRISHI: Yeah. But you don't think he just ties it to the assassination of Shareef right? The President even says:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

BARTLET: We started this, Leo.

LEO: This isn't about Shareef.

BARTLET: You're right; it's not...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Ok, yeah.

JOSH: But that's a later scene.

HRISHI: But you're saying when he's saying this to Toby, you think he is referring to Shareef?

JOSH: No, no, I think it's multi-layered.

HRISHI: Ok, yes, yes, yes, yes.

JOSH: There's what happened with Shareef, and then there's walking away giving Walken the power. I mean this is where essentially Toby's saying "Josh may be right -- they're going to do this, and they're going to, you know, push their agenda" and Leo's saying "Look, now is not the time to deal with that. This is what we did, he's in charge and here's what's happening now and it's not what *they're* doing this is now *us*."

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: This is *we*.

HRISHI: Yeah, he is Walken's chief of staff, technically.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: So. I have a question for you and maybe for *The West Wing Weekly* listenership in general. This character of Ryan Pierce.

JOSH: Yeah, we haven't gotten to him yet.

HRISHI: Is this the new Mandy? Is this another innocent form of continuation that I don't need?

JOSH: [laughing] Well that's funny. I was...I like Jesse Bradford very much, I remember working with him and enjoying him...so maybe I like the character more than you. I liked his

interactions with Josh Lyman. I like that they're both Harvard guys And I liked that he's got under Josh's skin immediately. I even liked the nod to the kind of thing Aaron might have done which is a meta joke about walk...walks and talk, and the fact that he actually falls to the ground during it -- I got a kick out of that.

HRISHI: I appreciated that they didn't go for the gimme, which is he didn't tell Josh that he actually had *Summa Cum Laude*.

JOSH: I was waiting for that.

HRISHI: Yeah I'm glad that that didn't happen.

JOSH: Oh, I'm hoping it happens down the line.

HRISHI: Ugh.

JOSH: Might have been too on the nose at the moment, but I thought that's where we were headed.

HRISHI: Yeah. Despite my extreme affection for *Bring It On*, I immediately disliked Jesse Bradford in this scene. I mean like, you know, not the actor's fault although I think he's well cast for inspiring my dislike. But, you know, just the way he's sitting in the chair, he doesn't get up the first time that Josh walks in, his sort of presumption, everything about him, the fact that he went to Harvard. All this stuff.

JOSH: Yeah, there's a sense of entitlement that's pouring off of him.

HRISHI: Sure, you know, he's a great-great-grandson of the [cross talk] 14th president of the U.S.

JOSH: [cross talk] Of Franklin Pierce, yes.

HRISHI: Which I thought was...I think that's a fun choice in some ways, you know, to pick Pierce -- to pick like an anti-abolitionist president.

JOSH: Right, yeah, I thought the same thing too, like, not the cuddliest Democratic president we've had.

HRISHI: Right. But at the same time, I was also...I couldn't believe that Josh would even tolerate him being in his office. He's the intern. Like "Get out of this room. Why are you talking to me? Why... I don't even want you to exist right now, let alone be in my space and conversing with me." That seemed crazy.

JOSH: True. But I also felt the writing was on point with Josh and Donna there, her having let him in without telling Josh and then also saying:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

DONNA: Leo's in his office. Am I being passed over?

JOSH: What?

DONNA: If you're gonna bring someone in over me, you can at least have the common courtesy...

JOSH : I don't even know who that guy is.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That felt authentically Josh and Donna to me, I liked it.

HRISHI: But still I'm not looking forward to having to deal with this character a lot, unless something happens. Unless they develop this character into something more. I don't want it to be the sort of *Swimfan* version of Mandy.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: Swimfandy.

JOSH: [laughing] Ah, that's what we were working towards. That's good. Swimfandy, that'll stick cause he's...I believe he will be around for a while.

HRISHI: I saw he...there are nine more episodes, or eight more episode. One thing I also wanted to commend about this episode is the title. Even though *The Dogs of War* is, you know, certainly a well-worn phrase. It's the name of a movie. Besides *The Missiles of October* reference here there's also *The Dogs of War*, a movie starring Christopher Walken. I remembered Tommy saying that:

[The West Wing Weekly Episode 4.23 excerpt]

TOMMY SCHLAMME: ...it was one point I thought - well it's either going to be President Goodman played by Christopher Walken or President Walken played by John Goodman.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought it was a really apt reference to use as the title. The line comes from *Julius Caesar* and in it Mark Antony says, "Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war." And I liked it because in the original play when Mark Antony is saying that, he wants revenge in the name of a leader who's no longer there. And Walken's order to bomb Qumar is in retaliation for Zoey. But Bartlet can't weigh in, he's not allowed to be in the room, he's not allowed to say anything and so, you know, what did Julius Caesar think of letting slip the dogs of war? We don't know because, like President Bartlet, in this situation -- he's a ghost.

JOSH: Well done. He's still got it! Even in Season 5 folks, Hrishu can still bring it. Now that's kind of brilliant and it's making me think that they missed an opportunity to use "Who Let The Dogs Out." [insert of *Who Let The Dogs Out*] Maybe just a little bit underneath.

HRISHI: Oh yeah, the answer to that to that song is Mark Antony.

JOSH: There ya go.

HRISHI: [excited] Oh, what if we could get...what if we could get Marc Anthony...

JOSH: Marc Anthony as a guest.

HRISHI: [laughing] What if we could get Marc Anthony to do a response song to "Me, I let the dogs out..."

JOSH: That's kind of brilliant. Maybe it could be your first *Song Exploder* original.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: That would be awesome. It's a little bit like my idea to get Ice-T and the Lemonheads to form a super band called *Arnold Palmer*.

HRISHI: [laughing] It's like...

[West Wing Episode 3.12 excerpt]

TOBY: It's like there's nothing you can do about that joke. It's coming, and you just have to stand there.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Alright Josh, in conclusion, any final thoughts.

JOSH: I also thought another...just, you know, travelling in Aaron's footsteps but in a way that felt genuine was Joshua gets woken up by Amy's call, lies to cover the fact that he's been woken up, and she busts him on the phone. I thought that was a good...that was very Sorkinesque, but I liked it.

HRISHI: Yeah, I thought that was great.

JOSH: I couldn't go back and listen enough times to Leo saying:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

LEO: Including the moolahs?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: It was just so cute. Yes John, even the moolahs.

HRISHI: I think one thing that's nice that isn't wrapped up but as a consequence of this episode may be even more consequential than the fact that the five Bahji sleeper agents are still out there. This doesn't come back right at the very end, but the fact that Acting President Walken is now done, he's now no longer the Speaker of the House, which leaves the White House up against a Speaker who is further to the right. I mean in the previous episode they say:

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

JOSH: Even Republicans think Haffley's a fascist.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the radical right, you know what Josh is afraid of is a radical right agenda coming through, in conjunction with the Speaker of the House and Acting President, even though the Walken administration is over, they still are left with this, you know, opposition that I think is gonna be...

JOSH: Looming.

HRISHI: Yeah there's this spectre of even more grimy political fighting to come.

JOSH: Yes. I take Haffley/Bartlet to be an incarnation of Gingrich/Clinton.

HRISHI: Gingrich/Clinton, yeah, me too. Well aren't we smart.

JOSH: Yeah. I guess we are, ultimately, that's the message.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Even in these post-Sorkin years, I think we can agree on one thing.

HRISHI: Are we really going to leave it with "Yeah, we both thought it was Gingrich/Clinton"?

JOSH: Yeah I think so.

HRISHI: Oh Jesus, alright. Well on that note, till next week, I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. Do we usually do that? Introduce ourselves again at the end?

HRISHI: We never do that, I'm just making up...

JOSH: I'm still Joshua Malina. And we thank as always Margaret Miller and Zach McNees -- not just for their continuing great work on the show, but for excellent work on all the live episodes. Those can be difficult to do well, and dammit we did them well. And we're smart and we're done with this episode. *The West Wing Weekly* remains a proud member of Radiotopia.

HRISHI: From PRX. You can find out about all the shows on *Radiotopia* including my other podcast *Song Exploder* and great shows like *Criminal*, *99% Invisible*, and more.

JOSH: I've been listening lately to quite a bit of *Ear Hustle*, the amazing podcast in its second season, recorded in San Quentin. It's pretty remarkable and edifying and entertaining. It's a very good piece of work.

HRISHI: You can find out about all the shows at radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: What's next?

[Outro Music]