

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 Music Music

Woodwind music with tambourine.

00:00:03 Ben Harrison Host

“And when Alexander saw the breadth of his domain he wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer.” We’ve all heard this quote. I’m pretty sure I’ve even paraphrased it on this show. Would you be surprised to know that while it is a pretty well-documented historical fact that Alexander sat down and had a cry when he’d conquered everything he could, this precise wording, the wording that I considered to be definitive, originated in the mouth of Hans Gruber, the bad guy from *Die Hard*?

I just found that out! My mind is fucking blown. History, man. Right? I kind of think Hans Gruber was cherry picking a moment from history to make his own point about the present, which in his case was a heist he was pulling during the Christmas party at the Nakatomi Plaza.

That moment where Alexander cries isn’t really in this movie, although it purports to tell us—through Ptolemy’s recollection—about the life and death of Alexander the Great, a real precocious young Macedonian who rampaged around the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and parts of India in the mid-300s BCE. You sort of wonder if that moment served as some kind of impetus for Oliver Stone, the film’s director, who in the early 2000s was still a fairly well-thought-of director. I mean. he had a reputation for grinding his weird political axe, but he had done a number of big-budget movies with mainstream success and a couple of smaller, more artsy movies that people liked.

This movie seems to thumb its nose at the big tentpole blockbuster style of this new era of filmmaking, opting instead to model itself structurally on the movie palace epics of the past. But this is not a movie that would have been made in the forties or fifties. One of Stone’s preoccupations in telling this story is to show us how different sexual mores were in the ancient past. At the time in 2004, the civil rights movement surrounding the LGBTQ community was building a head of steam in opposition to the Bible-thumping creeps in the George W. Bush White House. So instead of being the kind of manly man that “traditional family values” people should like to project onto the great men of history, Alexander—played by Colin Farrell—is slight, graceful, pretty... and he fucks boys.

00:02:11 Ben Host

And in addition to conquering that ass, he conquers a ton of the world in this film. In between set pieces of palace intrigue and steamy, non-heteronormative harem scenes, the Greeks subjugate the known world in the name of spreading their brand of freedom. And that’s the other thing that feels very 2004 here: when we are setting up a constitution and a democratic government in Afghanistan, and another one in Iraq, for people who never asked for us to come do that, this is an entertainment that is entering our multiplexes. Stone, a bit like Hans Gruber, would like us to see what he sees in history.

Conquer your fear, and I promise you will conquer death. Today on

Friendly Fire: Alexander.

[Music fades into the next song.]

00:03:01 Music Transition "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.

*War!
Huh!
Yeah!
What is it good for?!
Absolutely—
—nothing!
Uh-huh!*

*War!
Huh!
Yeah!
What is it good for?!
Absolutely—
—nothing!*

Say it again, y'all!

War!

00:03:18 Ben Host Welcome to *Friendly Fire*, the war movie podcast where we live by the edict "Why buy clothes when you can podcast naked?" I'm Ben Harrison.

00:03:27 Adam Pranica Host I'm Adam Pranica.

00:03:29 John Roderick Host And I'm John Roderick. Is that a quote from the movie? "Why buy clothes when you can podcast naked?"

00:03:35 Ben Host I think they say "Why buy uniforms when you can fight naked?" at some point.

[Music fades out.]

00:03:40 John Host Ohhh, sure.

00:03:41 Ben Host You know, 'cause it's like—they're Greeks, and they're very libertine, and they do a lot of... *[laughs]*. They do a lot of things naked!

00:03:48 John Host They do a lot of naked fighting.

00:03:50 Ben Host They do the Olympics naked!

00:03:52 John Host Uh-huh.

00:03:53 Adam Host There's some naked fighting between Rosario Dawson and Colin Farrell in this film. That's for sure.

00:03:58 Ben Host Yeah, that's an intense scene!

00:04:00 Adam Host We should be clear about which version we watched, right? We watched the longest version.

00:04:07 John Host The four—there are four versions of the film. There's the theatrical cut.

00:04:11 Adam Host Yeah.

00:04:12 John Host Which Oliver Stone felt didn't achieve his vision.

00:04:15 Ben Host Right.

00:04:17 John Host And then there are three different director's cuts.

00:04:20 Adam Host Yeah!

00:04:21 Ben Host Yeah.

00:04:22 John Host The director's cut, the final cut... So director's cut a year later. Final cut three years later. And then in 2013... the ultimate cut.

00:04:35 Adam Host I love this! This film was not well-received when it was in the theaters, but it was one of those films that when it hit DVD became very popular!

00:04:44 John Host Really?

00:04:45 Ben Host Yeah, it's like one of the most successful DVD releases that Warner Brothers has in their catalogue.

00:04:50 John Host Wow!

00:04:51 Adam Host It was that popularity that encouraged Oliver Stone to keep releasing cuts.

00:04:56 Ben Host To keep cutting on his film!

00:04:58 John Host *[Laughs.]* I guess so! I mean, it's amazing. The longer you make the film, the less likely people will be to finish watching it.

00:05:06 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** *[Laughs.]* Yeah. Is this the longest movie we've watched so far?

John: The more likely—*[laughs]*. Oh, for sure! It's three and a half hours.

Ben: I watched this on an 11-hour flight, and...

John: And it still seemed long?

Ben: The film seemed longer than the flight.

[John laughs.]

00:05:17 Ben Host It seemed like—I couldn't tell which seemed like it was taking longer. *[Laughs.]*

00:05:21 John Host If your audience doesn't finish the film, I think they're more likely to think that it is a good movie. Because there's that element of doubt. Right? They're like—

00:05:32 Adam Host That's not how it works!

00:05:33 John Host "I think this movie was probably pretty good!"

[Ben laughs.]

00:05:35 Adam Host Ask anyone who's walked out of a film what they thought of the film they were walking out of, and I think you'd get a different—

00:05:40 John Host But I did—see, I don't think people would force quit this movie. I think they would just run out of steam.

00:05:45 Ben Host It just lulls them to sleep. *[Laughs.]*

00:05:47 John Host Yeah, right around the intermission, which comes at the point in the movie where it's already a really long movie.

[Ben laughs.]

I think that's where people would like, pause it, go make some popcorn, and then never come back.

00:05:59 Adam Host Question for the group: none of us took this down in one sitting, right?

00:06:02 Ben Host I did!

00:06:03 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Yeah, I—well, he was on a 11-hour flight.

Adam: Like—you didn't—

Ben: I was strapped into a seat!

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:06:06 Adam Host No, but I mean, on a—like, you didn't close the movie and play a crossword for an hour and then go—come back to the movie later?

00:06:15 John Host Ben? Did you?

00:06:16 Ben Host I watched it straight through.

00:06:17 John Host Whooooa.

00:06:19 Ben Host I didn't even get up to go to the bathroom, which is unprecedented. I think it may be the longest I've ever gone without going to the bathroom in my entire life.

00:06:25 Adam Host Now I really don't believe you. That—

[Adam and Ben laugh.]

00:06:27 John Host Did you sit—wait, wait, did you sit through the intermission music? 'Cause the intermission title card is up there for five minutes while the music, like, gradually swells and swells!

00:06:36 Adam Host I've seen Ben get up to use the bathroom on a 35-minute flight before.

[All three laugh.]

That's crazy.

00:06:44 Ben Host I will admit that I watched the intermission, because I thought that the—I thought that the little graphics treatment that they gave it was kinda fun!

00:06:53 Adam Host Pleasant.

00:06:54 John Host Wow.

00:06:55 Ben Host It might have been my favorite part of the movie. *[Laughs.]*

00:06:57 John Host He was so bored! I watched it in—I watched it more or less continuously, but I paused it about five different times. I got up and made popcorn. I actually spilled the popcorn on the kitchen floor, so I had to...

00:07:06 Ben Host Mm-hm.

00:07:08 John Host Took me a minute to decide whether I was gonna scoop the popcorn kernel-by-kernel back into the bowl or just sweep it into the garbage.

00:07:13 Adam Host Yeah.

00:07:14 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Here's a question.

John: And I decided to save the popcorn.

00:07:17 John Host So that took five minutes.

00:07:19 Ben Host Have more popcorn kernels been consumed by all of the people who have seen this movie, or—or did the movie use more ketchup packets in its production? I'm asking for a kernels-to-packets comparison.

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:07:34 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** If you—

Adam: Are you counting digital packets? Because there's a lot of digital packets.

[Ben laughs.]

John: There's a lot of digital packets. There's sex packets, too.

Ben: Hmm.

Adam: Mm!

Ben: Wow.

John: If you—yeah, thank you. If you—

Adam: Are you the packet man in this metaphor?

John: If you—

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:07:45 John Host If you don't watch the movie all the way through, you miss I think probably 30% of the ketchup packets and digital packets, and probably another 5% of the sex packets that happen in that final battle scene in India. That—which is the—

00:08:01 Ben Host Oh, yeah.

00:08:02 John Host Which is not only the bloodiest scene in the film, but also one of the—it's one of the few times where I have looked away.

00:08:08 Ben Host Yeah.

00:08:09 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** When the elephant stepped on the dude's head I was like, *[wearily]* "Alright! Okay! Okay!"

Ben: Yeah.

Adam: That was... awesome.

00:08:16 Ben Host Hacking off an elephant's trunk was really upsetting to me, too.

[Adam laughs.]

00:08:19 John Host Yeah! Yeah, the elephant losing his trunk, I was like "Okay. Come on."

00:08:23 Ben Host Yeah.

00:08:24 John Host "Come on now. We're three hours into this movie. Do we really need—"

00:08:26 Adam Host As a—

[John laughs.]

00:08:27 Ben Host But beloved Twitter user @Yashar would fucking hate that.

00:08:32 Adam Host As a platform for battle, an elephant is pretty amazing.

00:08:36 John Host Really exciting.

00:08:37 Adam Host Yeah!

00:08:39 John Host When you're in a forest and you hear sounds like that—can you imagine your first experience with an elephant being that it is charge—a war elephant?

00:08:46 Adam Host They foreshadow the magic of this a little bit when Alexander's crew encounters the monkeys, and they're like, "Oh! They're like little people!"

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:08:55 John Host "Little hairy men!"

00:08:56 Adam Host And you think like, "Well eventually they're gonna run into an elephant. What the fuck are they gonna think about that?"

[John and Ben laugh.]

And true to your idea, like, they are terrified by the elephants.

00:09:05 John Host Yes.

00:09:06 Adam Host And rightfully! They look monstrous!

00:09:07 John Host Yes. Although I think maybe there is historical evidence that—at least I've seen engravings where Darius used elephants in that initial big battle, the one that sort of established Alexander as a empire conqueror.

00:09:23 Adam Host Yeah.

00:09:24 Ben Host Hm.

00:09:25 John Host So I—it feels like maybe these Macedonians would have seen elephants before that, but it's—but it was nice for them to—for Oliver Stone to like, keep that in reserve.

00:09:34 Adam Host Right.

00:09:35 John Host I should say—yeah, like the Battle of Gaugamela, there were—I don't know. Maybe there are some nineteenth century Orientalist engravings that showed elephants, but... I did not—I have to confess. I did not remember or maybe even know that this was an Oliver Stone film—

[Adam laughs.]

—until the credits rolled.

00:09:53	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Adam & Ben: Wow!
00:09:54	John	Host	And the first—the <u>first</u> thing that comes up on the screen is "Directed by Oliver Stone," except it's in Greek and then it rearranges itself.
00:10:01	Adam	Host	Yeah! I liked that.
			<i>[Ben laughs.]</i>
00:10:02	John	Host	And I was like, "OHHHH! Oliver Stone!"
00:10:04	Ben	Host	Yeah.
00:10:05	John	Host	'Cause through the whole movie I was like "Who is <u>directing</u> this, like—"
00:10:09	Ben	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> "Why does this seem like it's kind of about Vietnam?"
00:10:12	John	Host	It's so strange! It's such a—
00:10:14	Adam	Host	It's very <i>Heaven & Earth</i> -y, isn't it?
00:10:15	John	Host	It's such a hash! I mean it's like, <u>really</u> crazy!
00:10:18	Adam	Host	Yeah.
00:10:19	John	Host	Like, it—it's like going to Beth's and getting the 12-egg omelette. You're thinking "What the—?"
			<i>[Ben laughs.]</i>
			"What else can they <u>put</u> in this? It's got cigarette ash in it..."
00:10:25	Clip	Clip	<i>[Sounds of struggle.]</i>
			Speaker 1: Don't worry, Alexander. I'm on your side.
00:10:30	Ben	Host	The India stuff especially felt like it was a direct continuation of his Vietnam work. I mean the line about it being pure butchery and that we'd never be men again was...
00:10:43	Adam	Host	Yeah!
00:10:44	Ben	Host	Felt <u>very</u> Vietnam to me.
00:10:46	Adam	Host	One of the reasons this film was reviled was the Anthony Hopkins voiceover.
00:10:51	John	Host	The Ptolemy voiceover is very—is very, uh, Charlie Sheen.
00:10:55	Adam	Host	There have been some revisionist reviews of this film since the subsequent cuts have come out. And I think a longer film allows more oxygen for an Anthony Hopkins voiceover to exist, and I think it works better. Many people have said it works better for its length now.
00:11:10	John	Host	In the three-and-a-half-hour one.
00:11:12	Adam	Host	That line delivered by Anthony Hopkins I thought was <u>great</u> .

[All three laugh.]

That's exactly who you want to say that! You don't want Charlie Sheen saying that!

00:11:21 John Host No.

00:11:22 Ben Host No.

00:11:23 Adam Host You want Anthony Hopkins saying that!

00:11:24 Ben Host Or, you know, you don't want Colin Farrell saying it either.
[Chuckles.]

00:11:27 John Host His—Anthony Hopkins as Ptolemy narrating the events from 40 years after the fact... I thought was an interesting device, right? 'Cause Ptolemy and his reign in Egypt is all super fascinating and interesting to connect back to Alexander. You know, he was Cleopatra's great great-great-great-grandfather or whatever. Right? I mean, he's like—the way that the different—

00:11:53 Adam Host Gotta respect that seed.

00:11:54 John Host Right? See, respect the seed.

[Ben and Adam laugh.]

The way that the fracturing of Alexander's empire turned into all this half a dozen other empires that we've—

00:12:06 Adam Host Yeah!

00:12:07 John Host —that we maybe even know better. Super interesting.

00:12:09 Ben Host Yeah.

00:12:10 John Host But the way that the movie itself, within itself, kept jumping back 20 years then forward 10 then back 13 then forward 9... We see movies do this all the time! Jump around in time. But I felt like the way it was done here did not—I wish it—I wish they would just like, go forward and back and have some other way of letting us know that we were seeing child Alexander or older Alexander.

00:12:34 Adam Host Was the first cut the linear cut? Has there ever been a linear cut of this film?

00:12:38 Ben Host I don't think so. I mean, I think that that's, like, a technique that's very useful in some movies, because you're showing like, formative childhood experiences and how they led to the kind of shit that somebody gets up to as an adult. But it's very disorienting to go back 40 years, then forward 13, then back 5, then forward 9, you know, like—you really lose track of where you are in the timeline if you're not, you know, totally awake, like... I wasn't—

00:13:11 John Host Agreed.

00:13:12 Ben Host —[laughing] when I watched this movie.

I think that it is like, really interesting to see like, formative childhood moments like sitting at the knee of Aristotle and like, receiving the racism of the ancient Greeks as your, like, foundational idea of understanding the value of people in the wider world. Like, that's really—that's a really crazy thing to think about!

00:13:37 John Host Yeah, I loved the—um, some of the scenes. Right? I agree that a lot of those scenes were cool and belonged in the movie. It was more just the title cards and the fact that we were jumping around in time in ways that—there was never a thing to—there was never—it was never clear whether we were returning to the present moment of the

film, or whether we were returning to three weeks before the present moment of the film that we'd just left. I mean it was just a little too... garbled.

- 00:14:05 Ben Host Is it meant to be that the present is the Ptolemy stuff, and that this is all kind of like, 40-year-old vague memories? Like...
- 00:14:14 John Host Yeahhh, but—but I—
- 00:14:16 Adam Host That's it exactly.
- 00:14:17 John Host But I don't think that's a very good... I don't think that's very good in a three-and-a-half-hour film for there to be no center except for the bookend.
- 00:14:25 Adam Host I disagree. I think if—just regardless of what a film is about, if you're making a project that's three and a half hours and you expect someone to sit there all the way through it, rapt, I think you need to disrupt their attention somehow. And I think jumping around the timeline is a effective way to do it.
- 00:14:44 John Host I think the word you're looking for is irregardless.

[Adam and Ben laugh.]

I do—well, the—*[laughs]*. I—they're—I mean at the point at which we're looking at teenage Alexander as portrayed by fully grown Colin Farrell but with a different haircut... having a passionate argument with Angelina Jolie, his mother, who in real life is only six months older than Colin Farrell...

[Ben and John laugh.]

- 00:15:14 Ben Host They didn't even like, brush talc into her temples.
- 00:15:16 John Host *[Laughs.]* It was—I was very much like, "Alright, okay, okay, we're just gonna—we're just—I'm with you. I'm with—" I mean, I almost—the only reason that's believable is that Angelina Jolie has a kind of ageless...
- 00:15:28 Adam Host Yeah. I believe she actually is Olympias.

[Ben laughs.]

- 00:15:32 John Host Yeah! Like an ageless cruelty to her, right?
- 00:15:34 Adam Host Yeah.
- 00:15:35 John Host She's just—has a cruelty that is... that you believe she's Colin Farrell's mother, even though like, they're both 28 years old during the filming of this. *[Laughs.]*
- 00:15:42 Ben Host Is this cruelty that you're projecting onto her because she doesn't know who you are? *[Laughs.]*
- 00:15:47 John Host Well no, I would suggest that Angelina Jolie as an actor, right, went through a brief period where she was cast as beautiful ingénue. And then at a surprisingly young age started to be cast by Hollywood in these roles of like... like, epic villainess, you know, sort of "mother of dragons, woman covered with asps." Even when she was a—even when she was a adventure star, there was an element to her—I don't think Hollywood can handle Angelina Jolie is what I'm saying.
- 00:16:23 Adam Host *Adventure Star* being the working title of *Tomb Raider*?

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:16:28 John Host Well no, what was the one where she and Brad Pitt did shoot 'em ups with each other and that was where they met?

00:16:32 Adam Host Oh yeah!

00:16:33 John Host Right?

00:16:34 Adam Host Yeah!

00:16:35 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** I don't know.

Ben: *Mr. & Mrs. Smith.*

00:16:36 John Host Yeah, she—I want you to imagine, like, anybody her—of her generation. Like a fellow actor of her age and time, who kind of got—I wouldn't say sidelined, but definitely like, typecast as someone pretty wicked.

00:16:58 Ben Host As a "witchy woman"?

00:16:59 John Host Yeah. *[Half-heartedly singing]* See how high she fliies.

00:17:03 Ben Host Mm.

00:17:04 Adam Host It feels like she for a while, like, was Jessica Chastaining. But did not have the roles that a Jessica Chastain gets now, you know? Like there wasn't that option for her professionally. So she was sort of typecast into "snake charmer woman," like you're saying. Like, they could have badassed her up! And made her a CIA operative!

[Ben laughs.]

You know?

00:17:32 John Host I think that's—yeah! I think that's what she would have probably chosen for herself.

00:17:37 Adam Host Yeah. Had her career existed ten years later, I think that's where she goes, professionally.

00:17:44 Clip Transition **Speaker 1:** One thing an army knows quickly in their bones is which way the gods are blowing.

00:17:50 Adam Host I'm so curious about the theatrical cut of this film. Also I'll never go back and re-watch the theatrical cut. But one of the ways that that cut was reviled—

[Ben laughs.]

—was the Angelina Jolie performance, as well as everyone's performance.

00:18:04 John Host Really?

00:18:05 Adam Host Like, this was a universally Raspberried film. And hers was one of the parts that was critically kneecapped. But in a longer extruded story like the one that we saw in this new cut, I was totally rapt by her! Like, I thought all of her scenes were really powerful and interesting!

00:18:27 John Host Angelina?

00:18:28 Adam Host Yeah!

00:18:29 John Host Honestly, I thought the acting in this movie was pretty good with the exception of the, like, super-duper crazy, um—*[exhales thoughtfully]* performance of Colin Farrell that alternated for me between a like, strange Mel Gibson impression—

[Ben laughs.]

—like an impression of Mel Gibson when Mel Gibson had gone off the rails already?

[Ben laughs again.]

00:18:54 Adam Host Uh-huh.

00:18:55 John Host Like, crazy eyes Mel Gibson. And then other times he reminded me of like, late seventies Eddie Van Halen.

00:19:00 Adam Host Ooh!

00:19:01 John Host With a—with blond—with a blond wig.

00:19:04 Adam Host He did have that haircut.

00:19:06 John Host Right? He did—he did a weird—he had a weird Eddie Van Halen vibe. From the period where you liked Eddie, before he started to be like a weird shit talker.

00:19:16 Adam Host Uh-huh.

00:19:17 John Host Right? Back when he was just playing “Eruption” and like... So he—when he was—when Colin Farrell was good in this movie, I was like, “Eddie!” And when he was bad I was like, “Aw, Mel! No, I didn’t wanna see Mel Gibson in this!”

00:19:29 Adam Host But were the Mel parts the parts where shit is getting awful as they journey into India? Because you can accept a degradation of his mind as things get worse and worse for him.

00:19:44 John Host Yeah, the degradation of the mind as played through the utilization of googly eyes.

00:19:49 Adam Host *[Laughing]* Uh-huh.

00:19:50 John Host Like if googly—it’s—you know how Frodo in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, he only had one look, which was...

00:19:58 Adam Host “About to cry.”

00:20:00 John Host “About to cry.”

00:20:01 Adam Host Uh-huh.

00:20:02 John Host Right? Through the whole—*[stifling laughter]* through three films.

00:20:03 Adam Host Yeah.

00:20:04 John Host We had to watch that little pointy-nosed ding-a-ling about to cry.

00:20:07 Ben Host It did get more intense as it went along, but it definitely was just like, a slider on the amount of “wanting to cry” spectrum.

00:20:15 Adam Host Like, the limpid pools became more limpid.

00:20:18 John Host Yeah. And if he—and he would sometimes be about to cry from friendship.

[Adam laughs.]

Sometimes from hunger, sometimes from fear.

00:20:26 Adam Host I've never known that feeling.

[Ben laughs.]

00:20:28 John Host Yeah, I know.

[Adam laughs.]

But it—but I felt like Colin Farrell was like, googly eyes because he was mad, googly eyes because he was scared, googly eyes because he was losing touch with reality, googly eyes because he was... fighty.

00:20:42 Ben Host Because he was looking at a very pretty boy.

00:20:44 John Host A very pret—there's so many pretty boys in this movie.

00:20:47 Ben Host I thought that that was like a really interesting part of this movie! Like the extremely ecumenical male gaze. Like, everybody is looked at as a sex object in some way in this movie, man or woman, and to varying degrees and in varying, like, versions of the expression of that. That really played into the panning of this movie by critics, and almost led to the film not being released in Greece because there were like—there were people that were extremely angry that it depicted Alexander as being bi or gay.

00:21:22 Adam Host Many people panned it because it didn't go far enough in that initial cut. The cut that we saw gave far more oxygen to those scenes.

00:21:31 John Host I'm panning it because it didn't go further!

00:21:34 Ben Host It didn't show him actually penetrating anybody in the ass?

00:21:37 John Host Colin Farrell and Jared Leto had so much on screen hot energy, I wanted to be right in the middle of that sandwich.

00:21:44 Adam Host I was shocked that all of those scenes went to him and Bagoas! ...Bag o' Ass.

[All three laugh.]

00:21:53 John Host The thing is I wanted more of that, too!

00:21:54 Adam Host Yeah.

00:21:55 John Host This was so—this movie was so homoerotic and so good at it. Like, Jared Leto in dark eyeliner is maybe—

00:22:04 Adam Host It's a good look.

00:22:05 John Host —one of my favorite—that would—it's one of my favorite Christmas ornaments.

00:22:08 Adam Host Yeah. Speaking of people who permanently look like they're about to cry, Jared Leto has that mastered.

00:22:12 John Host He does. *[Laughs.]* But he's a beautiful man.

00:22:15 Adam Host Yeah.

00:22:16 John Host And Colin Farrell is beautiful in another way, you know, in a more...

00:22:19 Adam Host Yeah.

00:22:20 John Host ...like, "eyes closer together" way.
[Adam and Ben burst out laughing.]
And then—*[stifles laughter]* and then you know, his valet, his—you know, his manservant, also beautiful in a kind of—

00:22:31 Adam Host Bag o' Ass!

00:22:32 John Host Right. *[Laughs.]* In a sort of, like, post-Raphaelite way. And I was like, "Where do I sign up for this Macedonian army?"

00:22:39 Adam Host There's the scene were Alexander meets Bagoas, and then there's also like, the king courtesan, the eunuch king?

00:22:48 John Host Yeah, yeah.

00:22:49 Adam Host And I just wanna—I just wanna say that the worst film credit of all time is that guy's character name. It is "Fat Eunuch."
[John and Ben laugh.]
Which can be nobody's call sign on this show because it's so withering! It's the worst!

00:23:05 John Host Fat Eunuch, didn't Jesse Thorn interview him on—
[Adam and Ben laugh.]
—on *Sound of Young America*?

00:23:11 Adam Host It is rough. *[Laughs.]*

00:23:12 Ben Host Wow. *[Laughs.]*

00:23:14 Adam Host "I'm, uh, reading for the role of... it says here 'Fat—' I mean this can't be right."
[John laughs.]
"Fat Eunuch'?"

00:23:20 Ben Host "Hey Dave, great news. It's your agent. Uh, I got you an audition."
[All three laugh.]

00:23:30 Adam Host Ouch!

00:23:31 Ben Host "I know that you've kinda been typecast as this, but..." *[Laughs.]*

00:23:34 John Host "It's another fat eunuch role!"
[Ben laughs.]

00:23:36 Adam Host "You said you were retired; what do you say you come off the bench one last time?"
[John and Adam laugh.]

00:23:40 Ben Host "This is probably the most prestigious way that you can reprise this role."
[Ben and Adam laugh.]

00:23:47 John Host "Big budget."

00:23:48 Adam Host Yeah.

00:23:49 John Host I liked Val Kilmer. I liked seeing Val Kilmer in this movie. He—

[Adam laughs.]

It's definitely not like a—it's not like a glamor role for him.

00:23:56 Ben Host No, he—

00:23:57 Adam Host I love him, too.

00:23:58 Ben Host He gained a Schwarzenegger of weight.

[John laughs.]

00:24:01 Adam Host I was just gonna say he told people he gained 40 pounds for this film. He's just covering up his incidental 40-pound weight gain.

[John and Ben laugh.]

Right?

00:24:09 John Host He had to lose 15 to—

00:24:10 Adam Host Yeah! *[Bursts out laughing along with Ben.]*

00:24:12 John Host —say he gained 40?

00:24:15 Adam Host Oh, yeah, he's great in this! Really intense! I didn't know Val Kilmer had this gear in him. I really liked his performance a lot.

00:24:25 Ben Host It made me like, really appreciate him as a character actor in an—in like a new way. 'Cause he really does go—like, it's a super different role for him!

00:24:35 Adam Host He has such a unique face that I was shocked at how just taking away some of the symmetry of it made him almost unrecognizable.

00:24:43 John Host Right. Right.

00:24:44 Ben Host Yeah.

00:24:45 John Host Yeah. And the—you know, just the kinda patchiness of his beard.

00:24:47 Adam Host Yeah.

00:24:48 John Host A small amount of scarring makeup. Although it—it's weird how much taking an eye away...

00:24:54 Adam Host Yeah.

00:24:55 John Host ...from a character, and not replacing it with the drama of an eyepatch, but just like, a scarred eye. It's really affecting, and it's—the character becomes like a source of discomfort every time they're on screen.

00:25:09 Adam Host Especially in scenes where Philip is... Philip is mostly an asshole to Alexander, but there are moments where he pivots into a sort of paternal kindness that you just can't believe all the way, and I think the eye is a big part of it. You look into his face and you see him trying to express kindness, but it's just impossible to receive it because of how he looks.

00:25:31 Clip Transition **Olympias:** Zeus is your father.

00:25:35 Ben Host I wanted to talk a little bit about the relationship that Alexander has

with his parents. Like it's very, like, "pick one." *[Laughs.]* Which is a weird element of it and like, it seems like he's very, like—very much in Mom Camp as a young boy, and then the dad, like, pulls him over onto his side of the line. And then like... despite the fact that his mother's so devoted to him, he never—like, he's never in a scene with her as an adult, I don't think!

00:26:07 John Host The thing that this movie doesn't do is describe the way in which Philip of Macedon was the first great—I mean, he united Greece. He took—you know, we hear it several times from Alexander's generals. Like, "This wasn't even your idea. This was your dad. You're just following in your dad's footsteps." But we never see that in the character of Philip, who is only portrayed as a drunk and kind of a clownish... cuck.

[Ben laughs.]

In every scene we see him in. But you know, he was like, the great Greek of his time. So it was—through that whole—through all of that, I was like "When do we get to see Philip, like, kick a little ass?" He's not—he's never really portrayed as, like, someone so incompetent. That was a weird creative choice.

00:27:02 Adam Host Yeah, to make him great only in reputation, and what you're seeing is just a guy falling off a table drunk all the time. Interesting contrast.

00:27:11 John Host And the portrayal of Alexander's mother, too, as a—just like a sorceress. That just—that felt very late-period Oliver Stone. There's a kind of pre-*JFK* Oliver Stone and a post-*JFK* Oliver Stone.

[Ben laughs.]

[Stifling laughter] Even though *JFK* comes pretty early in his career.

00:27:27 Ben Host Yeah.

[John laughs.]

00:27:28 Adam Host I love the self-parody of the "back and to the left" guy at that first battle.

00:27:31 John Host I know! What the heck was that?!

[Ben laughs.]

00:27:33 Adam Host That is a director who knows himself.

00:27:36 John Host The thing is I didn't know it was Oliver Stone! So while that guy was saying, like—

00:27:39 Adam Host Whoa! *[Laughs.]*

00:27:40 John Host "Back and to the left!" I was like, "What?!"

[Ben laughs.]

00:27:41 Adam Host That's amazing.

00:27:42 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** What a weird, like, little cherry to—

Ben: "Did Larry David write this scene?"

[All three laugh.]

00:27:49 John Host And then later, yeah, just like—oh, wow! Self-quoting!

00:27:53 Ben Host Yeah.

00:27:54 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."

War!

00:27:55 Promo Clip **Music:** Fun, jaunty, upbeat music.

Renee Colvert: Hi! I'm Renee Colvert.

Alexis Preston: I'm Alexis Preston!

Renee: And we're the hosts of the smash hit podcast *Can I Pet Your Dog?* Now, Alexis.

Alexis: Yes.

Renee: We got big news.

Alexis: Uh-oh!

Renee: Since last we did a promo, our dogs have become famous.

Alexis: World-famous!

Renee: World—like, stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame! Second big news.

Alexis: Mm-hm?

Renee: The reviews are in.

00:28:13 Promo Clip **Alexis:** Mm-hm?

Renee: Take yourself to Apple Podcasts, you know what you're gonna hear? We're happy!

Alexis: It's true!

Renee: We're a delight! A great distraction from the world!

Alexis: I like that part a lot.

Renee: So if that's what you guys are looking for...

Alexis: Mm-hm.

Renee: You gotta check out our show! But what else can they expect?

Alexis: We've got dog tech, dog news, celebrities with their dogs. All

dog things!

Renee: All the dog things. So if that interests you, well, get yourself on over to [Maximum Fun](#) every Tuesday!

[Music ends.]

00:28:36 Promo Clip **Music:** Warm instrumental rendition of "Jingle Bells" by James Lord Pierpont.

Speaker: Have you been to [MaxFunStore.com](#) lately? Because we've just launched a ton of new merch for a bunch of your favorite shows! You want a patch? We've got it! Tote? Mug? Stickers? We got those, too! Heck, we've even got a onesie for your favorite baby.

[A baby laughs.]

Now is the time to start holiday shopping for the MaxFun fans in your life! Including yourself. That's [MaxFunStore.com](#).

[Music ends.]

00:29:07 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."

*Huh!
Yeah!*

00:29:10 John Host I thought that the movie did a good job of helping us imagine what it would be like to go on one of these—to go on a world-conquering expedition like this, where it's not just you're in uncharted lands. Like, you don't even understand how a chart works.

00:29:28 Ben Host Yeah!

00:29:29 John Host Right? He's headed to India in order to find the source of the Nile.

00:29:34 Ben Host Right.

00:29:35 John Host Which he imagines is an ocean.

00:29:37 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** *[Laughing]* Uh-huh.

Ben: Like, he thinks that the Earth is round, but not—*[laughs]* but flat. Like...

00:29:41 Adam Host Round but very tiny, right?

00:29:43 Ben Host Yeah!

00:29:44 Adam Host That would have to be his understanding.

00:29:45 Ben Host It almost feels like it's gonna make that the thing that the movie is about, like this... like, arrogant misunderstanding of the—of how the world works that winds up being his downfall. And it like, gets really close to that and just doesn't quite. I don't know; I thought it was really interesting! Every time they show a map and it's like, "Yeah, like, just—" you know, "Just over those hills, probably, is the sea that surrounds everything." Like, what an amazing thing to have thought.

00:30:14 Adam Host And to continue to think as your journey stretched into its seventh year. Like, every successive mountain range in the distance is being promised as the last one.

00:30:24 John Host Yeah.

00:30:25 Adam Host It's insane!

[Ben laughs.]

How must that feel, and how must that wear you down, year after year?

00:30:31 John Host Have you ever like, gone climbing in the mountains in a forest, and you kind of look up and you see a—that false horizon where you start to see blue through the trees?

00:30:39 Ben Host Yeah.

00:30:40 John Host And you're like "Oh, we're almost at the summit!" And then you come out of the trees and you realize "Oh, that was a completely false summit that still—the mountain keeps going up." And you go back into the trees and you keep going. You're like "Here we are! We're almost there!"

And that false summit is the... It's—it keeps you climbing. But it—there's nothing—there's no more punch in the gut.

00:31:06 Ben Host Yeah. It gets very discouraging after a while.

00:31:09 John Host Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:31:10 Adam Host Eventually you're the Donner Party.

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:31:14 John Host But that was—that's hard to convey in a movie, and maybe it's the three-hour scope that we end up feeling worn down along with everyone else. Along with the soldiers.

00:31:25 Adam Host I got stronger as the movie went on.

00:31:27 John Host Oh, Adam got stronger as he went on, he said.

00:31:30 Adam Host Yeah.

[Beat.]

00:31:31 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Yeah, I kept getting typhus. *[Laughs.]*

Adam: In this episode of *Movie Crossfire*, I will be defending *Alexander*.

00:31:38 Ben Host Was it typhus or was it poison? 'Cause it like—like, the "sick" makeup on Jared Leto looks really similar to Colin Farrell, but it seems to be diagnosed differently for Jared Leto.

00:31:51 John Host There's an awful lot of people handing Alexander cups of wine, and then taking two steps back—

[Ben laughs.]

00:31:59 Adam Host Ah!

00:32:00 John Host —to suggest that the cup of wine is poisoned.

00:32:02 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeah!

John: And then Alex—

Adam: Yeah, a lot of touching his feet over the sheets.

00:32:06 Ben Host They're worried about getting sick.

00:32:07 Adam Host Yeah.

00:32:08 John Host They don't wanna get foot typhus.

00:32:10 Adam Host That's what I thought.

00:32:11 John Host But if I were someone in Alexander's position, with like a hundred thousand troops that feel like constantly on the verge of mutiny for the last six years of my life, I wouldn't just take a cup of wine from anybody. And we see a lot of cups of wine delivered to him by—you know, like, I wouldn't take a cup of wine from anybody but my boyfriend or my other boyfriend.

00:32:37 Ben Host Why—yeah, why doesn't Bagoas take a sip of everything first?

00:32:42 John Host Yeah, thank you! Right! Or just like—no, let him—let Bagoas be the only one who pours the wine!

00:32:48 Adam Host Wasn't the style of the time to cut your wine, too? With water?

00:32:51 John Host Cut it with water, right. That was where the typhus got into—

00:32:54 Adam Host But if you're living in a city with unclean water, as was the case, and—at times in this movie. Like, Alexander wasn't gonna cut his wine!

00:33:04 John Host Right, don't cut your wine.

00:33:06 Adam Host No.

00:33:07 Music Music "Spill the Wine" by Eric Burdon and War fades in.

00:33:08 John Host *[Singing slurrily]* Spill the wine! Dig that girl!

00:33:10 Adam Host *[Laughs.]* Everyone's favorite seventies song, *[mocking John's mumbling]* "Meh meh meh."

[John laughs.]

"Meh meh meh."

[Music fades out.]

00:33:16 John Host Actually it's "Spill the wine, take that pearl," which means like—I don't know what.

00:33:20 Adam Host That's a sex thing, right?

00:33:21 John Host It's a little bit of a—you know who—

00:33:22 Adam Host I've never been able to find the pearl.

00:33:24 John Host *[Stifles laughter.]* You know who did that song? Eric Burdon and War.

00:33:29 Adam Host *[Whispering]* That is a War song!

00:33:31 Ben Host I was gonna say something about the movie.

00:33:33 John Host *[Laughs.]* Oh, yeah, yeah, go ahead.

00:33:35 Adam Host *[Imitating instruments]* Badum bum bum bum bum, ba-bum, ba-dum!

[John laughs.]

00:33:37 Music Music "Low Rider" by War fades in.

00:33:39 Adam Host *[Singing]* Low! Ri-der! Get a little lower!

00:33:44 John Host *[Laughs.]* You never get to hear Adam sing!

00:33:46 Ben Host Yeah, he's got a very beautiful singing voice.

[Adam and John laugh.]

00:33:49 Adam Host You're just upset 'cause you don't know any of the songs we're talking about.

[John laughs.]

00:33:53 Ben Host It's an interesting idea for a podcast, though.

[Music fades out.]

Two people talking about something that the other person can't relate to or—and doesn't know anything about.

00:34:02 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** Two people talking about songs that literally everyone knows, and one of the hosts doesn't.

[John laughs.]

Ben: And that really has nothing to do with the putative premise of the podcast at all, so... you know!

Adam: *[Laughs.]* I think people like tangents on podcasts!

[John laughs.]

00:34:13 Ben Host No! No, Adam, I think it's a great idea and maybe we should just kinda steer the ship in that direction. We should—we should do it—

[John laughs.]

This should be more random and confusing for people.

00:34:22 Clip Transition *[Sounds of arguing/fighting.]*

Speaker: This is my wedding, not some public brawl!

00:34:25 Ben Host Oliver Stone came to my school and gave a talk before he made this movie, and he was like working on the script of it at the time. And the thing that stuck with me about it, and the thing that I was reflecting on while watching it, is he was talking about how it is basically impossible to cast ourselves into thinking the way these people thought. Because this is like a—you know, a society with pre-Abrahamic morals. It has... you know, like they totally don't understand anything about how the world works.

Like, they don't understand how disease is communicated. They don't understand how big the planet is. Like, there's so much that is outside of their perception that we take for granted. And there's so much that we have decided—you know. Like in 2004, like, "gay" was like so scandalous! And like, the Bush administration was so stridently anti-gay. And this movie just presents it as kind of—as just kind of like a part of life. And that's—and that especially, I think, was probably very hard to imagine, you know, in that particular moment in

history.

But like, so much about this movie is hard to relate to. You know? And I wonder if that is part of what makes it hard for an American audience. 'Cause it was like, pretty successful in Europe, I think.

00:35:50 John Host I don't think that is, um, because the movie is good and Americans don't understand it.

00:35:55 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Yeah, I don't know if I'm exactly saying that. But like, I wonder if Europeans are like, slightly more hip to this as a premise or something. 'Cause like, nothing in the marketing is about that. But I think that it is, like, very intentionally a part of the script. It's like, "Let's try and like, imagine this unimaginable time and place."

00:36:19 John Host *[Thinking noise.]* I think that the movie lives or dies on the strength of whether it's a good movie, and it—this is an epic that's trying to do—that's trying to tell an incredible story, and it's trying to tell a lot of different... It's trying to tell the whole of it, or at least a large portion of the whole of it.

00:36:39 Ben Host Yeah.

00:36:40 John Host Which is hard to do in any movie, right?

00:36:42 Ben Host Right.

00:36:43 John Host I mean the great movies are ones where the whole of the story is told by focusing in on a knowable portion of it, or the whole scope of it is told—

00:36:54 Ben Host It's much easier 'cause it's like, one guy doing it. Like, if you tried to tell the story of the British conquering the known world, like, that's—that took place over a vastly longer timespan and was done by a lot more people.

00:37:08 John Host Right, but this movie also is trying to tell the story of Alexander's relationship with his mother in terms that are—like, there are conversations that happen between Alexander and Hephaestion where it's happening 100% in the like, psychological language of 2004. Like, "Do you think that you're acting this way because your mother once, you know, like, denied you the nipple or whatever?" And that's just not conversations that would have happened. There would never have been that kind of pop psychology—

00:37:41 Ben Host *[Laughing]* Right.

00:37:42 John Host —in ancient Greece, right?

00:37:44 Ben Host Yeah.

00:37:45 John Host And so this movie's a historic—a sweeping epic about a ancient general, but it's also a passion play about some like, late nineties actors, and it's—

[Ben laughs.]

I mean, it—and it has a lot of interesting—I mean, it's dressed very interestingly, and the fact that it treats the kind of bisexuality of the ancient world—and in particularly of the Greeks, right? Because when we see that, when we see that open bisexuality in... India and in other portion—when it plays out in the courts of Asia and is really looked at askance... Right? Like, that becomes a—that becomes

almost a diplomatic incident.

00:38:34 Ben Host Right.

00:38:35 John Host Later on in the film. The fact that that is played in a 2004 movie at so, like—so casually, or so—not casually. It's very—it's definitely focused on, but it's focused on so sympathetically. It's portrayed so sympathetically. Like, we're invited into those relationships. They're knowable to us.

00:38:56 Ben Host Yeah.

00:38:57 John Host It feel—they feel not just there... because they're not exploited, right? We never see Alexander and Hephaestion kiss on the lips. It's always possible that we're looking at a form of Greek friendship that isn't sexual. But it's also just the way they—the way they are together. The way they touch. It certainly is... It certainly was sexual to me.

00:39:25 Ben Host Right.

00:39:26 John Host I think it's—I think we're meant to be somewhat baffled. And that—and to your point, Ben, I think for an American audience to appreciate Greek male love in all of its... you know, in all of its many colors, and not just do that American thing of going like "Well, this is porn" or "They must be banging."

00:39:52 Ben Host Right.

00:39:54 John Host But to see it—you know, to see it in all its splendors...

00:39:58 Ben Host To see it like, neutrally portrayed, not as like necessarily a celebration or a condemnation but just as like a fact of how this world worked.

00:40:09 John Host Right. And I think a German audience or a Dutch audience might flatter themselves that they are more openminded than an American audience. But we're not broadcasting to a American audience as much as we are to a more sophisticated film-watching audience. I don't think many *Friendly Fire* viewers are gonna be scandalized by—

00:40:30 Ben Host Oh, they—they're a stridently homophobic bunch, *[laughing]* the *Friendly Fire*—

00:40:34 John Host Yeah. *[Laughs.]* Everybody that listens to MaxFun Podcasts is like—

00:40:37 Ben Host Yeah.

00:40:38 John Host —"How dare they kiss on the lips?!"

[Ben laughs.]

But I do feel like the movie is flawed like a lot of movies that try to do everything. And for me at least, some of those primary flaws are located in... you know, where little bits of this supernatural—quasi-supernatural stuff that—the eagle, and what the eagle represents...

00:41:04 Ben Host It's less supernatural than *Mongol* was.

00:41:07 John Host It's true.

00:41:08 Ben Host *Mongol* was super-natural!

00:41:10 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** *[Laughs.]* Also a very long and hard to fully grok film.

Ben: Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:41:17 Ben Host But like, what about his motivation? Like, he keeps talking about how he's doing this to free the people of the world. Like, conquering them to free them.

00:41:25 John Host So Oliver Stone. So 2004.

00:41:28 Ben Host We've talked a little bit about like the French idea of imperialism as "We're gonna turn, like, the world into French citizens." This kinda reminded me of that a little bit.

00:41:38 John Host Yeah, all of his "one world, one people, united nations" talk throughout the film. It just feels like such a strange overlay to choose. Like, Alexander justifying his—and going against his own generals as they're just like "Hey, we're actually conquering these people, and we're just trying to take their gold and..."

00:41:57 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Right!

00:41:58 John Host "And, uh..."

00:41:59 Ben Host Like, they're looting everything and also talking about how great this is for the people that they're doing it to.

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:42:05 John Host Yeah, "We kinda just wanna get back to Macedonia and build big houses," and Alexander's like, "No, I am liberating the people of Turkmenistan!"

[Ben laughs.]

It's like, "What?!" I mean, I'm not sure how much he was motivated by like, revolution theology. That felt very much like another kind of import. And—'cause we're talking about this movie being made in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

00:42:31 Ben Host Right.

00:42:32 John Host And a lot of the events of the early part of this film take place in northern Iraq!

00:42:35 Adam Host Yeah, but this film was in development for 15 years, though.

00:42:39 John Host For 150 years. You kidding me? They've been trying to make the story of Alexander...

00:42:44 Adam Host Is your umbrage with Alexander's motivations here about them being untrue?

00:42:51 John Host Yeah! I mean I think it's—I think—Ben was complimenting the film for being in some ways, like... letting us have a glimpse of an ancient world where people didn't understand the shape of the world, and I think that that's true. But there's an awful lot of revisionism about Alexander being some kind of neoliberal democrat!

[Ben laughs quietly.]

00:43:21 Adam Host I think there is a super interesting poison pill happening within the narrative of this film that goes like—you know at the end Ptolemy, uh—

00:43:31 Ben Host I believe it's pronounced *[cartoonish "spitting" sound effect]*-olemy.

00:43:34 John Host P'tiiiiing! Olemy.

[Ben laughs.]

00:43:36 Adam Host We get the title card that says the libraries where all of these diaries were stored has—have been burned long ago, so there's no real factual record. There's no historical record. And that, like... it would be impossible to depict the historical truth of this time! And by seeing how impossible it was for Ptolemy's words to be saved, and then to see them revised and shown to us later, is like a weird meta kind of storytelling. Like, Oliver Stone is saying this about himself, through Ptolemy.

Like, "We'll never know, man! But this is our best guess. Here's what I got." I think that's neat.

00:44:22 Ben Host Yeah, it's cool.

00:44:23 John Host Huh.

00:44:24 Ben Host Do you guys wanna hear a moment of pedantry?

00:44:26 Adam Host Let's hear that.

00:44:27 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Beeping as Ben speaks.]*

00:44:28 Ben Host "The fruit bowl next to Ptolemy contains Fuji apples, which were not available in 283 BC."

[Beeping stops.]

00:44:33 John Host *[Deadpan]* See, that's exactly what I'm talking about. It's—Adam, it's the Fuji apples.

[Ben laughs.]

00:44:38 Adam Host That's what this film is about.

[Ben laughs again.]

00:44:39 John Host Yeah. It's the Fuji apples.

00:44:42 Adam Host Apple revisionism.

00:44:43 John Host Yeah.

00:44:44 Ben Host That's the first time I've laughed out loud reading a goof—*[laughing]* on the IMDb's goof section.

Maybe I'm just delirious. I don't know!

00:44:53 Adam Host I mean, before the film came out, historians were pre-angry about what it would depict.

00:45:00 John Host Right.

00:45:01 Adam Host And how it would make Alexander look.

00:45:03 John Host Right.

00:45:04 Adam Host And all of his assorted motivations.

00:45:05 John Host Right.

00:45:06 Adam Host Post-release, those historians backed down from their feelings.

00:45:10 John Host Oh, really?

00:45:11 Adam Host And so I think—in defense of Alexander's depicted worldview and what I said earlier about an impossibility of a historical record having anything to do with them—like, how can you take umbrage with what his motivations are? Whether or not they are given to him by an Oliver Stone. Oliver Stone did his research! He's not projecting a worldview onto Alexander, like, out of nowhere.

00:45:38 John Host No, he's not projecting it out of nowhere; he's projecting it out of... Oliver Stone in 2004!

00:45:44 Adam Host That's not true!

00:45:46 John Host Alexander was not conquering the ancient world because he was the mother of dragons and thought that the oppressed people were all going to like, meet in a—some kind of Paris train station—

00:45:58 Adam Host One of the main things about Alexander was that he would go places, conquer them, and then their leaders would be like "Oh, you're gonna throw me in jail or whatever?" and Alexander would be like, "No, remain king! Remain queen! Keep your land!"

00:46:09 John Host Right.

00:46:10 Adam Host "I just wanted the score!"

00:46:12 John Host *[Laughs.]* Yeah! Right! He wanted the score! But that doesn't mean that he was motivated by like, a liberal conscience to liberate the world's people. It meant he was ticking stuff off of—I mean, if it—if Alexander had been portrayed with a sports mentality, where he was like "Booyah! I'm not looking to govern!" Like, that's what we—*[laughs]* frankly, that's what we should have done in Iraq! Go in and topple some statues and leave the Republican Guard in place and get out!

[Ben laughs quietly.]

I mean he was wise, at least, right?

00:46:47 Ben Host They make the same case about Genghis Khan in *Mongol*, right? Like, he's like dividing the spoils among his men or whatever instead of just keeping it all to himself, and that like, made him a more popular ruler. And I think that like, conquering somebody and then just like having them pay you fealty was like, an innovation at the time.

00:47:09 John Host Like, it's not my primary criticism of the film. I'm not like, saying that Alexander—that there is a true portrayal of him. I'm saying—I'm not saying there's a true portrayal of him that this film failed to accomplish. I'm saying that that is such a dated portrayal of him, and dated to 2004! It's just like when you walk through a town and you see an apartment building that was built in 2004, and you identify it by its crap, fake craftsman details and its mauve, like, plastic boards, and you go "Oh, that's from 2004." It can never be from another time. It looks like it's from... 1899, but it is like, stapled together out of the ideas we had in that moment. Rather than attempting to do a thing that isn't a morality play!

That's the thing. Oliver Stone made it into a morality play where we don't have the evidence to support it or—to support that one way or the other. It's the seduction of historical fiction, right? To make a romance out of Michelangelo to, you know, some girlfriend that we

think he might have had, and so we focus a movie around, you know, some story that has no—where somebody's name appears in a diary one time and that's what we're—that's the tent pole that we're pitching the movie up around.

And I don't... I wouldn't have chosen—

00:48:46 Adam Host

That's it. Isn't it?

00:48:47 John Host

It.

00:48:49 Adam Host

It wouldn't have been your choice.

00:48:50 John Host

That's right.

00:48:51 Adam Host

And that's why you find it so disagreeable.

00:48:52 John Host

That's right. I don't find it even that disagreeable. I just find it... mildly disagreeable.

[Ben laughs.]

00:48:58 Adam Host

Huh.

00:48:59 John Host

To hear a character using the language of late 20th century psychology in a movie where those ideas wouldn't have existed, or late 20th century politics! If we're gonna go all the way to not having Fuji apples—it's a Fuji apple, is what it is!

[Ben laughs.]

It's a freakin' Fuji apple! That wouldn't have happened then. That's my beef.

00:49:26 Adam Host

[Adam speaks firmly over John's last few words here.]

I design the rating system. Not you!

00:49:30 John Host

[Laughs.]

I love, Adam, that you are so, like, up on a black steed about *Alexander!*

00:49:37 Adam Host

I'm—

00:49:38 John Host

You're really upset! You're more upset—

00:49:40 Adam Host

I'm riding Bucephalus!

00:49:41 John Host

Yeah! You're more upset than I normally see you about—

00:49:43 Adam Host

Bucephalus was a great horse.

00:49:44 John Host

Bucephalus was a great horse.

00:49:46 Crosstalk Crosstalk

John: I mourned its—

Adam: And also Hank Williams Jr.'s nickname for some reason.

00:49:50 John Host

Bocephus.

[Beat.]

[John laughs quietly.]

00:49:53 Adam Host

That was the joke.

00:49:55	John	Host	Got it. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:49:56	Adam	Host	You got some joke on the bottom of your foot there, John.
			<i>[Ben laughs.]</i>
00:49:59	John	Host	Boy!
00:50:00	Ben	Host	Did John just Twitter comment you?
00:50:02	Adam	Host	Mm-hm!
			<i>[Ben and Adam laugh.]</i>
00:50:04	John	Host	I wanna start over with a different set of cohosts.
00:50:07	Music	Transition	Brief clip of "War."
			<i>War!</i>
			<i>Huh!</i>
			<i>Yeah!</i>
00:50:10	Adam	Host	Let's talk about one thing that I think we can all agree on. And I'm being sincere about this. The actor who plays young Alexander? I thought was <u>great</u> in this!
00:50:18	John	Host	It looked a <u>lot</u> like him.
00:50:20	Ben	Host	Super crazy casting, yeah!
00:50:21	John	Host	Great casting.
00:50:22	Adam	Host	He has close-together eyes!
00:50:24	John	Host	Every—all the young actors portraying older actors were recognizably themselves—
00:50:30	Adam	Host	Yeah.
00:50:31	John	Host	—and that, I thought, was really impressive.
00:50:32	Adam	Host	Well done.
00:50:33	John	Host	Yeah.
00:50:34	Ben	Host	I think there's a lot <u>technically</u> super impressive. Like, we were talking about the makeup earlier. Like, that's also just like... perfect. Like, it never looks like <u>rubber</u> , you know? Like, from a technical standpoint, this movie is... fucking stupendous. It's like one of the biggest cavalry charges in film history. Like, there's <u>so</u> much to look at—
00:50:51	Adam	Host	Yeah.
00:50:52	Ben	Host	—that's like, really amazing and beautiful, and I think there's gotta be a lot of CG to like, make ancient Babylon or whatever, but it holds up! It looks dope!
00:51:01	Adam	Host	This film was compared to <i>Troy</i> a lot, and <i>Troy</i> was a film that leaned heavily onto its CG in a way that <i>Alexander</i> was a little more tasteful in how it blended CG and practical elements. I'm with you, Ben! I think it was really well done technically.
00:51:16	John	Host	I thought Babylon looked CG, but the battle scenes were <u>fantastic</u> . And we get into those—we get into the center of some battles sometimes like we see in a lot of movies now, where the action's happening fast and furious, blood is splattering all over the place,

and you're—and you lose your center. But boy, it was effective here!

00:51:38 Adam Host It's a minor thing to give us the subtitle of where we are in the battle—

00:51:41 Ben Host Yeah!

00:51:42 Adam Host —whether or not we're at the center or the right or the left, but I thought it was crucial and I wonder why that doesn't happen more often!

00:51:48 John Host I agree 100%. When it kept flashing back to like "Now we're at the Macedonian center—"

00:51:52 Adam Host Yeah.

00:51:53 John Host I was like "Oh! I get it! I get it! Okay!"

00:51:54 Ben Host Yeah.

00:51:55 John Host Like, it was such a minor thing, but a major thing.

00:51:59 Adam Host If you're making a war movie and you're listening to this show for some reason... Steal that!

00:52:03 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeah.

John: Yeah.

Adam: And use it!

Ben: I think it's the only movie I can think of that does that!

00:52:07 Ben Host At first blush, I reacted badly to it 'cause I was like "What is that? Like, is this trying to be a documentary or is it trying to be a movie?" And then—but like, you know, like that first battle scene, like, every time it cuts and you're like "Oh!" Like, "I feel secure in understanding what I'm seeing." It really won me over.

00:52:28 Adam Host Everyone's wearing helmets.

00:52:30 John Host Yeah.

00:52:31 Adam Host Everyone's in a—on a piece of sand that looks the same as any other. Like, give us the subtitle.

00:52:36 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** But you got that strategy, right? As a result of that.

Adam: Yeah. Yeah.

00:52:38 John Host Alexander leads the cavalry (*calvary*) in a—a—or calvalry or however you pronounce it.

00:52:43 Adam Host Sure.

00:52:44 John Host In a—this mad charge off to the right, and deflects like all the light cavalry of Darius and then he—he actually says it; he says it out loud. "Now turn left!" And they swing left, and you have a picture of the—what he's doing!

00:53:00 Adam Host Yeah. Yeah.

00:53:01 John Host And he slides back into that gap, and makes it all the way up to Darius!

00:53:06 Clip Clip **Speaker 1:** ZEUS BE WITH US!

[A horse whinnies and a crowd roars.]

00:53:09 Adam Host When you fight in the desert—I mean, there's no chance that there's not 200,000 skulls buried in Iraqi sand right now, right? Due to like the shifting winds.

00:53:20 John Host And what's crazy is they—

00:53:21 Adam Host Like, they don't bury their dead in the desert!

00:53:24 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** They're out there forever!

John: They—they don't—

00:53:25 John Host They don't even really know exactly where this battle took—I mean, they know it took place in Kurdistan. Or I'm sorry, like, right—in northern Iraq. And they know around where, but a lot of these battles, yeah, they just happened... out there. I'm sure you're right. I'm sure there're a bunch of Greek swords, like, under 15 feet of sand.

00:53:47 Adam Host It's incredible.

00:53:48 John Host Just waiting for you and your dad and your metal detectors.

[Ben laughs.]

00:53:51 Adam Host Yeah. Like, you watch a film like *Braveheart* and it's all, like, Mel Gibson yelling "Freedom" or "Charge" or whatever.

00:53:59 John Host "Freedoom!"

00:54:00 Adam Host And that's so insufficient when you compare it to a single tweak of dialogue. Hearing him say "Go left" gives you so much more context for what's happening, and it's—like, on the page it's so minor, but when you see it in the film it is a massive, massive thing.

00:54:16 John Host You have—he has an army at the start of the movie, that isn't overwhelming. And it becomes an overwhelming force, but we still get to see how... how the fight plays out. There's a long period in the middle of this movie where we don't see any fighting. And by the time we get to the battles at the end, I was sorta starved for them. And then I was really given—I was really given more battle than I wanted.

[Ben laughs.]

Like—

00:54:45 Adam Host You thought those elephants smelled bad on the outside...

[Ben laughs.]

00:54:48 John Host The thing is, the—*[laughing]* the whole—

[Adam laughs.]

The whole time those elephants were charging I was like "Please don't chop off an elephant's trunk. Please don't chop off an elephant's trunk."

00:54:55 Ben Host Yeah.

00:54:56 Adam Host But then we got a nice tusk through-and-through.

00:54:58 John Host Yeah, that's right! That's right.

00:55:00 Adam Host That's fun.

00:55:01 Ben Host That's gotta hit you really hard to go through, right? 'Cause tusks aren't particularly sharp.

00:55:05 Adam Host There's something scary about the height, too. Like, when you're on top of an elephant as a war platform. It's scary to see those guys on top of there fighting, and the guys on the ground? It's almost equal terror.

00:55:18 John Host Well, it's scary because they build little houses up there!

00:55:20 Adam Host Yeah.

00:55:21 John Host Which don't seem very stable! That's not the little house I would wanna be in.

00:55:24 Adam Host No.

00:55:25 Ben Host As a guy who recently took a ride on a camel, I felt like any higher than that would be terrifying.

00:55:32 John Host Was it a one-hump camel or a two-hump camel?

00:55:34 Ben Host So, it had a big pile of blankets on its back that I was sitting on.

00:55:39 Adam Host Once Ben got on him he was a two-hump camel.

[Ben and Adam laugh.]

00:55:43 Ben Host So I couldn't see what it had going on W/R/T humps.

00:55:49 John Host Right.

00:55:51 Ben Host Or lovely lady lumps, for that matter.

00:55:53 John Host *[Laughs.]* The Bactrian camel is the two-humper.

00:55:57 Adam Host Hm.

00:55:58 John Host And those are—you know, they were invading Bactria during a big portion of this here. So you gotta assume that maybe some of those were Bactrian camels.

00:56:08 Ben Host Yeah.

00:56:09 John Host But I don't—wasn't there—was there any kind of, um—?

00:56:12 Ben Host I'm looking at pictures of Bactrian camels, and they got a—like a very large dewlap on them.

00:56:17 John Host Yeah, they got a lot of dewlap.

00:56:19 Ben Host And this—the camel I was on definitely was a little more, uh... more slender of neck.

00:56:24 John Host I'm wondering whether there was a missed opportunity for a pedant here.

00:56:28 Ben Host Oh, a camel pedant!

00:56:30 John Host Oh, no! Wait, wait, wait, wait. But the camel battle was fought sort of in—more in Arabia. So anyway, never mind. We never see a Bactrian camel, and I—

00:56:39 Adam Host We never see camel vs. elephant. Do we?

00:56:42 John Host No.

00:56:43 Adam Host That would have been cool. Who wins?

00:56:46 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Who wins in camel—?

Adam: Definitely the elephant, right?

John: Yeah, the elephant.

00:56:48 John Host But I—but wait a minute. Would you rather be... an elephant-sized camel—

[Ben laughs.]

Would you rather be one elephant-sized camel, or twenty camel-sized elephants?

00:56:58 Adam Host An elephant looks like it is one big hump. And I think if you're on one of those Bactrian camels, you'd be sliding in between the humps. Be very difficult to ride, it looks like. They'd be spitting everywhere.

00:57:09 John Host No, they're not difficult to ride!

00:57:10 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** You sit between the humps—

Adam: Did you get spit on, Ben?

00:57:11 John Host You hug a hump.

00:57:12 Adam Host Isn't that the main thing about camels, is they spit?

00:57:14 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Cartoonish spitting sound effect, complete with a "ping!" as it hits a spittoon.]*

00:57:15 Ben Host I managed to avoid getting spit on, but, uh—*[laughing]* Yassein, the camel that I was on, was hella cranky about the camel in front of him and kept trying to bite him on the ankle. And it was—

00:57:28 Adam Host His life is shit! I understand!

00:57:30 Ben Host *[Laughing]* He's gotta look at a camel butt all day! And, uh—

00:57:33 John Host Well, no, I think this is—! You know, those camels probably have a—within themselves, a pecking order.

00:57:38 Adam Host Right.

00:57:39 John Host And your camel felt like he was in the wrong order!

00:57:43 Ben Host Yeah. Yassein didn't like being first loser as camel number two in the train.

00:57:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** No, Yassein wanted to be up front!

Adam: You were riding the cut camel.

[Ben laughs.]

Adam: That's what—which one you got.

00:57:53 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Also, I tried to get on like, the third camel, and the guy—the camel keeper was like "No, no, no, you're much too big. You have to get on Yassein."

00:58:01 John Host I got put on a big horse one time, and the guy that put me on the horse said "Look, your horse thinks he needs—he should be in the lead of this whole operation."

00:58:10 Ben Host *[Laughing]* Uh-huh.

00:58:11	Music	Music	Inspiring music begins fading in.
00:58:12	John	Host	"But he can't be. So your job is gonna be to keep this horse—"
00:58:15	Ben	Host	To disabuse this horse of his ambition? <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:58:17	John	Host	That's right. And I got on the horse and I was like, "Look, babe. I feel you." <i>[Ben laughs.]</i>
00:58:21	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	John: "I know what you're feeling." Ben: <i>[Laughing]</i> Yeah—! John: "As soon as we can, we're out in <u>front</u> ."
00:58:25	Ben	Host	You got the John Roderick of horses there! <i>[Both laugh.]</i>
00:58:28	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	John: "Let's get outta here." Ben: The horse that <u>should</u> be the retired director of the CIA. <i>[Both laugh.]</i>
00:58:34	John	Host	"Let's get outta this line and go out on our own." <i>[Ben laughs.]</i> <i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:58:38	Adam	Host	"This horse is in desperate need of one of those back cracks, so, uh, John, I'm gonna need you to ride this one." <i>[All three laugh.]</i>
00:58:50	Ben	Host	See, Ben? Tangents are fun! I guess so. <i>[Adam laughs.]</i> I mean, we were talking about camels and horses, which are related—there <u>was</u> a moment; a pedant that was complaining that his horse was like, twice the size of the kinds of horses that they woulda had.
00:59:01	John	Host	Horse pedant.
00:59:02	Ben	Host	Which is a—which was the exact same criticism of the horses in <i>Mongol</i> , now that I think of it.
00:59:09	John	Host	Yeah.
00:59:10	Adam	Host	Young Alexander and Philip quarreling over Bucephalus in the market was fun.
00:59:16	John	Host	Yeah.
00:59:17	Adam	Host	That was a fun moment.
00:59:18	John	Host	Yeah.

00:59:19 Adam Host I liked all those little flourishes!

00:59:20 John Host Yeah, that would have been—I would have liked to have seen that relationship portrayed in that light more.

00:59:25 Adam Host Right, because you see Philip and Alexander as older men far more than you ever see Philip's upbringing of young Alexander. And because young Alexander the actor I thought was so competent, I would have liked to have seen... that grief more. Like, I—like, there's—he was obviously really wounded by his father, but you only see the wound as portrayed by Colin Farrell.

00:59:51 John Host Well, and this is the thing I think of, when I said the introduction of a kind of supernatural aspect into the movie? The only person that ever interrogates Angelina Jolie's claim that Alexander is the son of Zeus—the only interrogation of that that ever happens in the film is done by Alexander himself.

01:00:14 Adam Host *[Ben laughs.]*
I love that—*[laughs]* I love the scene! Like, you never wanna hear your mom talk about a sex experience, but when Olympias is like "No one's ever fucked me like Zeus! Oh my god."

01:00:24 Crosstalk Crosstalk *[Ben cracks up.]*
Adam: *[Laughs.]* And Alexander's like "SHUT UP, MOM!"
Ben: "EWWW! EWWW!"
John: "Shut up!"
Adam: *[Laughing]* "Don't!"
[Adam and Ben laugh.]

01:00:31 Adam Host That was a great moment! *[Laughs.]*

01:00:32 John Host But the problem is that the film portrays her—or the film does not itself examine her claim.

01:00:43 Ben Host Yeah, the *Washington Post* fact check doesn't pop up on screen.

01:00:48 John Host Right. And so it's always, at least within the language of the film, plausible that Alexander is the son of Zeus or whatever.

01:00:56 Adam Host Sure!

01:00:57 John Host Right? Like, it's always there.

01:00:58 Adam Host They're talking about real Titans when they look at the mountain range.

01:01:01 John Host They are!

01:01:02 Adam Host There's no irony in that.

01:01:03 John Host But for us the viewer, I think it would be... Like, for Alexander to have enough knowledge to say to his mother "Shut up, you're crazy, my father is Philip of Macedon."

[Ben laughs.]

Because the other thing she could be saying is "Philip's not your

father. It was... like a—it was a truck driver that I met."

01:01:26 Ben Host Yeah, that's given some voice to.

01:01:28 John Host But she isn't—like, she—because every time we come back to her, she's there kind of playing with her snakes. She's given this exotic, witchy cast. The movie does suggest to us that at some point or other, we're gonna—like, Zeus is gonna come down outta the clouds. And he never does... but I think—I think what you're saying, Adam, is that is part of the—that's sort of like how the ancients would have thought? But we're given omniscience in so many other places as modern viewers, to be confused about whether the filmmaker is also going to introduce real Titans or not—that the eagle somehow is the eye of Alexander or something? Like, that seems cheap.

01:02:17 Adam Host I experienced this movie believing that Zeus and the Titans were as real as its characters believe them to be.

01:02:24 John Host Yes, but you are a simple, simple child man.

01:02:26 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* You're the only person that I know that believes in Hellenic theology.

[Ben and John laugh.]

01:02:31 Adam Host Yeah. I believe Zeus has a great big dong.

01:02:33 John Host Yeah.

01:02:34 Ben Host You insisted on sacrificing an ox before we started podcasting this morning.

[John laughs.]

01:02:39 Adam Host Yeah. You wanna make a sudden, jerking motion across its throat.

[Ben laughs.]

01:02:44 John Host The thing is, Ben, when we take *Friendly Fire* on tour again?

01:02:46 Ben Host Yeah.

01:02:47 John Host I want it still to be an option in Adam's mind that Zeus would come to you in the night.

01:02:51 Ben Host *[Stifling laughter]* Mm-hm.

01:02:52 John Host And give you a real rogering.

01:02:54 Ben Host Yeah.

01:02:55 Adam Host Yeah.

01:02:56 Ben Host "Nobody's ever boned me like that."

01:02:57 John Host So let's just let him keep thinking that.

01:02:59 Adam Host "That Zeus knows where everything is."

[Ben laughs.]

01:03:02 John Host "How did that Zeus—how did that Zeus get my room key?"

[Adam and John laugh.]

01:03:05 Adam Host Well, he used a—he used a little mini lightning bolt to zap the—

01:03:09 John Host *[Imitates a lightning bolt.]*

01:03:10 Adam Host —zap the reader!

01:03:11 Ben Host Oh, yeah. *[Laughs.]* Yeah, it's got—the card reader. It depolarized my card, but it opened the door right up for him.

Oliver Stone really believes in the Great Man theory of history, I think. He's got those Putin interviews. He's got the Castro inter—like, he is really obsessed with the idea of the Great Man theory, almost.

01:03:33 John Host Well, because I think he thinks he is in the pantheon of great men.

01:03:36 Ben Host That's really something that came through to me in this, was like, I feel like Oliver Stone really identifies with Alexander the Great, *[laughs]* in a way that is so pathological.

01:03:47 John Host And the idea of making a film like this... And I think it's—I think we see it in the four versions.

01:03:54 Ben Host Right!

01:03:55 John Host The movie came out, and it didn't win 60 Oscars.

01:03:58 Ben Host No. *[Laughs.]*

01:03:59 John Host And so he was like "Well, we need a different version. You need to see a different version!"

01:04:02 Adam Host I am smiling so big hearing this.

[John laughs.]

Because—like, of course. Obviously. But you can't make this, or any other Oliver Stone film, without thinking that way! You need big fucking balls to make this movie. You need to believe that you are Alexander to make *Alexander*. There's no other way! And I think a lot of big-time Hollywood film directors have to have that gear in them to be able to do what they do. And I don't think that that's a weird, like, pathology that's—

01:04:36 John Host Do you not? *[Laughs.]*

01:04:37 Adam Host I don't think that is unique to Oliver Stone.

01:04:40 John Host Ah.

01:04:41 Adam Host I think that is a thing that you have to have to be a certain type of filmmaker that makes films of this scale with these budgets.

01:04:47 John Host If you're gonna make *Avatar* or *Titanic*, you have to be that—

01:04:49 Adam Host You need to have that James Cameron, Michael Bay, open shirt confidence, you know?

01:04:55 Ben Host Baz Luhrmann was apparently, like, racing Oliver Stone in the run up to this movie being green-lit, to try and get his Alexander the Great movie green-lit first. And like they had like a big, like, saber-rattling dispute.

01:05:10 Adam Host That's a fun race.

01:05:11 Ben Host And like, that's so perfect, right? Like, that Baz Luhrmann was the other guy trying to make the Alexander the Great movie. I wish both had been made! *[Laughs.]*

01:05:19 Adam Host Visually, I feel like there is some Baz Luhrmann in this.

01:05:23 Ben Host Yeah.

01:05:24 Adam Host Like, I could see it. If Oliver Stone's credit didn't come up at the end, I think you could have credibly imagined a Baz Luhrmann credit at the end of it.

01:05:34 Ben Host Wow. Yeah.

01:05:35 Adam Host If not for the absence of Christina Aguilera.

01:05:39 John Host You guys know a lot more about film than I do. I think you're absolutely right, Adam, about the BDE...

[Ben laughs.]

...that you have to have to make a film like this.

01:05:50 Adam Host Yeah.

01:05:51 Ben Host Big Dictator Energy? *[Laughs.]*

01:05:52 John Host *[Stifles laughter.]* But I think you have to interrogate (*in-tare-oh-gate*) that—or you have to interrogate (*in-teer-oh-gate*) that—also. Which is ultimately like, do we need spectacle movies, bread and circuses? Is that good? Is it good for us? Is it a good way to spend treasure and blood in the world?

01:06:14 Adam Host I am nodding yes in reply to all of those questions.

01:06:17 John Host I know. I see. I see. I'm sitting right here across from you. Ben—

01:06:21 Adam Host That was for Ben's benefit.

[Ben laughs.]

01:06:22 John Host Yeah, but Ben knew it, also. *[Laughs.]*

01:06:24 Adam Host Ben knows me very well.

01:06:25 John Host *[Laughs.]* And those are questions that, you know, that maybe I'm dumb to ask, right?

01:06:30 Ben Host Whoa, Christopher McQuarrie was gonna be the screenwriter on that Baz Luhrmann version!

01:06:36 Adam Host Wow.

01:06:37 Ben Host That's nuts.

01:06:38 John Host And he was... He also wrote *Lady Marmalade*? *[Laughs quietly.]*

01:06:41 Adam Host He does the latter-day *Mission Impossible* films.

01:06:44 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** *[Briefly sings the Mission Impossible theme.]*

Adam: You know, *[stifling laughter]* Tom Cruise was Oliver Stone's first choice to play Alexander, also.

[Ben laughs.]

01:06:49 John Host That would be amazing! This would have been an amazing Tom Cruise movie!

01:06:51 Adam Host If we could mash up all of those names...

01:06:53 Ben Host Wow.

01:06:54 Adam Host Be a pretty wild film at the end of it.

[Ben laughs.]

01:06:56 John Host Well, how do we feel about Colin Farrell... as a thing?

01:07:00 Ben Host I think he's brilliantly cast in this, because to me he just seems like an ego in the shape of a man, and that kinda feels... like, there's a lot of verisimilitude for a guy that conquered the world by 25.

01:07:13 John Host Yeah, I came out feeling like he was googly eyeing his way through the movie, but there was a lot of the movie that I liked him and was with him.

01:07:22 Ben Host Yeah.

01:07:23 John Host Right? I felt like that he just needed slightly more range.

01:07:28 Ben Host It's got a bit of the Batman voice problem, where like, most of the movie he's just like, rasp-screaming at everybody.

01:07:34 John Host There's so much Mel Gibson in his performance.

01:07:37 Adam Host But young Alexander as portrayed by Colin Farrell does lighten his voice a little bit.

01:07:43 Ben Host That's true. Yeah.

01:07:44 Adam Host Like, I think he's doing work there.

01:07:45 Ben Host Right.

01:07:46 Adam Host With the age.

01:07:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeah, he's depicting it—

Adam: I liked Colin Farrell before this movie, and I like him in it, also.

01:07:51 John Host Mm-hm.

01:07:52 Adam Host I think he's good.

01:07:53 John Host Mm-hm.

01:07:54 Ben Host He's a snack, too. He's really easy on the eyes. Everybody in this movie is very fuckable!

01:07:58 John Host Yeah. Pretty much.

01:07:59 Adam Host But is the movie itself fuckable?

[Ben cracks up.]

Only—*[laughs]* only a custom rating system can tell us. It's a rating system designed by me using an object from the film that catches my eye. One of the objects that I did not choose for this rating system—I thought for sure, John, you were gonna bring up—was Alexander's tax plan that he's feverishly working on during one of the montages.

[All three laugh.]

Which, like—like a junior high school thesis paper, is just like, in big words, "Alexander's Tax Plan," *[stifling laughter]* and the A is a triangle like the Greek letter.

[John laughs.]

I love that! *[Laughs.]*

01:08:44 John Host Well, you just named my guy! I was Alexander's tax plan—

01:08:46 Adam Host Awww!

01:08:47 John Host —and now I have to come up with a different guy.

[Ben laughs.]

01:08:48 Adam Host You do. You do. Try again.

I think the main thing that influenced how I feel about this movie now is how I felt about it before seeing it.

01:09:00 John Host Hmm-mm-mm?

01:09:01 Adam Host And the object that I'm choosing that best embodies that quality is the baboon! When Alexander's army walks into India and they are blown away by these tiny men in hair suits fighting them from the trees, they mistake them for being, like, little people. But they're not. They're apes.

01:09:25 John Host Are they even baboons? I thought they were monkeys.

01:09:27 Adam Host I thought they were baboons! Are they not?

01:09:29 John Host Are monkeys apes?

01:09:31 Ben Host Apes don't have tails.

01:09:32 John Host Monkeys are not apes.

01:09:34 Adam Host Can we agree on what they are? What are they?

01:09:36 John Host I don't think they're baboons. I thought they were monkeys.

01:09:38 Adam Host For the purposes of this rating system, I'm gonna call them monkeys.

01:09:42 John Host Let's say monkeys.

01:09:43 Adam Host Knowing that they could be baboons.

01:09:45 Ben Host Baboons are a type of monkey. Don't worry.

01:09:47 Adam Host Don't write us.

[John laughs.]

01:09:50 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** That was—

John: Send your angry letters to gofuckyourself@maxfun.org.

Adam: You go into India.

01:09:56 Adam Host You're thinking you're gonna fight people, and instead... And you think for a moment you're fighting little people! But no, they're monkeys, and that... is how I felt going into this. I thought I was gonna—

01:10:06 John Host *[Stifling laughter]* You thought you were gonna be fighting little people but you ended up fighting monkeys?

[John and Ben laugh.]

01:10:09 Adam Host I thought I was gonna see a little weird movie that everyone hated. But once I understood that this movie was a monkey, and not a little person—

[Ben laughs.]

01:10:22 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** —I appreciated it a lot more!

Ben: *[Through laughter]* What the fuck is this metaphor?

John: *[Laughing]* Okay. Alright.

[Adam laughs.]

01:10:27 John Host No, this is good! This is summing up this entire episode for me.

01:10:32 Adam Host This happens a lot when you watch a lot of movies. You hear about a film's reputation, you go into it with very low expectations, and that is often a great way to come out on the other side feeling good about what you've seen. And that is a thing that happened to me here. I went in thinking that this would be a 20-Raspberry-winning film, and as it was going along, I was like... "I am enjoying this!"

[Ben laughs.]

"This is fun and interesting!"

01:10:58 John Host How many watch—how many different times did you have to watch it? I mean, how many—how'd you break it up?

01:11:04 Adam Host I took this down in four chunks. I stopped at the intermission and I stopped once on either side of the intermission.

01:11:09 John Host Mm-hm. That seems right.

01:11:10 Adam Host But there—the way this film is constructed allows you to do that easily, because it really partitions itself out into acts and different time periods. And I don't think you lose anything by taking it down in chunks like that! It feels episodic, in a way that works in its favor. Whatever way the viewer chooses to watch this film, I think it should be seen! I think Oliver Stone... not a great guy.

01:11:37 Ben Host *[Jovially]* We didn't come here to review Oliver Stone, Adam!

01:11:41 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** Exactly.

John: I did. *[Laughs.]*

01:11:42 Adam Host The filmmaker that makes these films? Like... I'm glad he's around, and I'm glad he's making films like this. I think that there's a sincerity in the films of Oliver Stone. And I haven't seen his ones about dictators, so I'm not including that in this. I'm talking about his narrative film work, like of this era. Like, there's a sincerity imbued to his films that are, like, totally unique to him! And there's a language both visually and in the dialogue that his characters speak that like, I think is unique. It has a specific quality to Oliver Stone films. And it's like seeing something performed on stage, in a way. Like, there's a stage play feel to *Alexander* that I really responded to. This passion play idea of it that I liked a lot!

It has a different intensity than other films, and I totally get how off-putting that can be. If you watch this and ten other films made in 2004, I think this is the outlier. It's just weird! It's an odd duck. But I'm so glad that a film like this can be made, and I'm so glad Oliver Stone was the one that made it! Like, when that credit comes up at

the end, I couldn't help but be like "Fuck yeah, Oliver Stone. You fucking did it. You got four bites of this apple, this Fuji apple, and you got it—like, you did it your way. And I respect the hell out of it!"

I like the movie! I really did!

01:13:08 Ben Host

[Whispering] Wow. *[Laughs.]*

01:13:09 Adam Host

And I never would have thought that I would have before seeing this. But again, I believe that's going into a thing expecting crap, and you getting, uh, a piece of mud pie at the end. It's good! It's good. It's not great. It's good. I'm gonna give it, uh, four and one quarter monkeys.

01:13:27 Ben Host

They thought about calling it *Alexander the Good*, but they were worried it would be too kinda on the nose.

01:13:32 Adam Host

I'm happy that it's getting appreciated now. I wish I got a chance to see this in a movie theater. I think this would have been a lot of fun to see its full three and a half hours on a big screen, with the sound—

01:13:44 John Host

They might do it at Cinerama, right? Wouldn't that—?

01:13:46 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Adam: Like—

John: I would go to see that with you.

Adam: I would go see it! Yeah!

01:13:48 Ben Host

Particularly fun would be to see it in one of those old-timey movie palaces with the like, weird Egyptian theme in the—*[laughs]* in the theater.

01:13:55 Adam Host

Yeah! I think there's room for spectacle. And this is a spectacular film in that way.

01:14:02 Ben Host

I also think it is spectacular, *[stifling laughter]* but I do not think it's very good.

I think that it's... really weird to make a movie about somebody conquering the world and not, like, pass any moral judgment on that. It kind of celebrates the idea of conquering the world. It is not a movie about, like, whether or not that was a good idea. And in kind of riding the fence, it is a tacit endorsement of that as a... as a goal? That's so weird.

Like, it's so weird to do that! So weird to get \$155,000,000 and go make this movie and... like, leave that to the—*[laughs]* like, to the critics to hash out. And I think that's... I think that's maybe where I part ways with it. I don't know. Like, maybe it was a mistake to watch it in one part. Maybe it would be better as like an HBO miniseries with five episodes of 45 minutes apiece or something like that.

01:15:08 Adam Host

I thought a lot about that myself, yeah.

01:15:10 John Host

I agree.

01:15:11 Ben Host

'Cause I really found it interminable. And there were—there was a lot interesting about it. And it's like a time in history that I think is really interesting to visit, and I wish there were more films set in this period that were as interested in it as a period as this movie clearly is. But yeah, I don't think it added up to a good movie for me. So I'm gonna

give it two and a half monks.

01:15:45 Adam Host Ben goes out of his way to say that the world domination theme's... bad.

[Ben laughs.]

01:15:51 John Host Yeah.

01:15:52 Adam Host Says nothing about forcible castration.

[John laughs.]

So I think we can assume that Ben is pro-castration.

01:15:58 Ben Host It's worked out great for me!

[Adam laughs.]

01:16:02 John Host That aspect of your review, Ben, is the thing that I always look forward to in hearing your review of the film.

01:16:11 Ben Host How will I find a way to do virtue signaling this time? *[Laughs quietly.]*

01:16:15 John Host Well, what's amazing to me is that I—like, the—because as I was watching the film, you know, having done this show with you for all this time, I was watching it and trying to see it through your eyes sometimes. In terms of the themes of world-conquering, the themes of... you know, the way that humanity treats humanity, in attempting to portray the way that those things have functioned in the human experience since... the dawn.

[Ben laughs quietly.]

Right? So watching it—you know, watching it and thinking about like, "What is Ben's take on this gonna be?" or "What does—how do you—how are you going to see it?" Because for me, of course, like, world domination is not a—like, world domination as a goal for someone who is in the ancient world and is a king, and is a warlike king, or a war maker... Like, it would never—like, it's not a thing that I would ever look at and question if I weren't thinking about it in terms of how you were gonna perceive it. Right?

01:17:27 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** So it's always—

Ben: *[Laughing]* I'm sorry I've poisoned your mind in that way.

01:17:31 John Host It's part of the interesting thing about this show.

01:17:33 Ben Host It did really make me, like, feel terrible thinking like, "God, this just seems to be like, somehow inherent to a certain kind of ambitious man." Like, Alexander is the, uh—*[laughs]*. I don't know. He's the Jeff Bezos of his era. Like, he like, can't stop and enjoy the spoils of war. He just like, keeps conquering everything he can see.

01:17:59 John Host Yeah. And for 2300 years, ambitious men used Alexander himself as their role model.

01:18:05 Ben Host Right.

01:18:06 John Host Like, that he—like, there's not a—there wasn't a general since Alexander that didn't study what he did and try and emulate him.

01:18:13 Adam Host There was no option to not do that, though. You either conquer or be

conquered, right? Like, there was—*[laughs]*. It's not like Alexander could have laid back in the cut in piece.

[John laughs.]

And made things prosperous for his people. Like, he could only ever be this, right?

01:18:30 John Host

Sure, Darius was—

01:18:31 Adam Host

Or die trying.

01:18:32 John Host

Darius was on his way to visit Alexander before Alexander came to visit Darius.

01:18:35 Adam Host

[Noise of agreement.]

01:18:36 John Host

I—you know, I've critiqued it quite a bit in this episode. And I think my primary complaint with it in a couple of respects—particularly the way Olympus is given sort of quasi-supernatural affectations that are never interrogated, and the way Alexander has a kind of modernist neoliberalism that's never interrogated—the only counter to Alexander throughout the movie are a bunch of generals who are disgruntled. There's no one—and the film itself does not examine his motivations, examine his accomplishments, with any outside viewpoint other than just people who are mad that Alexander won't let them go home.

[Ben laughs.]

And so Alexander in all of his fugues and in all of his, you know, different moods—we never get a full picture of either what's driving him or what his alternatives were. We spend an awful lot of time in his bedroom.

That said, it's an epic. And there's so much about it to enjoy. I wonder what I would have thought about the theatrical release, because three and a half hours—we all agreed to watch the long version. Because we're gluttons for punishment and we figured like, "Why not? Why not?"

[Ben laughs.]

"Let's pick a movie that is too long even for me to watch in the bath."

[Ben laughs.]

01:20:18 John Host

But I'm glad I watched, and I'm glad it was made, frankly. It's—it is, like a lot of movies we watch, an opening to conversation. Not just between us, but like... You couldn't watch this film and not have some questions about the ancient world and the fact that these were real people. So I'm gonna give it three and a half monkeys. I feel like it's a strong three and a half monkeys. That is a monkey for every hour of this movie, and I agree, if you watched it as a miniseries, if you thought of it as like "Well, this is four episodes of *Band of Brothers* that I'm gonna binge watch tonight, or I'm gonna watch over the course of two nights..."

There's an awful lot to take in, and it's—it is a—it's beautiful. It's often

beautiful. It's a great war movie. Maybe if I watched it over two nights I would have had a—like, more fun.

01:21:14 Ben Host Maybe I shoulda watched the first half on my first plane ride and the second half on my second plane ride. Maybe that's the secret! Maybe then I woulda liked it more!

01:21:22 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Maybe, Ben, you and I just need to get inside of Adam's, like, just joyful approach to life and stop being such anxious, brat assholes!

[Ben laughs.]

Adam: That's how everyone describes me.

Ben: Yeah. A real bon vivant.

Adam: Real joyous approach to life.

Ben: Yeah.

01:21:39 John Host *[Laughs.]* Just lighthearted Adam, skip-to-la-lou'ing.

01:21:42 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* John, did you have a guy?

01:21:48 John Host Yeah, of course! Of course my guy was Aristotle.

[Adam laughs.]

As portrayed by Christopher Plummer.

01:21:57 Adam Host The great Christopher Plummer.

01:21:59 John Host Because Aristotle—and this is—it's wonderful to see Aristotle portrayed as a living man. Because Aristotle is... He's teaching these boys the knowledge as he understands it. And he's really wrong about some things. Just, geographically wrong, and also... sort of wrong.

01:22:24 Adam Host Geographically wrong but also wrong wrong.

[Ben laughs.]

01:22:27 John Host And he—but he does it with the exact confidence that I bring to things when I'm wrong.

[Ben laughs harder.]

Which is—*[laughs]*.

01:22:33 Adam Host He's got the confidence of a Bush. Like, the confidence of the wrong, for sure.

01:22:37 John Host Yeah! He has—I mean, you know, if I were sitting there teaching a group of teenage boys about things, I would be almost exactly that amount of wrong, and I would be that amount of confident!

01:22:47 Adam Host And those boys would be rapt.

01:22:49 John Host They absolutely would. Those boys would—

01:22:51 Ben Host Stand up on their rocks and say "Oh captain, my captain."

01:22:55 John Host *[Laughs.]* When they were out conquering the world many years

later, they would be writing me little papyrus notes.

[Ben laughs.]

Saying "I'm trying to find the headwaters of the Nile, which you explained was an ocean."

[Adam laughs.]

"Seems to be over the next mountain still..."

[Ben laughs.]

01:23:10 Adam Host "I'm sleeping with all these other boys, many boys as a time—at a time..."

[John laughs.]

"And yet I haven't found love!"

01:23:17 John Host Yep. Yeah. So he was—I identified with him mightily.

01:23:21 Adam Host Mm.

01:23:22 John Host Felt like... If there's ever a job opening for a new Aristotle.

[Ben laughs.]

01:23:28 Adam Host My guy's Craterus. The Macedonian general. He, at the end of the seven-year march, has finally had enough. Took seven years to get there before he develops a dissenting opinion he feels comfortable sharing with the group.

[Ben and John laugh, Adam stifles laughter.]

That feels like me! I feel like I could do this show for seven years before I finally say "Fuck you guys. I'm not driving over to John's anymore—"

[John laughs.]

"—to be given no donuts, even though John was at a donut shop this morning and brought no donuts home."

[Ben laughs.]

01:24:02 John Host I truly am the Alexander of this relationship.

01:24:06 Adam Host Craterus starts a mutiny that doesn't get a lot of traction, but he also lives through it. Like, Alexander winds his way through the crowd and is like "You get executed, you get executed." Like, he's doling out executions with finger guns. Craterus is not one of those guys. He goes on to be one of the provincial kings after Alexander's death, I think!

01:24:30 John Host Right!

01:24:31 Adam Host But that was a fun outcome for him.

01:24:34 John Host Yeah.

01:24:35 Adam Host Good job by Craterus and his moment at the Baize River. So that

makes him my guy. Those other guys are out there just yelling from the crowd anonymously; that really pisses Alexander off!

01:24:48 John Host Well, it does, and he goes and finds 'em and they all end up, like, tied to logs!

01:24:52 Adam Host I think he pointed out some innocent guys in that crowd!

01:24:54 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeah, he definitely did.

John: Sure. Yeah.

Adam: Think some guys are getting executed wrongly!

01:24:57 John Host That's the kind of collateral damage that you gotta expect in the ancient world.

01:25:00 Adam Host Right.

01:25:01 Ben Host Being a drunk despotic ruler, *[laughs]* you can really fuck some shit up. "Ohhh man, I drunk-executed a lot of guys last night."

[All three laugh.]

"Whoops!" *[Laughs.]*

01:25:13 Adam Host Who's your guy, Ben?

01:25:14 Ben Host My guy's "back and to the left" guy!

[Adam laughs.]

I just—I thought that that was amazing! Like, to put that in the first 27 minutes—Oliver Stone busted his own chops. And I laughed out loud when it happened. I really appreciated it.

[John laughs.]

01:25:28 Adam Host Oliver Stone cut out the part at the end of the film where Ptolemy's like "The records on Alexander will be sealed for another 40 years, so it's up to your kids! And their kids after them!"

[John and Adam laugh.]

"To keep the interest alive!" And then he turns to camera. "It's up to you!"

[Ben laughs.]

Fun moment. Good guy! "Back and to the left" guy.

01:25:47 Ben Host Eh, it's not a great guy. I mean, we already talked about it.

01:25:49 Adam Host There was the magic trunk. When that guy sliced off the trunk, it turned right in midair and hit that guy in the wrist.

[John and Adam laugh.]

01:26:00 Ben Host It's true.

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

War!

Huh!
Yeah!

01:26:04 Adam Host *[Stifling laughter]* Do we have a magic movie to watch next?

I sure hope so.

01:26:07 John Host Yeah.

01:26:08 Adam Host Only the 120-sided die can tell us.

01:26:11 John Host Here we go. Making my die corral. Ope—now I've got—uh, I'm using an old telephone now as part of my die corral here.

01:26:18 Adam Host We're kind of running out of Oliver Stone films. I hope we can just sort of—

01:26:23 John Host Not have one here?

01:26:24 Adam Host Dose them out.

01:26:25 John Host Okay, here we go.

[Die rolls.]

01:26:26 Adam Host Evenly.

[Die continues for a few seconds and then comes to a stop.]

01:26:30 John Host Alright!

[Beat.]

Seventy-one! Number 71.

01:26:34 Music Music *[Intense, dramatic music plays over the next line.]*

01:26:35 Ben Host Seventy-one is a 1965 Sam Peckinpah film set during the Civil War. It's called *Major Dundee*.

[Music stops.]

01:26:43 Adam Host *[Australian accent]* "That's not a knife! This is a knife!"

01:26:46 John Host *[Laughs.]* Oof.

01:26:47 Adam Host That's *Major Dundee*, right?

01:26:49 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Wow.

John: Oof.

Ben: *[Laughing]* Oh, god.

[Adam laughs.]

01:26:52 Ben Host This podcast sucks.

[All three laugh.]

01:26:55 John Host You know, while we're doing—while we're doing accents, I wanna just harken back to the incredible accent choice that Angelina Jolie made in—

01:27:07 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** Yeah?

Ben: Oh, yeah!

John: —in *Alexander*.

Ben: Kinda like, Russian-ish?

John: Where she basically—*[laughs]* yeah!

01:27:10 John Host Where she basically did the accent of Natasha from *Bullwinkle*.

[Ben and Adam crack up.]

[Stifling laughter] Through the entire film! And so much better than like—than movies where everybody just uses a fake British accent to portray the ancient world.

01:27:25 Adam Host That's fun.

01:27:26 Ben Host I think she got nominated for Worst Female Fake Accent at the Golden Raspberries that year.

01:27:32 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Really something, man.

Ben: Yeah.

01:27:33 Music Music "War" starts fading in.

01:27:34 Adam Host Colin Farrell was unable to drop his brogue, his own accent, and so everyone else in the cast had to fall in line with a weird accent.

[John laughs.]

And that's why many Irish actors were cast!

01:27:46 John Host Really?

01:27:47 Adam Host Yeah!

01:27:48 John Host To make the Greeks just like, "Oh, well, you're all Irish I guess."

01:27:50 Adam Host To make it not stand out.

01:27:51 John Host Wow, interesting.

01:27:52 Adam Host Kinda did Colin Farrell a favor there.

[Ben laughs.]

I think.

01:27:57 Ben Host Well! *Major Dundee* will be next. Looking forward to. Sam Peckinpah, one of the... American auteurs of the sixties and seventies. Can't wait! So, in the meantime, for John Roderick and Adam Pranica, I've been Ben Harrison. To the victor go the spoiler alerts!

01:28:17 Music Music "War" continues, playing quietly as Rob speaks.

What is it good for?!

*Absolutely—
—nothing!*

Listen to me!

War!

It ain't nothing but a heartbreaker

01:28:24 Rob Schulte 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.

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Thanks! We'll see you next week.

01:29:19 Music Music

"War" continues until the next music cue.

Is there no place for them today?

*They say we must fight to keep our freedom
But Lord knows there's got to be a better way
Oh!*

01:29:31 Music Transition

A cheerful guitar chord.

01:29:32 Speaker 1 Guest

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01:29:34 Speaker 2 Guest

Comedy and culture.

01:29:35 Speaker 3 Guest

Artist owned—

01:29:36 Speaker 4 Guest

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