

Note: This show periodically replaces their ad breaks with new promotional clips. Because of this, both the transcription for the clips and the timestamps after them may be inaccurate at the time of viewing this transcript.

00:00:00 Rob Schulte Producer *Friendly Fire* deals with a lot of tough subjects. But we just wanted to give a special heads up that today's film, which centers around a child soldier in West Africa, features depictions of sexual violence and child abuse. Your hosts are going to talk about those things in this episode, and we just wanted folks to be aware of that going in.

Skip to next week's episode if that's not a subject you wanna hear a podcast about.

00:00:26 Music Music Gentle, bare music of only a few long, sustained notes playing.

00:00:28 Ben Harrison Host How do you know there's someone who's been to Africa at your party? I'll tell you. I'm the fireman of going to Africa.

I've been to Kenya a couple of times, once for work and once for a wedding. I got mugged on the streets of Addis Ababa for my iPhone, which was the second time I've been mugged for an iPhone. The first time was in Brooklyn.

I've been to northern Nigeria and Senegal in recent years. They're great! My passport is running out of blank pages. I love Africa. I think everybody should go.

But in all the places I've been, all the people I've met and history I've read, nothing prepared me for what I saw in watching *Beasts of No Nation*. It is a brutal and unflinching, but also utterly beautiful, picture of a—very specifically unnamed—African nation at war. That's because Cary Joji Fukunaga directs the film. He's an incredibly talented storyteller, both narratively and visually. His work here is astounding. In this film, Fukunaga also acts as his own cinematographer, for the screenplay he also wrote.

If that sounds like a heavy amount of weight to carry, it is. But it pales in comparison to what an audience is asked to endure as we witness the life of Agu. He's our main character, a boy forced to join a group of soldiers rebelling against what remains of their fallen government, led by a commander played by the great Idris Elba, who is a toxic combination of utterly charismatic—as the most effective cult leaders are—and sadistically ambitious.

00:02:06 Ben Host Along the way, Abraham Attah's performance as Agu is riveting and tragic. He is not merely a "child actor," the way his character is not merely a child. His work is revelatory.

We've seen some films for *Friendly Fire* that unflinchingly wade into the very worst aspects of humanity during wartime, and *Beasts of No Nation* is one of those films. But what makes this film special is that its depictions of its many atrocities, and those who commit them, trigger both revulsion and awe. It's not violence for violence's sake. These explicit details are depicted in service of a powerful message: maybe we are all a bit closer to being beasts than we like to admit.

"I just want to be happy in this life." On today's *Friendly Fire: Beasts of No Nation*.

00:02:58	Music	Music	<p>Music fades into "War," by Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong, lead vocals by Edwin Starr. The song plays at full volume to the end of the transcribed section, and then drops to play quietly as the hosts introduce themselves.</p> <p><i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i> <i>Uh-huh!</i></p> <p><i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i></p> <p><i>Say it again, y'all!</i></p> <p><i>War!</i></p>
00:03:19	Ben	Host	<p>Welcome to <i>Friendly Fire</i>, the war movie podcast where, I mean... <i>[Exhales pointedly, tiredly.]</i> Fuck. You know? Like, <u>what?</u></p>
00:03:26	John Roderick	Host	<p>Wow. Heavy.</p>
00:03:29	Ben	Host	<p>Did not see this one coming.</p>
00:03:32	Adam Pranica	Host	<p>What's your name, Ben?</p> <p><i>[John laughs.]</i></p>
00:03:36	Ben	Host	<p><i>[Stifling laughter]</i> I don't wanna tell you. I'm worried what you'll do to me if I tell you.</p>
00:03:41	John	Host	<p>I'm John Roderick.</p>
00:03:43	Adam	Host	<p>Yeah. I'm Adam Pranica.</p>
00:03:44	John	Host	<p><i>[Laughing]</i> And this is the <i>Friendly Fire</i> podcast.</p> <p>Ben is a little overwhelmed.</p>
00:03:50	Ben	Host	<p>I'm overwhelmed.</p>
00:03:51	John	Host	<p>He's overwhelmed by our feature this week.</p>
00:03:54	Ben	Host	<p>Usually I'm just whelmed. Now I'm <u>over</u>whelmed.</p>
00:03:56	Adam	Host	<p>I was texting with Ben last night. And I was like "Hey, are you planning to watch this movie with your lovely wife?" And he was like "Yeah, I usually do. The night before, we'll save one of the films for a together film." And I was like "You might wanna... might wanna rethink that, actually."</p> <p><i>[John and Ben laugh.]</i></p> <p>Not sure what her tolerance is for bleak. Though she did marry Ben.</p>

00:04:19 John Host So.
Wow.

[Adam laughs quietly.]

Yeah.

00:04:21 Ben Host I think this movie is up there with *Come and See*.

00:04:24 Adam Host I think that's fair. I think it's—I think it's definitely on the Mount Bleakmore.

[Ben and John crack up.]

00:04:28 John Host [Laughing] It's on Mount Bleakmore!

00:04:32 Adam Host Of films, right?

00:04:35 Ben Host It sure is, man. It's just hard when it's a kid! It makes it extra hard!

00:04:41 Adam Host I think if this film did not cast Idris Elba as his role, it would have been even bleaker. There's a light inside him even when he's playing dark that I think helped the movie. It helped this film be palatable. I think that and its intense beauty as a film, visually, I thought—

00:05:01 Ben Host Yeah.

00:05:02 Adam Host —were its saving graces. But like, as a subject and as a story, it's as tough as it comes.

00:05:08 Ben Host Sure is. It is very easy to just turn away from really tough subjects like this, and almost feels like the right thing to do. [Laughs quietly.]

Like, I don't know if it's like a—I'm just mis-wired, but like, I—I almost felt like, bad watching this. Like I was doing a bad thing. Like, treating this as an entertainment—like, the subject matter as an entertainment.

00:05:38 Adam Host Hmm. I, uh—

00:05:39 John Host Wow. Interesting.

00:05:40 Adam Host Yeah. That—[laughs]. That's too bad to hear. I mean, do you feel like that is a quality of an effective film? When it has that kind of power. Like, the power to hurt, I think personally is a trait in films that I admire and like.

00:05:59 Ben Host It feels like a taboo that it's breaking somehow.

I got the sense that Cary Fukunaga is a much more humane filmmaker than the guy that made *Come and See*. Like, *Come and See*, the kid was famously subjected to like, an extremely unhealthy diet so that he would age nine years in the nine months that they shot the film.

And I don't think that the kids in this movie—to my filmmaker eye, like, it looks like great care was taken that they weren't exposed to like, traumatizing imagery, even though they were kind of portraying very traumatic things.

00:06:41 Adam Host The thing about *Come and See* and its child actor was that as his conditions deteriorated, like, he became more and more blank. But I found something so affecting about the child actors in this film in their

expressiveness. In their hyper-expressiveness sometimes, even.

Like I thought they were—obviously like, very beautiful, but like their ability to evoke feeling due to their expression in their circumstances, I thought was super powerful and really well done. I thought these were great little actors.

00:07:17 John Host And their expressiveness was often a lack of emotion or a lack of emotiveness, right? I mean, there was a lot of time where the kids were portraying a kind of dead-eyed hopelessness or... There wasn't a lot of—there were no histrionics. Considering what they were going through—

00:07:35 Adam Host Yeah.

00:07:36 John Host You know, they—they grew up in a sense over the course of a 24-hour period. Right?

00:07:42 Adam Host You do get to A-B it, though. Like, you get Imagination TV for 20 minutes and you get, like, their joyful faces.

00:07:48 John Host Right! Right.

00:07:49 Adam Host And I think that's fairly key.

00:07:51 John Host Yeah. You're right. You're right. You see the transformation and you know what's been lost and what's being sublimated.

00:07:57 Adam Host Yeah.

00:07:58 Ben Host I think critically, Agu comes from a pretty well-off family, too. So the sense of loss is—like, the needle's really pegged. Like, the extent of loss, where like he witnesses his mother stuffed into a car and driven away and then he witnesses his father and brother killed. And he goes from like, comparatively idyllic childhood to like, being threatened with death at every turn. You know, in a five-minute span.

00:08:33 John Host You guys—obviously powerfully affected by the tone and by the—by events in this movie. But this is also—it's the premise of every Disney film.

00:08:47 Adam Host Yeah.

00:08:48 John Host Right? I mean...

[Ben laughs.]

Kid watches his parents die—

00:08:51 Ben Host Yeah.

00:08:52 John Host—in a circus fire or whatever, and then goes on a grand adventure. Where they are made into a—made into, like, a heroic grown person. It's—

00:09:03 Ben Host And then a UN worker tries to provide therapy to Dumbo. *[Laughs.]*

00:09:09 John Host *[Laughing]* Right.

Well, right! Dumbo doesn't even have the benefit of someone trying to give him—poor Dumbo therapy.

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:09:16 Adam Host When Simba is raped by Scar—

[John laughs.]

—I think that was the part of *Lion King* that hurt the most.

00:09:22 Ben Host

But the song was great. *[Laughs.]*

00:09:23 John Host

[Laughs.] Throughout a lot of—yeah, there weren't a lot of songs in this.

But this isn't an uncommon story in history.

00:09:31 Adam Host

I think one of the surprises—and this is not in the top five of surprises in this film—but toward the end, we realize that this is a modern moment in time, and it's not like, the eighties or the seventies in Africa. Like, as soon as the brand new Range Rover drives up to the compound that's acting as an orphanage for these kids, you're made to understand that this is in the present day.

00:09:58 John Host

Oh, I—maybe that's another thing that you bring to watching this movie, is... You know the way the war in Bosnia was super confusing to watch?

00:10:05 Ben Host

Right.

00:10:06 John Host

Just because you couldn't understand who the players are, or what they're—

00:10:08 Ben Host

Yeah, like, "Why are you so mad at each other?"

00:10:10 John Host

[Laughing] Yeah, right. "What's your—what's your end goal here, dude? Is it really about—like, who cares who owns Sarajevo; can't you just hang out?"

[Ben laughs.]

But watching these civil wars in Africa and not understanding—I mean even if you do kind of have a picture of the lay of the land. Like, Sierra Leone—this wasn't a religious war, where in neighboring areas there were religious wars, and it wasn't really an ethnic war! It was just a war over resources and power.

It was hard to—uh, to parse it, watching it in American media. Again, partly because American media wasn't that interested in it! You know, it wasn't, like, daily front-page news. It was always a sidebar. But boy, you sure heard about the atrocities.

00:10:58 Adam Host

Many, many of the—even primary actors, but most of the background actors, are veterans of those wars in this film. And you can't fake that look.

[John laughs.]

There is a grizzled affect to a person who fought in Sierra Leone that, uh—you don't direct, I don't think.

00:11:18 John Host

Did you guys see this movie prior to this?

00:11:21 Adam Host

No, this is my first time.

00:11:22 Ben Host

This is—first time, yeah.

00:11:23 John Host

'Cause I watched it when it was released.

00:11:26 Adam Host The first Netflix movie.

00:11:28 John Host Yeah.

00:11:29 Adam Host Is this one.

00:11:30 Ben Host The one that famously got snubbed for Oscars, because it was Netflix.

00:11:34 John Host Well it got snubbed for Oscars and also—just the hilarious Hollywood business crapola where Netflix released it, and they'd made some deal—they violated some understanding with movie theaters.

00:11:52 Ben Host Right.

00:11:53 John Host Where movie theaters had some exclusive 90 days where they would be the only place to watch the movie before it went on Netflix. And so all the Loews Chain and the United Artists, all those movie theaters refused to show it. And so it didn't get a wide release, and it ended up being an arthouse film, where it had—it had the potential to have been a... I don't know about blockbuster, but it had the potential to be more widely seen.

00:12:22 Ben Host Right. What a brave stand for the Regal Cinema Chain to take, to block—

[John laughs.]

—to boycott this film. *[Laughs.]*

00:12:28 John Host It seem—to boycott it for no reason other than just some business, you know, trying to just slap down Netflix.

00:12:36 Ben Host Yeah. They don't wanna let Pandora's box get opened.

00:12:40 Adam Host Careers are at stake when you do stuff like that! Right?

00:12:43 John Host Yeah.

00:12:44 Adam Host Like, Abraham Attah should be rewarded at the highest levels for his work in this film, and he—and this film should guarantee him a life of great work. And that is a little bit in question, because a film like this doesn't get seen the way it should.

00:12:59 John Host Yeah. Well, and Idris Elba! I mean, I was stunned by his performance, watching it the first time.

00:13:04 Ben Host Yeah.

00:13:05 John Host I was terrified this time that I was gonna see cracks in it.

00:13:09 Adam Host Mm-hm.

00:13:10 John Host And I didn't. You know, I loved it again. Just like you say, Adam, he has a light inside, but also just, like—he just captured something very real about this flawed guy.

00:13:24 Adam Host Yeah.

00:13:26 Ben Host He's one of the few actors whose whole—like, his whole physicality is different when he plays different roles. Like, he doesn't look like the same person that played Stringer Bell.

00:13:38 Clip Clip **Stringer Bell:** That's not how I plan on doing things.

00:13:40 Ben Host It's so wild! He's incredible.

00:13:43 Adam Host I agree. His physicality is a crucial component of what makes him a

great actor, and he's making a lot of subtle choices here that really work.

You know, like—these moments occur during acts of atrocity, but you know, when he's at the front of his child army, standing two feet above them, like, leading them into war, and he's shot from behind—like, and you're—and you're like, with the child army going into battle, it's... These are incredible scenes!

00:14:10 John Host

Yeah. They are.

I usually—when we watch a film that's directed by a young director, a kind of like... upstart director, I bring a harder eye to them, and I have a lot of—

00:14:24 Adam Host

You hate their hands.

00:14:25 John Host

I do. I'm really reluctant to like them.

00:14:27 Ben Host

[Stifling laughter] You wanna cut their hands off? Jeez. *[Laughs.]*

00:14:29 John Host

[Laughs.] Well, you know, that's part of—it's part of my culture, Ben.

[Ben laughs.]

But I loved the way this movie was directed. And the idea that he also was his own cinematographer?

00:14:41 Adam Host

Yeah, that's amazing.

00:14:43 John Host

And wrote the—or, you know, not "wrote the movie," but partly wrote it. I mean, it's based on a book.

00:14:49 Ben Host

Yeah.

[Adam laughs quietly.]

00:14:50 John Host

I just—I was—I came out of it just like, "Uh, whatever you need, director."

[Ben laughs.]

"I will be a fan of you now."

00:14:58 Adam Host

Yeah, that's got to be very inspiring to all of your actors. I mean, to have a DP break his arm and be like, "Okay, I guess I'll take the first and second most difficult jobs" on an away game like this is... amazing! And he does a great job. Like, nothing suffers.

00:15:14 John Host

Yeah.

00:15:15 Adam Host

And you could argue it's better than it could ever be for that reason.

00:15:18 Ben Host

One of the most "hand of the director" moments in this movie is the subject of some, uh, plagiarism accusations, however. I was reading this article in Art Forum—or no, in Art Net, about how—

00:15:37 Adam Host

If it wasn't in DeviantArt, I don't think John would have read it.

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:15:40 John Host

No. No. Although my subscription to DeviantArt has lapsed. I'm...

00:15:45 Adam Host

Oh!

00:15:46 John Host Yeah. I have to—

00:15:47 Ben Host Oh no!

00:15:48 John Host Have to look into that.

00:15:49 Ben Host I'm sorry.

But when Agu is high and the green colors shift to red, and it's just kind of like a—

00:16:00 John Host Yeah.

00:16:01 Ben Host —kind of like a fever dream of combat, that is very heavily influenced and—*[stifles laughter]* if not directly ripped off from an Irish photographer named Richard Mosse, who is quoted in this Art Net article saying like, "Yeah, like, Cary Fukunaga, like, got in touch with me and said he was being—he was like really interested in how I achieved this look when I did this work. And I don't get any credit for the—in the film, and like, it doesn't seem like—"

[Laughs.]

It seems like they just went ahead and took this idea and used it for themselves, which is not a great look. And the article has like, some side-by-side comparisons of frames from the film and photographs by Richard Mosse that are pretty—it's pretty hard to ignore the similarities.

00:16:58 Adam Host That's pretty tough. Like, I could see this both ways. Because I don't think color timing is proprietary. I think it's shitty that this guy wasn't given credit on some level for being the inspiration for it.

00:17:12 Ben Host Yeah.

00:17:13 Adam Host But I also—like, I don't put Cary Fukunaga on blast for being inspired by it and using it in a film.

One of the most interesting parts of the production of this film is that Cary Fukunaga color-timed his entire film himself.

00:17:26 Ben Host Wow.

00:17:27 Adam Host And that is another job that he just took. *[Laughs.]* That you're really not supposed to, because it's so much work.

00:17:34 Ben Host Some of the best directors are the ones that can do as well or better than every other job on set—

00:17:41 Adam Host Yeah.

00:17:42 Ben Host —but how you develop that expertise is... Like, I don't—I have no idea. *[Laughs.]* You know? Like, I don't know how you have enough time *[laughs]* between being born in like the late seventies, and directing this film in 2014, to like, develop that level of expertise.

00:18:02 Adam Host And coloring film is fucking hard. And it is so granular and time-consuming and... like... It is my least favorite part of an edit, really. You can go over the same shit over and over and over again, and you're A-B-ing shots on down the line. Like, it's just unending. It's just a pile of shit. It's so hard.

00:18:22 Ben Host It's unending and it's one of those things where you kind of like—it's like when your palate gets, like, overwhelmed?

00:18:28 Adam Host Totally. Yeah. You stop being able to see it!

00:18:31 Ben Host You can't tell the difference. You can't tell what's good anymore.

00:18:34 Adam Host Yeah.

00:18:35 Ben Host It's—it is a hard thing to do. And I—you know, I was thinking about it reading this article, like, how many times I've been a part of a music video or a commercial or some kind of shoot where we put a bunch of inspirational images up on a board and you know, you make a vision board, or a—

[Adam or John laughs.]

—you know, a collage of the kinds of imagery you wanna draw on. And I think that's how most, you know, films are made, is like, you are making reference to previous things. And the nicest thing you could say about it is that Richard Mosse came up with something like, really compellingly unique, and it's possible to draw a direct connection between the inspiration of that and this movie.

But yeah, I'm not sure—like, how do you, like, license and idea for how to take a picture, you know? *[Laughs.]*

00:19:33 Adam Host Yeah.

00:19:34 John Host Ry Cooder taught Keith Richards the open G tuning, and Keith didn't really ever credit Ry. Just took it and wrote like six albums based on it.

00:19:46 Adam Host Hm.

00:19:47 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Right, but like, what do you do? You—

[John or Adam chuckles.]

You like, start every album with like, "This one goes out to Ry Cooder. *[Mimics guitar music.]*"

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:19:55 John Host *[Mimics guitar music.]*

Yeah! The—lately, there've been a lot of instances where people have successfully sued an artist for plagiarizing a—in music, certainly, a chord progression or a sound, and it's partly a product of the era of sampling, where people were actually taking prior recordings and turning them into a new song.

But it's the very nature of art to... steal. Like, every artist ever has—I mean—

00:20:38 Adam Host It's the nature of man.

00:20:39 John Host It's the nature of man! Thank you, Adam.

00:20:42 Ben Host I've always said that good artists borrow; great artists steal.

[Beat.]

00:20:46 John Host Wow.

00:20:47 Ben Host That's my quote.

00:20:48 John Host Wow. Yeah, that's good. That's good.

00:20:50 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** I came—I—

John: You got that from Abraham Lincoln, right?

00:20:51 Ben Host No, I came up with that myself.

00:20:53 John Host *[Laughs.]* But it's—but it's—

00:20:56 Adam Host That is the most meta joke there's ever been. *[Laughs.]*

00:20:58 John Host That is so good.

[Ben laughs.]

If I had a—if I had an orange bell here, I would ring it for you, but... I don't.

00:21:04 Ben Host Nooo, I—*[laughs]*—I can't claim that I even came up with the idea of stealing the idea.

[He and John laugh.]

Which is why I'm not a great artist. *[Laughs.]*

00:21:15 John Host I think that's kind of a modern event. Where an artist would—I mean, obviously artists have yelled and screamed about it and stomped their feet when somebody comes along and takes their thing and makes something better with it.

00:21:30 Clip Clip **Speaker:** I'm starting to like this whole "sharing" thing.

00:21:32 John Host Anyway, the way this film puts us in the—in first-person perspective a few times is really effective, and that... Being in that drug-induced kind of fever state, it almost veers into—it's the only place in the movie where it kind of gets a little magical, or, um...

00:21:57 Adam Host John, you've done brown-brown. Did they get it right?

00:21:59 John Host Well, it's really hard to replicate the experience of being on drugs... on film.

00:22:07 Adam Host Yeah.

00:22:08 John Host Right? It's such a—being on drugs is so... encompassing that just watching the visuals of it, it's never enough to communicate...

00:22:22 Ben Host The only way to truly replicate the feeling of being on drugs is to shoot a very close-up shot of Willem Dafoe's face with a very wide lens.

[Adam laughs.]

00:22:32 John Host Hmm. *[Stifling laughter]* Mm-hm.

The, uh—*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.*

00:22:36 Adam Host Yeah. The carpet in that film, right?

00:22:38 John Host Is one of the closest approximations of, like, what it feels like to be really, really—*[laughs]* torqued. And I'm still astonished by what that movie accomplished.

00:22:52 Ben Host Is brown-brown heroin?

00:22:55 John Host Well, it's a couple—a couple of different things go by that name. And one of them is a speedy drug, you know, an amphetamine, mixed with gunpowder.

00:23:09 Adam Host Gunpowder contains nitroglycerin.

00:23:11 John Host Yeah, it's nitroglycerin. It's not the phosphorus, but nitroglycerin.

00:23:13 Adam Host Yeah.

00:23:14 John Host And nitroglycerin is a thing that you take if you—if you're having a heart attack, right? So it affects your—it affects the way the drug goes into your blood. It's a blood thinner, I think, nitroglycerin.

00:23:27 Ben Host Whoa.

00:23:28 John Host Or it—um... So yeah, they take a—break a bullet apart, pour it in, put the amphetamine, they cook it—

00:23:37 Adam Host Cut your head like a professional wrestler, scoop some of that in there.

00:23:41 John Host That's right. Just pop it in your wound.

00:23:43 Adam Host Yeah!

00:23:44 Ben Host I had never encountered this as a—as an idea. I had a cocktail at a bar in Seattle once that had gunpowder in it.

00:23:52 Adam Host They're not doing brown-brown at tennis academies, Ben?

00:23:55 John Host *[Cracks up.]*

Uh, you had a—you had—I'm sorry. Ben, you were telling your war story about having an expensive cocktail in Seattle?

00:24:04 Ben Host It had gunpowder in it!

00:24:06 John Host Yeah.

00:24:07 Ben Host And I wonder if that was—if there's some idea that it would change the effect.

00:24:12 Adam Host I bet!

00:24:13 Ben Host I mean, I didn't notice anything. Just tasted a little bit...

00:24:16 Adam Host Did it keep you up?

00:24:17 Ben Host No, not particularly.

00:24:18 Adam Host Like, in a way that alcohol is a depressant, like, maybe the gunpowder keeps you up there a little bit.

00:24:23 Ben Host Counteracts? Yeah.

00:24:24 John Host Yeah.

00:24:25 Ben Host I drank 25 of 'em and didn't even get slightly drunk, so. *[Laughs.]*

00:24:28 John Host Yeah. There it is!

00:24:29 Ben Host Canceled it out.

[Adam laughs.]

00:24:32 John Host But it's just—it's the same as—it's the same idea as snorting something, right? It just gets closer to the blood vessels. You know, you put something in a mucus membrane...

00:24:42 Adam Host Not a lot of clean needles around these parts.

00:24:45 John Host Right. And it's a lot harder to do an enema—

00:24:48 Adam Host Yeah.

00:24:49 John Host —out in the jungle.

[Adam and John laugh.]

[Stifling laughter] Those cocaine enemas.

00:24:53 Clip Clip **Murdock (*Rambo: First Blood Part II*):** That's a hell of a combination.

00:24:55 Adam Host I thought that's what the, uh—

00:24:56 John Host Zinggg!

00:24:57 Adam Host I thought that's what the red water was in that trench.

[John audibly shudders.]

I thought it was just everyone doing enemas.

00:25:00 John Host Eugh.

00:25:01 Ben Host I wanna be real about something. I went to a tennis camp one time when I was a kid, but I never went to a tennis academy, and I was never good at tennis.

[Beat.]

00:25:10 John Host Hmm.

00:25:11 Adam Host Alright, well thanks for setting the record straight.

[John and Adam laugh.]

[Stifling laughter] Your Rod Laver chest tattoo would indicate something different, Ben.

[John laughs.]

00:25:20 Ben Host I don't even know who that is, Adam!

[John laughs.]

00:25:25 Adam Host You use the Laver grip when you jack off?

[John keeps laughing, Adam laughs quietly.]

I love you, Ben.

00:25:32 John Host Ben, you know Rod by his shoes.

[Ben laughs.]

00:25:36 Adam Host Yeah!

00:25:37 John Host Right? That would be your—that would be your entry into the Rod Laver, uh...

00:25:40 Adam Host Yeah.

00:25:41 John Host ... *[stumbling over his words a bit]* oeuvre.

00:25:42 Ben Host Listen.

00:25:43 John Host *[Stifling laughter]* World—

00:25:44 Adam Host Ben's got three stripes on the side of his dick.

[John laughs.]

00:25:47 Ben Host I think 1970s tennis is an aspirational style.

00:25:50 John Host Yes.

00:25:51 Adam Host Mm.

00:25:52 John Host You close in on it sometimes.

00:25:54 Ben Host I play in those margins.

00:25:55 Clip Clip **Speaker:** That ball was on the line!

00:25:57 Ben Host When he is high on that stuff and they go into a town, there was a close-up on what appeared to me to be a minaret, and I wondered if there was an implicit religious element to this conflict in that moment. Because they do spend a lot of time establishing the Christianity that his family practices, and that his town practices.

00:26:22 John Host There is a large Muslim population in Sierra Leone. But it's not... There... In my understanding, it was never—it never played a major role in—I mean there are a lot of different tribes represented in—a lot of ethnicities in Sierra Leone because, like Liberia—you know, Liberia is an African nation that was established by American slaves going back to Africa and starting a country, an African country, Liberia.

You know. Lib—liberty.

00:27:03 Adam Host Oh.

00:27:04 John Host Liberation.

00:27:05 Ben Host Yeah.

00:27:06 John Host Sierra Leone is a version of that, except it was—the country was formed earlier by British slaves. When the British abolished the slave trade, this was a country that was—again—kind of a... It was an amalgam of people that weren't necessarily from there, but were coming there from various places within the—within a newly abolished British slave enterprise.

00:27:39 Adam Host And the etymology of that country is like, "Leave Us... Lay-own"? (*Leave Us Alone.*)

[Ben laughs.]

00:27:44 John Host Yeah. Sie—yeah, right. Yeah. "Si..."

00:27:47 Adam Host Yeah. "Yes."

00:27:49 John Host "Erra, Leone."

00:27:50 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** "Yes."

John: This is—

Adam: "Yes, leave us alone, for..."

John: Yes. "Si"!

Adam: For—yeah. Yeah.

John: "Leave us alone." Right.

Adam: That makes sense.

00:27:55 Ben Host

[Laughs.] It's a little bit of Spanish peppered in.

[John laughs quietly.]

I—so I understood that this was kind of a—intentionally not about a specific country. Am I misunderstanding that?

00:28:08 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Adam: No, that's right.

Ben: Is this supposed to be Sierra Leone?

Adam & John: No.

00:28:10 John Host

He changed the details, and the details were changed in the novel, but it's... more or less based there. I mean if it—if this had been about Liberia, there would have been a lot more brutality. That civil war got... super-duper-duper ugly.

00:28:29 Adam Host

What do you think of the decision to anonymize the country, though? I think it's a good one.

00:28:34 John Host

I think it's a good one but it does... It does the thing of, for an American audience, making all of Central West Africa seem sort of the same? Which I think is a danger from an American viewpoint, to say like, "Oh, well this could have happened in any African country!"

Because that's not necessar—I mean that's not true. Right? And if you think about Rwanda, which isn't anywhere near this—I mean, it's in Central Africa toward the other side—and to kinda say, like, "Well, Rwanda or Sierra Leone or Liberia..."

I mean they're different conflicts, and they're different... And you know, and sort of like—now we're watching Boko Haram, and—you don't want to make the mistake of just looking at the surface of these conflicts, seeing similarities, and conflating them.

00:29:32 Ben Host

Yeah. I mean, Boko Haram is more comparable to Al-Shabaab than the like, rebel groups depicted in this film. From what I understand.

00:29:42 John Host

Completely different. Although that's happening in Nigeria and Niger—which are not, geographically, that distant.

00:29:53 Ben Host

Right.

00:29:54 John Host

And the—the, um—the, you know, what—?

00:29:58 Ben Host

ECOMOG or whatever?

00:29:59 John Host

Yeah. The—that is a group. So it's—in this movie it's not called ECOMOG. It's called something really close to that.

00:30:09 Ben Host

ECOMOD. *[Laughs quietly.]*

00:30:11 John Host

ECOMOD, right. And ECOMOG was a kind of African-centric United Nations.

00:30:17 Adam Host

Hm.

00:30:18 John Host So not actually a UN, but a sort of united African peacekeeping force that's very, like, Nigerian-led. And—

00:30:31 Ben Host The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group is the—

00:30:35 John Host Hm!

00:30:36 Ben Host —is what ECOMOG stands for.

00:30:39 John Host So the fact that they had ECOMOG here in this movie and just sorta changed the acronym by one letter... you know, although Sierra Leone is anonymized, it's also really localized.

00:30:55 Adam Host Hm.

00:30:56 Ben Host Yeah.

00:30:57 John Host Which I do—I agree that I think it's effective, because it's not trying to say about itself, like, "This is a true story." It does give—it does allow for creative license. But I just—you know. I also felt like that specificity is important because different things happened in different conflicts.

00:31:19 Adam Host It didn't feel like the religious aspects were hyper-important, in the context of the conflict. Right? This seemed very much a...

00:31:30 Ben Host Right, he doesn't look up at the minaret and like, scowl—

00:31:32 Adam Host Yeah.

00:31:33 Ben Host —and start firing at, you know, people coming out from afternoon prayer or anything. Like—*[laughs]*.

00:31:39 Adam Host The NDF's reason for being really kind of like... snapped me to attention a bit. Like, Commandant makes the case that it's politicians selling off their country's resources at a fraction of what they're worth, and then in exchange for that they're personally enriching themselves. And that, uh, sounded like a familiar problem.

[John and Ben laugh.]

Right?

00:32:04 John Host *[Stifling laughter]* Are you ready to take to the jungles, Adam?

00:32:05 Adam Host *[Joking]* Commandant's looking directly into the camera during his description of that.

[Ben laughs.]

00:32:12 John Host But I do think that religion plays a big role in this movie, because Commandant sets himself up as the head of a kind of religious—as a kind of religious figure! And a lot of the way that he recruits and indoctrinates these child soldiers is through exploiting, kind of, village religions and...

00:32:39 Ben Host Yeah. They venerate him.

00:32:41 John Host They do. But you know, there's that crucial scene where right after they are initiated into the troop, he lines them up and has a firing squad unload on them. But they're blanks. He does it and then turns to them and says "Do you see? You're immune now. You're invincible."

And makes these kids think that there were bullets in those guns, and that they can't be killed. And that is a thing that happened among child soldiers. The idea that they would put sort of branches on themselves—

00:33:16 Adam Host Yeah!

00:33:17 John Host —and those little—you can see little things on their uniforms.

00:33:20 Adam Host Yeah, the shaman made those.

00:33:22 John Host Yeah.

00:33:23 Adam Host And the shaman is such a big part of that rebirth.

00:33:25 Ben Host Oh, I thought those were tefillin, because they're all Orthodox Jews.

00:33:29 John Host *[Laughing]* Yeah, that's what it was.

[Ben laughs.]

They became—they converted. It's a lengthy process.

00:33:33 Adam Host They're all wearing natural fibers, too.

00:33:34 Ben Host Yeah. Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:33:36 John Host The Commandant, uh, he leads his soldiers in on that bridge scene where 2i/c is like, cowering behind a—abutment, and the Commandant, you know, just strides forward, immune to bullets.

00:33:53 Ben Host Commandant definitely performs his godhood by never ducking or flinching, even.

00:34:00 John Host Right.

00:34:01 Ben Host There's that scene where they're like, watching as like another part of the squad is trying to take a town, and he's just like, looking through his eyepiece, his monocular thing—*[laughs]*.

00:34:14 John Host Surveyor's telescope, right. That's a great—

00:34:16 Ben Host Yeah!

00:34:17 John Host —little element.

00:34:18 Ben Host And like, bullets are hitting the dirt all around him, and he's just like, oblivious to it almost. There's like, the indoctrination he does of the kids, but he also kind of believes it of himself, by appearance anyways.

00:34:34 John Host That's kind of true of all great generals, right? Or all great—commanders that lead from the front?

00:34:38 Adam Host Yeah. What makes this film unique is how often you see the back of Idris Elba's head.

00:34:43 John Host Yeah. Yeah, and watch the bullets go flying by us, as well.

00:34:47 Adam Host Yeah.

00:34:48 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."

War!

00:34:49 Promo Clip **Music:** Quiet rock.

Aimee Mann: Hello, this is Aimee Mann.

Ted Leo: And I'm Ted Leo.

Aimee: And we have a podcast called *The Art of Process*.

Ted: We've been lucky enough over the past year to talk to some of our friends and acquaintances from across the creative spectrum to find out how they actually work.

Speaker 1: And so I have to write material that makes sense and makes people laugh. I also have to think about what I'm saying to people.

Speaker 2: If I kick your ass, I'll make you famous.

Speaker 3: The fight to get LGBTQ representation in the show.

Ted & Aimee: Mm-hm.

Speaker 4: We weirdly don't know as many musicians as you would expect.

00:35:18 Promo Clip

Speaker 5: I really just became a political speech writer by accident.

Speaker 6: I'm realizing that I have accidentally, uh, pulled my pants down.

[Someone starts to laugh.]

Ted: Listen and subscribe at MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

Speaker 7: It's like if the guinea pig was complicit in helping the scientist.

[Music ends.]

00:35:35 Promo Clip

Music: Straightforward, thump-y electric bass guitar beat with light drums.

Laurie: Hi. I am Laurie Kilmartin.

Jackie: And I'm Jackie Kashian.

Laurie: Together we host a podcast called:

Jackie: *The Jackie and Laurie Show*.

Laurie: Uh, we're both stand-up comics. We recently met each other because women weren't allowed to work together, uh—uh, on the road or in gigs for a long, long time, and so... our friendship has been unfolding on this podcast for a couple years. Jackie constantly works the road; I write for *Conan* and then I work the road in-between.

Jackie: We do a lot of stand-up comedy, and so we celebrate stand-up—

Laurie: Yes.

Jackie: —and we also... bitch about it.

Laurie: We keep it to an hour; we don't have any guests. We somehow find enough to—to talk about every single week. So find us—you can subscribe to *The Jackie and Laurie* show at MaximumFun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

Jackie: *[Nonplussed]* K, bye.

[Music ends.]

00:36:22	Music	Transition	Brief clip of "War." <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i>
00:36:24	John	Host	The first scene where they really engage in combat, the ambush at the bridge. The <u>first</u> bridge.
00:36:30	Ben	Host	Right.
00:36:31	John	Host	They—you know, they're hiding under the bridge; they're getting ready. I very definitely felt like, "Wait a minute. This squad is not ready for a <u>mission</u> ." Like—
00:36:39	Ben	Host	<i>[Stifling laughter]</i> Right.
00:36:40	John	Host	"I thought we were just gonna wander around in the bush and take potshots of opportunity. Are we seriously going to <u>mount</u> a—like a <u>military assault</u> ?"
00:36:50	Adam	Host	Yeah, and it wasn't even like, <u>guerrilla</u> -style. It was a frontal, cross-the-bridge type of battle.
00:36:56	John	Host	Yeah! And the film accomplishes a feeling of like, putting you under the bridge and—you know, you almost are sort of checking your own gun belts, because you <u>feel</u> that, like, " <u>What</u> are we about to do?! Nn-no!" You know, like, "The only training I've received is with some <u>sticks</u> !" Right? I mean, that—
00:37:16	Ben	Host	Yeah.
00:37:17	John	Host	He doesn't even—our hero doesn't even have a <u>gun</u> in that scene! He's just still carrying bullets. He's <u>awarded</u> his <u>gun</u> in, you know, in the aftermath.
00:37:30	Ben	Host	Because they get enough guns to hand some out to the kids that don't have 'em yet.
00:37:34	John	Host	Right! Right. But that was a—kind of an astonishing whole set piece, and certainly the— <u>one</u> of the more brutal moments of the film, when he's handed the machete and told to kill... to kill that engineer.

00:37:49 Ben Host That is a really tough scene. And you really feel that engineer's pain. I mean—*[sighs]*. Any—I think anybody that's like, been in a—*[laughs]* in a situation where like a government authority is like—has like, determined that you're something that you're not, and is going to like, take some action about that—you know, like—

I was going to London with Jesse Thorn one time, and he was wearing a hat at passport control, and the guy, like, really took exception to it. And it became a little hairy for a second, *[laughs]* because this guy had like a thick Scottish accent or something and we just couldn't understand what he was saying? And—

00:38:28 John Host I mean, I take exception to it. The idea of wearing a hat at passport control? Jesse should have been put in a holding tank!

00:38:35 Ben Host Yeah. Well. *[Stifling laughter]* You just think that in general, but—*[laughs]*.

00:38:38 John Host I do! *[Laughs.]* But you shouldn't wear a hat in situations like that! No matter how fashionable you are. Take your goddamn hat off!

00:38:45 Ben Host You can't talk 'em out of it at some point. You know?

00:38:47 John Host Right.

00:38:48 Ben Host And—

00:38:49 John Host But this isn't a situation where a government functionary is doing that. It's a—it's a—

00:38:52 Ben Host Right!

00:38:53 John Host —eight-year-old.

00:38:55 Ben Host You can see that this guy really doesn't have—he's like a non-combatant, he's just a guy, and... and he's going to be used for the process of jumping Agu into the gang.

00:39:07 Adam Host I'm going to lightly push back on that a little bit and say that we do not know for sure that this guy is a bridge engineer. And he is emoting the kind of desperation that anyone would in a circumstance where they see their imminent death. I think that's—that confusion, that battlefield confusion, I think is—is part of what's baked in here.

Is this guy who he says he is? Who knows! But he's a captured soldier of some stripe, and it doesn't matter what he says.

00:39:37 John Host I think the fact that they find that surveyor's scope in that same raid confirms the idea that this was a surveying crew or an engineering crew, rather than a bunch of soldiers, like, on a mission.

I think that—I think those two things are—

00:39:57 Adam Host You don't think he's there to survey how to kill NDF people?

[Ben laughs.]

00:40:00 John Host I think if you were gonna do that, you would use a different scope.

00:40:03 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** And you wouldn't have the other guy with a reflector, *[laughing]* a hundred yards down?

John: Right. Standing out there in a reflecting vest?

00:40:07 Adam Host *[Laughing]* Uh-huh.

00:40:08 John Host But I think what's interesting about that character and about that scene is that, from our—from the viewer's perspective, he seems like an educated man. And it's not just in the way he's talking and saying that he's an engineer, but there's something about the way he's dressed, the way he's composed, the way he looks.

00:40:26 Adam Host That's a great point. He's not grizzled like the rest.

00:40:29 John Host Yeah. He's not grizzled, he's very much a city person, and seems like a—and seems like a person with class, and he has a certain dignity. He wouldn't plead, in that same way. And so he becomes a proxy, I think, for us the viewer to say like, "Wait a minute. This is a—this is someone who is divorced from these village kids, who does—there is a city/country divide here, too."

00:41:03 Ben Host Right.

00:41:04 John Host And...

00:41:05 Ben Host And then crucially Agu's voiceover, in praying to God afterwards, is that he didn't like killing that guy but he knew it was the right thing to do.

00:41:17 John Host Right, but he's saying that to himself—I mean, Agu is repeating that as a kind of mantra to absolve himself of that crime. And I think he—he just experienced his own father being an innocent killed unjustly.

00:41:34 Ben Host Right.

00:41:35 John Host And now he is committing that same crime, and it's a credit to the Commandant's indoctrination, that whole experience at the mountain camp, that in such a short time Agu could become... you know, could have adopted a new worldview.

00:41:54 Ben Host Right.

00:41:55 Adam Host I think—we were talking a little bit about the visual inspirations for Cary Fukunaga, but I think one tonal inspiration for this film has got to be Terrence Malick in *The Thin Red Line*. Especially the—how the voiceover pervades a lot of the story, its—

00:42:11 Ben Host Mm.

00:42:12 Adam Host —its great visual beauty. I definitely felt some Malick vibes from this film. Did you guys?

00:42:17 Ben Host It's a little faster-paced than your average Terrence Malick.

00:42:20 Adam Host Sure.

00:42:21 Ben Host But definitely—I can definitely see the comparison. There aren't quite as many shots up at trees.

00:42:26 Adam Host But there are. *[Laughs.]* And—

00:42:28 John Host *[Stifling laughter]* There are some.

[Ben laughs.]

00:42:29 Adam Host And like, slowly dripping drops of water. Like, there's moments to catch your breath here that are intentional in that same way.

00:42:36 John Host But—

00:42:37 Ben Host Yeah.

00:42:38 John Host —it is relentless. I mean the film—

00:42:39 Adam Host Yeah.

00:42:40 John Host There are moments to catch your breath, but it's also—those are usually ones where some hell is about to get unleashed.

00:42:46 Adam Host Let's talk about the single. That is a good moment to do that. There is a sequence in the middle of this film that runs three minutes. It's the inside of the home that the kids have raided. And it's an unbroken shot that goes from the child soldiers' entry up the stairwell.

We're going out to the balcony to shoot down, then we're going in inside and we're finding a mother and her child, who is briefly mistaken for being Agu's mother before he comes to terms with the fact that it isn't. And then he runs outside, and then there is the beating of her child, and then when he goes back in he witnesses the rape of the mother before shooting the mother, and then he goes back out to the balcony, and we're given witness to the destruction and the violence on a more—on a wider scale.

00:43:41 John Host That's one shot?

00:43:42 Ben Host Yeah, that's all one shot.

00:43:44 Adam Host I watched it I think five times, like I just stopped it and backed it up all over again, because... it's... I mean, you could look at this in a couple of ways. Like, this—sometimes a sequence like this is viewed as like, directorial masturbation, like "Look at what I can do."

But I did not think that with this sequence. I thought it was astounding every time I watched it, and it became more astounding with each viewing. And that removes just how awful the scene is that we're watching play out during. There's ten different things happening throughout the sequence, and all of them—each one is more atrocious than the next.

00:44:27 John Host That whole scene, that three minutes, really stood out to me as a different kind of moment in the film. I didn't realize that it was because it was one shot, but you do feel—you do feel point of view, and it is just an intense set of... It's an intense dance through the whole thing.

00:44:46 Adam Host You're making sure your actors hit your spots.

00:44:48 John Host Right.

00:44:49 Adam Host As the camera moves. But there's also this element of changing light throughout this sequence that's crazy.

00:44:56 John Host Yeah! Yeah, yeah.

00:44:57 Adam Host It is so difficult.

00:44:59 Ben Host I think it also makes it feel emotionally—like, on an emotional level, even if you're not noticing that the shot isn't cutting, the emotional continuity somehow registers. So when Agu joins Strika in stomping the little girl to death and then turns around and shoots the mother, it doesn't feel like, you know, a presentation of disjointed moments; it is one moment.

00:45:29 Adam Host Right.

00:45:30 Ben Host And that really accomplishes something in this scene.

00:45:32 Adam Host It's not just action shot in the frame but reflected action. Like there's so much happening in the mirror in that bedroom too, both before and after, that—it's so controlled and composed, for a scene that's meant to evoke, like, a mania.

00:45:49 John Host Yeah.

00:45:50 Adam Host Of sorts. It's really—like, look. It's hard to recommend the film, and this specific sequence, to people who enjoy... film, because of what it depicts. But it's really incredible. And if you can possibly stomach it, I think it is worth studying. It's... fantastic.

00:46:13 Clip Clip **Commandant:** To the enemy, you are invincible!

00:46:16 Ben Host Over the past year or so, I've been working on a video project documenting a domestic violence prevention effort. And I thought a lot about the—you know. I mean like what I was saying earlier, that it almost feels like breaking a taboo to watch this film, or like it's a bad thing. And a big takeaway from just kind of being a fly on the wall on this video project has been that the taboo-ness of it is part of what perpetuates it.

Like, the fact that it's not talked about, the fact that it's... shameful, is a part of its power. And I think that like, processing the fact that this kind of stuff exists in the world is important, actually. And it's important to have conversations about it.

00:47:06 John Host In particular in war. Because rape is used in war as an organized technique. And part of its power in war is shame.

00:47:18 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Right.

John: Right?

00:47:19 John Host It's a—it is not just—it's—in some ways, it—it's the same as wounding soldiers rather than killing them. I mean, it is a strategy in war to wound rather than kill. Because that exhausts your enemy's resources, 'cause they have to deal with wounded. And there are a lot of situations I think, in a battle, where it's preferable to not kill your opponent, but just to...

00:47:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Just to maim.

John: Just to badly injure them.

00:47:48 John Host To maim, right. And rape plays that role, because it destabilizes your opponent and it has a lasting destabilizing effect, 'cause it's very difficult then for people to reintegrate and to—even in peacetime—sort of wrestle with the aftermath of rape. And...

00:48:08 Adam Host It's a weapon that the Commandant uses against his own troops, also. Like it's not just—this isn't the only scene of sexual violence in the film.

00:48:15 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Right. He—

Adam: The scene where Agu is raped, and then we're made to understand that Striker has also been.

00:48:22 Adam Host And the idea—correct me if I'm wrong, guys, but like—is every kid who wears a special hat in the unit... been the subject of the Commandant's rape? Because it—that changed for Agu! Like, he got

the special hat after. And then we learn that about Striker, and then you—you sorta take a look around. And you see how many of these hats have been distributed.

That was the thing that was—that made sense to me.

00:48:46	John	Host	I mean the Commandant is creating a loyal faction within his own troops, like a special bodyguard of young boys. And he's used shame to inspire almost like a—a Stockholm syndrome kind of loyalty from these boys.
00:49:10	Ben	Host	Yeah.
			I wanted to talk about the scene where he takes them to—you know, when he's summoned by the Supreme Commander, and that veil kind of falls away because he's treated with such disrespect by the apparatus of the NDF that he works under.
00:49:28	John	Host	Right. He goes from being the absolute king and god to being a...
00:49:34	Ben	Host	...guy in line at the DMV. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:49:35	John	Host	Right, he sits in the anteroom for a whole night.
00:49:38	Adam	Host	There's so much about that scene that's amazing. I think—
00:49:41	John	Host	Amazing.
00:49:42	Adam	Host	Beginning with the <u>setting</u> . Like, we've gone from the jungle to basically what looks like a college campus, and all the cleanliness of that. Some nice metal benches. A man in a suit, with a suitcase—
00:49:53	John	Host	Yeah.
00:49:54	Adam	Host	—waiting his turn.
00:49:56	John	Host	A Chinese guy.
00:49:57	Adam	Host	Yeah! It was such a difference in feeling. And that that difference in setting coincided with the difference in feeling that Commandant was experiencing that moment in time, I thought was just a really deft maneuver for the story.
00:50:13	John	Host	Yeah. Big time.
00:50:15	Adam	Host	Really messing with expectations there.
00:50:16	John	Host	And then—and realizing, like, "Oh, you're one of <u>dozens</u> of commandants, and..." I mean, he gradually understands that <u>he's</u> a liability. That the war crimes are gonna get pinned on him.
00:50:28	Adam	Host	Yeah.
00:50:29	John	Host	That the civilian leadership is gonna start to try and—as they transition into a real government, they're gonna start disavowing the actions of their commanders in the field.
00:50:39	Adam	Host	And how long-term conflicts usually pivot into PR wars—
00:50:43	John	Host	Right.
00:50:44	Adam	Host	—at a certain moment.
00:50:45	John	Host	Right.
00:50:46	Adam	Host	And decisions are made based on that.
00:50:48	Ben	Host	I wondered so much, when 2i/c was elevated to commandant,

whether we were going to see him try and assume that god king position for the troops.

00:51:00 John Host Because 2i/c is—he's revealed throughout the movie—I mean, he's a competent soldier but also kind of cowardly.

00:51:09 Ben Host He does not have the leadership qualities that Commandant espouses and practices.

00:51:16 John Host But he would be a better commandant transitioning to regular army kind of rule follower.

00:51:24 Adam Host *[Stifling laughter]* I kinda wanna scrutinize that a little bit because, like, 2i/c ducks sometimes.

00:51:29 John Host He does.

00:51:30 Adam Host I don't think that makes him a coward.

[John laughs.]

It's—I think it's like, you look at him standing next to Commandant and you could get that feel, but like, there's a—*[laughs]*. I don't—I don't think he's a coward is what I'm saying.

00:51:40 John Host But I mean, Commandant yells at him a few times and he gets very—I mean, he does not have a lot of second in command...

00:51:49 Adam Host Mm-hm.

00:51:50 John Host ...kind of personal authority?

00:51:52 Adam Host Yeah.

00:51:53 John Host Just in the way he responds—I mean, he has a look on his face throughout where he is dubious of the Commandant's god status. He's the only one that looks at him with kind of questioning eyes.

00:52:07 Ben Host *[Stifling laughter]* Right.

00:52:08 John Host But he also—yeah. He—*[laughs]* he's—he recognizes that bullets kill.

[Adam laughs.]

But—

00:52:15 Adam Host That makes him a genius.

00:52:16 John Host Yeah, right.

00:52:17 Adam Host In this squad.

00:52:18 John Host But I don't think—I—

[Ben laughs.]

I think in that moment—in that moment where he's elevated by the commander, and then 2i/c says... "No, you're coming with me," and 2i/c—or I think—I think Commandant pretty clearly has him executed by that prostitute.

00:52:35 Adam Host Yeah.

00:52:36 Ben Host Yeah.

00:52:37 John Host The fact that 2i/c can't break the grip of Commandant's leadership,

even though in that moment he could have said "No I'm not going with you, I'm staying here at headquarters to get my orders." You know, I mean he follows Commandant to his death, even against his will.

00:52:51 Adam Host There's so many different kinds of fear we experience in this film, and one of them is the fear of someone powerful who has just been disappointed.

00:52:59 John Host *[Laughing]* Yeah!

00:53:00 Adam Host That room just goes cold as soon as we realize that.

00:53:03 John Host I know, I can imagine that you two guys feel that on this show a lot.

00:53:07 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Another fear I feel is the backlash that we will get if I don't say something pedantic about the movie. Or if I don't quote something pedantic about the movie that a person on the Internet wrote.

So I will share with you guys this trifle. "When Agu is first captured by the NDF and made to carry a crate of ammunition, it is a crate of 5.56x45 millimeter rounds, according to the markings on the crate."

00:53:36 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Beeping as Ben speaks.]*

00:53:37 Ben Host "Curiously, neither side in the civil war uses weapons that chamber this round. The NDF forces all carry Kalashnikov variants, chambered in 7.62x39 millimeter..."

[Beeping stops.]

"...While the NRC soldiers favor HK G3 variants, chambered in 7.62x51 millimeters."

00:53:57 John Host Interesting.

00:53:58 Adam Host Probably gonna experience a lot of jams.

00:53:59 John Host Yeah, right.

[Ben laughs.]

Those Heckler and Cock guns are great if you're guarding the Swedish Parliament.

00:54:06 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** *[Laughs.]* Yeah. But, uh... No use in the—in the gold mines.

John: *[Stifling laughter]* But down in the mud they're a little—*[laughs]*.

00:54:12 John Host They're a little finely calibrated. If you go on our *Friendly Fire* Facebook page, there—and I think this is also true on the Reddit—there's a wonderful fan of the program who... *[laughing]* who has a segment of his own—

[Ben laughs.]

—on the Facebook page called "The Guns of *Friendly Fire*," where he—

00:54:31 Ben Host Wow!

00:54:32 John Host Where he delves into weapons that are used in various films and

talks about them in detail.

00:54:38 Adam Host How 'bout that!

00:54:39 John Host Yeah. "Guns of *Friendly Fire*."

00:54:40 Ben Host I'm terrified of that person!

[All three laugh.]

00:54:43 John Host We actually have on our Facebook page quite a few people who are, um...

00:54:48 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Who hate me and wanna kill me? *[Laughs.]*

John: ... gun owners.

00:54:50 John Host Well, not just on the—not just in the Facebook page.

00:54:53 Ben Host Yeah.

00:54:54 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Here on the program. There's two of us. *[Laughs.]*

Ben: Sure.

Adam: That's always been true, Ben!

00:54:57 Adam Host It's just now you know about it.

[John laughs.]

00:55:01 Ben Host I thought that might be a good way of transitioning into the gold mine scene where Commandant is betrayed and abandoned by his men. I thought this was an amazing sequence. Both in terms of like, what a difference it is visually, like, we've been in such dense, foliated places for the most part and suddenly we're in this kind of sun-scorched gold mine.

And the like, disgusting water-filled trenches that they've dug to—I guess either defend it or mine for gold or both?

00:55:38 Adam Host Yeah, why not both?

00:55:39 Ben Host Yeah. Would this have been a diamond mine?

00:55:42 John Host Yeah, Sierra Leone is—I mean, this is the territory of the blood diamond, too, right? The diamonds that are mined to fund weapons purchases and, uh, totalitarian governments.

00:56:00 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** So there's, uh—there's gold there, but—

Adam: And the great people at De Beers.

[John laughs.]

00:56:04 Ben Host Yeah.

00:56:05 Adam Host Let's just give it up for them.

00:56:06 Ben Host Just a...

00:56:07 Adam Host Great global citizens.

00:56:08 Ben Host Just paragons of virtue in the world. *[Laughs.]*

00:56:12 John Host Yeah, so this is—I mean this is ground zero of the blood diamond trade. But it—in this scene, Commandant is not—has not

successfully mined for diamonds or gold here. This is where he loses—he's lost control, and now he loses everyone's respect.

- 00:56:32 Adam Host You can't not feed your army.
- 00:56:34 Ben Host He makes a really interesting case, that like, they don't really have a reasonable recourse to being his army, though. Like he says like, "What are you gonna do? If you go out there and try and join up with another NDF group, they're gonna treat you like deserters, like the betrayers that you are. You're gonna be arrested by anybody else that you find."
- So like—
- 00:56:57 John Host Can't be reintegrated into society.
- 00:56:59 Ben Host Right. He's broken them beyond repair, and he lets them know it. And for the older—you know, for the—you know, guys that aren't minors anymore, that is true. When they—when the UN forces capture them, those guys are on the ground getting zip-tied while the kids are loaded into a truck and taken to kind of like a deprogramming camp.
- 00:57:25 John Host Yeah! You wonder within the culture—they're so bonded to one another as a troop.
- 00:57:32 Ben Host Yeah.
- 00:57:33 John Host Almost as a tribe. And you... At that moment, I wondered, if they'd just thrown their guns down and taken their magic hats off and just dispersed, and each person headed their own direction and came out in a village wherever they were... You know, they're not marked by anything other than dead eyes.
- 00:57:54 Ben Host Right.
- 00:57:55 John Host Could they just claim to be refugees as well?
- 00:57:57 Adam Host Well, their experience doing exactly that led them to the Commandant.
- 00:58:02 John Host Right. Right. So if the war is coming to an end, which is kind of implied—you know. I mean if you showed up in a village and were like "Hi, I'm sort of a stranger here but everyone I know was killed," you wouldn't be alone in that, either.
- But I don't think it was even conceivable to them because they were so bound to one another at that point. They could only think to act as a unit.
- 00:58:29 Ben Host I wondered what the people that work for the UN and other NGOs that do this kind of work do to determine whether a kid goes to deprogramming camp or gets arrested. Because it's not like these guys are carrying passports around that say what their birthdate was. Some of these guys must be edge cases, you know?
- 00:58:53 John Host Well, and I think it's—I think we see in that coming back to civilization. You know, they are then re-entering a world of NGOs. Where the idea of a child soldier—we see the full scope here. Where a child, to the Commandant, represents not just a warm body but somebody that he can indoctrinate and inculcate a kind of—you know; there's nothing more brutal than a teenage boy.

Because their executive function hasn't matured. And you know, they can be very effective killers. So we see them—we see these boys used as the raw material of a rebel group. And then they come back into civilization and they're seen as boys again, who need to learn math, and need to process their emotion. And that's a very NGO kind of—again, it's—that seems more familiar to us, as Western viewers, that mentality.

But it is a mentality. Right? It's as much a mentality as...

01:00:07 Ben Host

Yeah.

01:00:08 John Host

As the other mentality. It's just—

01:00:10 Ben Host

It's a view of how the world can and should work—

01:00:13 John Host

Right.

01:00:14 Ben Host

—that is being laid on these kids in the same way that the previous—you know, their previous superior was laying a worldview on them.

01:00:24 John Host

Yeah, right! That woman who says like, you know, "Share with me what happened to you," and he's like, "You haven't been in war. How could you possibly ask—" I mean, he's so contemptuous of this adult woman. And then we see him—and I think this is maybe a little pandering to us—we see him kind of—not break down, but he starts to say, like, "I don't wanna talk about it because... I did some bad things and I—and you're not gonna like me."

But what if he didn't do that? What if he just sat there stone-faced? It's only troubling when combatants walk back into the world we know. There are definitely people in the United States who are funding this because the idea of "child soldier" is something they can grab ahold of, and understand as a sort of—I mean there's so many people brutalized in this conflict, and "child soldier" becomes a thing that you can...

I mean, you can bring a child soldier to the United States and—it's a very sympathetic situation that's understandable in a thumbnail. Nobody leaves a conflict like this unscathed.

01:01:35 Music Transition

Brief clip of "War."

War!
Huh!
Yeah!

01:01:38 Ben Host

A few years ago I was doing some filming for an NGO, and somebody was telling me about how a lot of these, like, big, you know, international NGOs that set out to do a public health thing will pick, like, vaccination against Disease X as a thing, because when they go back to their funders they can say "We vaccinated 60,000 people against Disease X," and it's like a very simple win.

Where it's like—

01:02:07 John Host

Right.

01:02:08 Ben Host

Like, the calculus is easily quantifiable. And like, "deprogramming child soldier" might be the same thing, where it's like, "Yeah, we got

like 300 kids at this camp, and like... 25 of 'em have gone to high school now." Or something like that.

01:02:27 Adam Host Yeah, where money is involved, your results need to be measurable.

01:02:31 John Host Yeah.

You've spent quite a bit of time in West Africa, Ben. More than we have. Was the—did this feel familiar to you?

01:02:40 Ben Host I haven't spent a ton of time in West Africa. I've spent more time in East Africa, but the... Like, what I'll say is that the house that he lives in and the idea that his father has some land at the beginning, to me meant that he was sort of toward the upper middle of the social stratification in his village at the beginning.

Like, they—you know. They had a house with like, doors and electricity, and... And like, that's not typical for most people in that part of the world. Like, there's lots of—you know, everybody has a house or whatever, but like, there're a lot of sort of unplanned, unformal—informal developments where people live in mud huts and they have one room for their entire family, and stuff.

So like, the way his family was presented read to me as like, he had quite a bright future ahead of him in that he had access to education, probably access to limited healthcare. He had some—you know. Some parents that really cared about him and stuff.

I—you know. *[Stifles laughter]* I have not been anywhere near a conflict like this, so I—*[sighs]*. I couldn't really speak to that, but the—it's so different from place to place that it's hard to know if the comparisons I have to make are entirely accurate or not.

01:04:08 Ben Host But it real—like, you know, what it really reminded me of was I went to a town in Ethiopia called Bahir Dar that was, uh—and visited some people's homes who were middle-class and would, you know, be astonishingly poor by American standards but were middle-class by the standards of that area.

And like, those rural places where—*[laughs]* the long arm of global capitalism doesn't seem to be, uh, touching yet, are interesting. Because you do see, like, Chinese construction companies, you know, building a bypass that you're like *[laughing]* "What the hell is this for?"

And like, that little subtle moment where there was just like, a Chinese businessman who was obviously semi-terrified to be there at the Supreme Commander's offices was—and then the real opulence of those offices. Like, those were fancy—that was a fancy place to be by anybody's standards. In some of the rooms, anyways.

And that's something that I felt was really well drawn and representative of the kind of disparity of wealth that I've seen.

01:05:32 John Host Yeah, the presence of the Chinese guy, although very brief in the movie, it really sets the—that moment apart. The Chinese presence in Africa, and in the development of Africa, the ongoing right now, is extraordinary and something that we're—there's not a lot of reporting on and we're—most Americans aren't aware of it.

01:05:57 Ben Host I mean it's the same kind of economic imperialism that we practice. They're—like, the Chinese are investing heavily in their relationships with African countries because of the resource wealth that they have, the untapped resource wealth that they have, and...

01:06:14 John Host They're just doing a better job of it than we are.

01:06:16 Ben Host Right. *[Laughs.]*

01:06:17 John Host In Africa.

01:06:18 Ben Host Précisément.

01:06:19 Clip Clip *[Crowd shouting.]*

Speaker: Who is your commander?!

01:06:22 Adam Host Well, no one can do a better job of rating a war film than the hosts of *Friendly Fire*. Each film on *Friendly Fire* gets its own custom rating system designed by me, based on an object that catches my eye in the film. And there is a great, great object in *Beasts of No Nation*.

Comes from that scene where they go and meet the supreme commander! Which, by the way, I wanted to note that if you're living on a diet of crickets and leaves, and then you grab a donut for each finger and eat all of those donuts, that is a recipe for some real grumble guts.

[Ben laughs quietly.]

01:07:02 John Host *[Laughing]* You're gonna have a stomach ache.

01:07:04 Adam Host The aftermath of that scene we don't see, but could be another scene of violence—

01:07:08 John Host Yeah.

01:07:09 Adam Host—in a certain way.

[All three laugh.]

01:07:12 Ben Host A kind of violence with which you're on intimate terms, Adam.

01:07:15 Adam Host Yeah.

[Ben laughs.]

This moment is punctuated by a lot of things. Some of them is that buffet. But another thing is the jacket that the Supreme Commander wears. The short sleeve, white suit jacket. You guys are big fans of the clothes in some of these war films.

01:07:38 John Host Mm-hm.

01:07:39 Adam Host What did you guys think of that jacket?

[Beat.]

[Stifling laughter] That jacket of course is going to be the rating system for this film.

01:07:44 Ben Host Wooow.

01:07:45 Adam Host And I'll tell you why in a moment.

01:07:46 John Host *[Laughs.]*

I don't like a lot of tropical wear. I know that it's a segment of menswear. I wear Hawaiian shirts almost exclusively from May to August, or I'm sorry, May to October. But all that kind of guayabera and short-sleeved—I mean the Bahamian short pants with a—as a component of a suit? I don't like it. I don't think you should show your skin.

[Ben laughs.]

I think that you should—from neck to wrists you should be covered at all times, unless in a Hawaiian shirt.

01:08:26 Adam Host There was a moment where J.Crew tried to convince the world that a suit could be worn with shorts.

01:08:31 John Host Yeah...

01:08:32 Adam Host And that was when I got off the J.Crew train. That moment.

01:08:36 Ben Host Wow.

01:08:37 John Host Yeah, it's the Bermuda thing.

01:08:38 Adam Host Can't do that. Not with these legs! *[Laughs.]*

01:08:40 Ben Host Not a fan of the work of Tom Brown?

01:08:43 Adam Host I don't have the calves that Ben does.

01:08:45 John Host You got off the J.Crew train and waved as Ben—

01:08:48 Adam Host *[Laughing]* Yeah.

01:08:49 John Host —went over the horizon?

[All three laugh.]

[John imitates a train horn.]

01:08:54 Adam Host Yeah, but I heard the next one's Uniqlo.

[Ben laughs.]

I'll catch that one.

[John laughs.]

Anyway. You know, a lot of a person's power is connoted by how they look, and Supreme Commander is one of those people. It's not just a big red sectional couch that you get to sleep on, or the buffet of snacks in the next room. As soon as he walks into the room he commands your attention. His—

01:09:21 John Host He could have had a uniform on!

01:09:23 Adam Host He—yeah, but he did not.

01:09:24 John Host He did not.

01:09:25 Adam Host You know why? Because the ideas that he were—that he's espousing are not military! In that moment. They're political. And you look at him and you can see that he is not... He is not a military general. He is a president, and that is what the white, short sleeves

suit jacket tells us.

And that's the sort of power that Idris Elba's character has! When you look at him, you know who he is. You know who those children are by seeing what they're wearing. That garment I think says a lot, and I think it's a film that says a lot with how it looks.

I don't know if we'll see a better-looking war film in this project. It is just... so incredible. Every frame so composed. The color choices are incredible shot to shot. I think everything is so intentional that it was almost fatiguing. It's fatiguing emotionally, but it's also fatiguing visually for that reason. I think you—I think three quarters of the way through you might forget how great-looking this is 'cause you might just be palate-shot. I think that was a comment that Ben made earlier on, like you just get overloaded on this stuff.

But I think in addition to how it looks, there might not be a more pure war film that we've seen on *Friendly Fire*, because you see it all. You see the pre-war calm and goodness of a person's life. You see their conscription and loss of innocence due to things they had nothing to do with. Like, war is visited upon Agu here, and when he loses his family, he loses his innocence, and he loses everything else in very short order, and he's turned into something totally different than what he was in the beginning.

01:11:14 Adam Host

I think Imagination TV is such an interesting place to start in this film because you can't program a child to be a warrior without their inherent ability to imagine. Like, you're manipulating a child's ability to do that and using it for these violent ends, and that's sort of the thing that Agu shuts off at the end when he has that moment with the therapist, right?

Like, "I don't want to go back to that place of imagination." Like, in order to awaken those stories in him means to awaken that part of his psyche, and he just can't do it.

That part about trying to live post-war is the final chapter in this war story. And its continuity is one of the things that makes the film great. You see beginning, middle, and end. And its realism is hard to watch, but like, I don't consider it the same way that I consider *Come and See*. I think it's a better film. It may be because of its gloss.

For all of those reasons, this is why this is as good as war films get for me. And I am going to give it all five suit jackets for that reason. It's just beautifully done, and an incredible story. And a hard story. But all of that works together for me.

01:12:37 Ben Host

I will also give it... five jackets, for the same reason. I was wrecked by this movie. I was a heap of tears on the couch at the end of it. And...

01:12:50 Adam Host

Did your wife watch it with you?

01:12:51 Ben Host

She did.

01:12:52 Adam Host

Wow!

01:12:53 Ben Host

And she was as well. It was hard for both of us to watch. And I think that it's important to know that you will be wrecked by the time you're

done watching this movie. But I think it's really worth watching. And you know, the—[sighs].

When he's talking to her at the end, and you know, it may—you may be right John, that it's a bit, like, of emotional pandering or kind of, you know, catharsis that's not always wrought by people who go through this. But you feel—when he's thinking about her in his head as a small child, and he is an old man—like you understand how different his perspective on this is from hers.

Like, you really feel like you've been through it with him. Like, you feel like you have seen the things that he has seen. And it's an illusion, but it's... an effective illusion. And then when he says, like, that he's a—some kind of beast or a devil, and that he really did do bad things, and that—I mean, that just—it just guts you.

And the idea that there is some kind of life after that, that he—you know. That—and it's all—it is only implied by the fact that he's able to let his shoulders relax and run into the surf and play with the other boys. But the idea that there is some way to rehabilitate a child like that is like, very—boy, if the movie had ended on any less optimistic note, [laughs] I would just be lying in bed right now, staring at the ceiling fan, you know?

I think it's one of the great movies we've watched, and I don't think I would have put it on without this project, and I'm glad I did.

01:14:52 John

Host

Sort of testimony to the breadth that the appellation "war movie" covers. To put this in the same feed as *Kelly's Heroes*—

[Ben laughs.]

—or *M*A*S*H*, or even *Bridge at Remagen*... You know. This is one of the films that tries to depict what war is, but no one is a hero here. No one ever steps in and stops an atrocity. No one shows some superhuman character. And in a way, by the end of the movie, it also feels like maybe there's no villain. Even the Commandant, left there ranting in his chair, you have sympathy for.

And in a way you have sympathy for him through the whole film. Without him and his organizing principle—I mean, Agu was 15 minutes away from getting eaten by a leopard. So... you know, he did give these kids a home and an education, and—I mean, brutal—in a brutal world. The Commandant didn't invent this world. He's not—and we see at the end of the movie, he's not the political leader, either! He's been given a job.

But to watch this movie is, I really feel like, a profound experience. And it—and the idea that this film didn't have a wide release because AMC Theaters didn't want—or wanted to punish Netflix is just so base. And a squandered opportunity. We've seen movies before that we felt like were underappreciated or sort of astonishing, and they're often smaller-budget movies or—you know, what you would call "small" movies, that have a enormous impact, and this is one.

Adam, I felt like you were so eloquent in describing what made this movie special. And I often will get halfway through a movie and feel

like I've got a rating for it. And I get that feeling of like, "Oh—" you know, "Please, movie," like, either "Don't disappoint me" as the—as we wind to a close, or in some cases, you know, *[laughs]* as I'm formulating my rating I'm like, "Come on, movie! You can do better than this!" You know, "Surprise me by the end."

01:17:39 John Host But from start to finish, this film has a consistent quality that you just don't often see. Performances, the look and feel of the movie, the message of it, whatever that message is. The message is sort of—the—you don't feel the hand of the director in the sense that he's not moralizing. That—and when I said that little teeny bit at the end there was pandering, I mean it was the smallest bit.

Ben, you nailed it. It was not pandering that at all felt like it disgraced the movie. There's just no pandering! It's just straight ahead. And there's no brutality for the sake of brutality, either! Everything in the movie serves it, and it's absolutely a five—short-sleeved white jacket movie. I just endorse it emphatically.

And we've talked a lot about it being a brutal watch. I think it's—I think in a way it's less brutal than some other movies we've seen. It's very emotionally affecting, but you're not—there's nothing in that—you don't see anyone's brains. There's no guts in this—you know, there's no, like, gratuitous violence and blood.

And I often find those movies, where people are—like the Mel Gibson movie where you're just being splattered with Spaghetti-Os all through the film is infinitely worse, but it's not emotionally affecting, because you feel like "This is stupid."

01:19:24 Adam Host

Right.

01:19:25 John Host

And what this movie does is it doesn't subject you to that much on-screen violence. It just tears your heart out. So yeah. Strongest endorsement.

01:19:37 Adam Host

There's one last endorsement we need to give before the show is over, and that's the endorsement we give to a guy.

Lot of guys in this movie! We only know a few of them that well. Ben, who's your guy?

01:19:52 Ben Host

My guy is Dike. The—he's the star of Imagination TV at the beginning of the movie.

01:20:00 Adam Host

He—his was the face. He's got such a great face, right?

01:20:03 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Ben: Yeah.

John: Such a fun little guy. Yeah.

01:20:06 Ben Host

He steals the show, and I think that his establishment early on as a friend and then—you know, his abandonment once the danger becomes imminent, you know? Like, as a character, we don't see him anymore after, you know, we see the men meeting in the church about what to do now that the buffer zone is evaporating.

And I don't think we see Dike after that. But I thought about him—

01:20:37 Adam Host

A weaker film would have brought him back, huh?

01:20:40 Ben Host Right. I thought about him all through this film.

01:20:42 Adam Host Yeah.

01:20:43 Ben Host And what happened to him, and what befell him. He seemed too small to become—to—you know, to be useful as a soldier, but maybe he was swept up the same way that Agu was. Maybe he was killed. Maybe he made it with his family to the city. Very hard to know, and I think that that was very—very deft, as a choice.

[Laughing] And he's also just the most charming little guy.

He knows how to do the kung-fu, he knows how to dance. He's got it all.

01:21:19 Adam Host Hell of a salesman.

01:21:21 Ben Host *[Laughing]* Yeah.

Adam, did you have a guy?

01:21:26 Adam Host Your guy is really great. Uh—*[sighs]*. My guy... not as great.

[All three laugh.]

There is a man in this—

01:21:36 Ben Host Well it's not a competition, Adam. *[Laughs.]*

01:21:37 Adam Host There's a man in this film that you can't help but notice. Because he is mostly naked, and that—and by that, of course, I mean Tripod. The shredded naked dude. One of the Commandant's lieutenants.

You get the sense that he is carrying out—well, you don't—it's not suggested. Like, you see many of the atrocities that he commits. But I think I'm gonna make him my guy for the specific reason of... of like, he's one of the guys that Cary Fukunaga recruited from Sierra Leone and the Liberian Civil War. Like, he was in the Liberian Armed Forces during that civil war.

This guy—Anointed Wesseh is the actor's name. And he insisted, as a choice, that he be naked in his scenes. And you know, this film is filled with real faces of people who were there, and real bodies who have experienced war trauma. And occasionally, great big penises.

[Ben laughs.]

And Tripod was all of those things! Like, I found him in every frame that he was in. He was just an incredible-looking dude. By any measure. And I'm making the actor my guy, specifically not Tripod the character my guy, just because he represents a big part of this film! He's a guy who was there. And he's a guy who's put in front of camera, and he's sharing a frame with Idris Elba.

01:23:13 John Host His name—his actual given name—is Anointed Wesseh.

01:23:18 Adam Host Yeah. And I think he's a proxy for many of the other actors in this film, and I just want to recognize his contribution to the film. Unclothed or otherwise, like—hundreds of people were in this film, a lot like Anointed Wesseh, doing great and difficult work.

You know—like, Agu at the end is talking all about how difficult it is to leave that part of their—of his life behind. Anointed Wesseh is made to relive it in this film. And his is a story that is shared by 200 other people in this film. So think about that.

01:23:57 John Host Well, going into this segment—uh, this almost never happens, but Anointed Wesseh was my guy also.

01:24:05 Adam Host Ohhh!

01:24:06 John Host He's astounding.

01:24:07 Adam Host Yeah.

01:24:08 John Host But we don't—I don't take my guy from you. My guy and your guy cannot be the same guy. I do wanna also give some props to Anointed.

But in that case, my guy is the witch woman.

01:24:24 Adam Host Hmm.

01:24:25 John Host The crazy lady from the village who is so... She's so ranty and so dismissed in her first appearance in the film. But then she plays a pivotal role, and you don't get a full sense that the government troops are knowingly exploiting her lack of connection to reality in order to just—you know, use her as an accuser.

But she's directly responsible for Agu's father and brother being killed. And she's—she stands in this super important kind of position where, when the tides change and the system that used to be what you felt like was the most dependable aspect of your life—the government, your father, the culture of the village, what everyone knew, which is that this person is respectable and that person isn't...

When that's overturned and suddenly you have a situation where the person with the thinnest grasp on reality is being treated as an authority, where it's enough that one person accuse you of something and that is a life and death accusation... You know, that group of men is firing squadded because they pull her out, and they're using her as the authority.

"Who are these guys?!" And she's like, "I've never seen them before! They're rebels!" And these are the men of the village! So she plays a major role in that moment, and I think it's... It's the point at which you realize that everything's upside down. And it happened in an instant.

01:26:24 John Host All the power that Agu's father had as a land owner and as someone who had authority, and Agu's education, and all these things. They're just upside down. The witch is the one making the call.

01:26:42 Adam Host The last person you wanna see in that scene.

01:26:44 John Host Yeah. Right. So she's my guy.

01:26:47 Ben Host Good guy.

01:26:48 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."

War!
Huh!
Yeah!

01:26:51 Ben Host Do you guys wanna pick our next movie? Or are we done?
[All three laugh.]

01:26:55 John Host *[Laughing and far away]* Done with the show?

01:26:56 Ben Host Did we get to the end of *Friendly Fire*?
[He and John laugh. John still sounds far away.]

01:27:01 John Host Where's my dice?!
[For the next several lines, John's voice comes to us from various distances, and we can hear him moving things around.]

01:27:03 Adam Host Oh no, John. Tell me you didn't lose it.

01:27:06 John Host Ohhh, my—

01:27:07 Adam Host See, this is why I should have held on to the die and not just left it here.

01:27:12 John Host My villainous little child took it.
[Rustling.]
Let me check in here.

01:27:18 Adam Host What we need is one of those Bluetooth trackers for it. Like, we need a little Tile.
[Ben laughs.]

01:27:23 John Host A little Tile connected to the die.

01:27:25 Adam Host So you—you don't wanna lose your keys; you don't wanna lose your die.

01:27:29 John Host Look around here.

01:27:32 Adam Host What, you think I'm gonna miss a grapefruit-sized, green die on the table?

01:27:37 John Host Hang on.

01:27:38 Adam Host She's messing with forces she can't understand.

01:27:41 John Host Man. Oh, wait, there it is! I found it!

01:27:44 Ben Host Yaaay!

01:27:45 Adam Host Heeey!

01:27:46 John Host Yaaaaay.
[Adam and Ben laugh quietly. John comes back to the microphone.]
Okay!

01:27:53 Adam Host Boy, that was close.

01:27:54 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Yeah, that was close.
Adam: We almost didn't have another show.

01:27:56 John Host That was close. We can't move forward without it! Alright. Here we go!

[Die rolls for a few seconds.]

Ninety-three! Ninety-three. The magic die.

01:28:12 Ben Host We're staying on theme. Another extraordinarily brutal film.

01:28:15 Music Music *[Intense, dramatic music plays over the next line.]*

01:28:16 Ben Host This is a World War II film from 2011, directed by Joe Johnston. It is *Captain America: The First Adventure!*

[Music ends.]

01:28:25 John Host Oh no... This isn't a war movie! Come on! Why is this not a pork chop movie?

01:28:32 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* I don't know, man! You're the one that split them up!
[Laughs.] This was on there from before then.

01:28:38 John Host Oh...

01:28:39 Adam Host This is like a Mentos dropped into a Diet Coke.

[John and Ben laugh.]

This is the palate cleanser we need, right?

01:28:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeah.

John: *Captain America: First Adventure...*

01:28:49 John Host I—you know, I ended up seeing this in the theaters because I felt some nerd pressure—

[Ben laughs.]

—to be fully acquainted with the Marvel Universe at that point in my life.

01:28:59 Adam Host Hmm.

01:29:00 Ben Host Yeah.

01:29:01 John Host Have—you guys I'm sure both saw it, because you're teenage boys.

01:29:05 Adam Host No! I am not a consumer of the MCU.

01:29:10 John Host Wow. What about—Ben, surely you did.

01:29:13 Ben Host I did see this movie in the theaters, but I don't remember anything about it at all.

01:29:19 John Host Oh, what an endorsement!

01:29:20 Ben Host I saw the last—you know, *The Adventures and Games*, and there was like, stuff in it about Captain America that was like—I don't—I don't know what this stuff is! *[Laughs.]*

01:29:30 John Host I remember some things about it because there's a pretty good special effect at the beginning—

01:29:35 Ben Host Hm!

01:29:36 Music Music "War" is fading in.

01:29:37 John Host —that stuck with me as an example of pretty good special effects—

based filmmaking. But other than that, uh, yeah. I feel like... went in one ear and out the other.

01:29:49 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Yeah. Well, let's see if this forgettable film—
[John laughs.]

—makes a case for itself in a re-watch. Next week on *Friendly Fire!* So we'll leave it with Robs from here. For John Roderick and Adam Pranica, I've been Ben Harrison. To the victor go the spoiler alerts.

01:30:06 Music Music "War" continues, playing quietly as Rob speaks.
*Absolutely—
—nothing!*

Listen to me!

War!

It ain't nothing but a heartbreaker

01:30:12 Rob Producer *Friendly Fire* is a Maximum Fun podcast hosted by Benjamin Harrison, Adam Pranica, and John Roderick. It's produced by me, Rob Schulte.

Our theme music is "War," by Edwin Starr, courtesy of Stone Agate Music, and our logo art is by Nick Ditmore.

Friendly Fire is made possible by the support of our listeners. Like you! And you can make sure that the show continues by going to MaximumFun.org/donate. As an added bonus, you'll receive our monthly pork chop episode, as well as all the fantastic bonus content from Maximum Fun.

If you'd like to discuss the show online, please use the hashtag [#FriendlyFire](https://twitter.com/FriendlyFire). You can find Ben on Twitter at [@BenjaminAhr](https://twitter.com/BenjaminAhr). Adam is [@CutForTime](https://twitter.com/CutForTime). John is [@johnroderick](https://twitter.com/johnroderick), and I'm [@robkschulte](https://twitter.com/robkschulte).

Thanks! We'll see you next week.

01:31:05 Music Music "War" continues, playing quietly under the dialogue.
Is there no place for them today?

They say we must fight—

01:31:10 John Host Is that the doorbell?

01:31:12 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** Sounds like a—

John: Hang on.

Adam: —like a grandfather clock. Or a doorbell.

John: Hang on just a second, Ben.

Adam: Okay.

01:31:15 Ben Host Yep.

[Music fades out.]

[Pause.]

01:31:18 Adam Host *[Singing to the tune of a grandfather clock]* Boom, boom, boom, boom...

01:31:21 Ben Host *[Laughs.]*

[Finishing the tune] Sorry aaabout this, Rob!

[He and Adam laugh.]

01:31:27 Adam Host *[As the hour toll]* Rob!

[Ben laughs.]

01:31:31 Music Transition A cheerful guitar chord.

01:31:33 Speaker 1 Guest MaximumFun.org.

01:31:34 Speaker 2 Guest Comedy and culture.

01:31:36 Speaker 3 Guest Artist owned—

01:31:37 Speaker 4 Guest —audience supported.