

Angel On Top
Episode 3.03: That Old Gang of Mine

[CHIME]

LaToya: Welcome back to Angel On Top, a podcast where we watch and discuss every episode of Angel, one by one, spoiler free, and in tandem with Buffering the Vampire Slayer. I'm your host, LaToya Ferguson. And before I tell you about today's episode of Angel, we are doing a special intro installment of Kristin's Corner, right here at the top. Take it away, Kristin.

[KRISTIN'S CORNER jingle plays]
Kristin's Corner! Kristin's Corner!

Kristin: Oh my gosh, hi everybody. Here I am, it's so early to hear my voice. Usually I'm here to talk about, you know, Cordelia or Cordelia. Or even sometimes Cordelia. But today, I'm actually here to tell you two other joyful things. Believe it or not, there are some joyful things outside of simply Cordelia. In the Buffering and Angel On Top universes, for many a season now, we have been so honored that our Scoobies—you listeners—have run holiday gift exchanges. There are now two holiday gift exchanges, and as we have become one, just like the Spice Girls always said we would, here in this podcast feed, the gift exchanges for our patrons are also now combined.

That means if you are patron of Angel On Top, if you are a patron of Buffering the Vampire Slayer, that means that now is the time to sign up for that Scooby gift exchange or also, the Scooby book exchange. Both of the links to sign up for those gift exchanges are the most recent post on both Angel On Top and Buffering the Vampire Slayer's Patreon feeds. And also, if you are one of our black or indigenous listeners, you likely know this already, but you'll get an email with those links to sign up as well. All of the digital perks available on both Patreon accounts are accessible for free for our black and indigenous listenership.

The other thing that I wanna tell you about is that we're doing some fundraising for Georgia and for the runoff elections in Georgia. Stacy Abrams, you probably know. Stacey Abrams is a massive political force, a massive force in general. And did so much organizing, along with so many others locally in Georgia, to flip the state blue. Hell fucking yeah, Georgia! And there are runoff elections happening in January for two very critical Senate seats. Stacy Abrams is also a massive Buffy the Vampire Slayer fan. We would be doing this fundraising no matter what, but it is very special that Stacy is a Buffy fan, has a lot of opinions about Angel and Spike

that have been floating around the internet lately. I'm not gonna go into them here, because they may or may not contain a few spoilers.

But I will tell you is this. Right now, and through the end of the day on Sunday, November 22nd, we're running a giveaway. So you can head to bufferingthevampireslayer.com/forgeorgia, that's F-O-R-G-E-O-R-G-I-A. Bufferingthevampireslayer.com/forgeorgia, and you'll see that we have many bundles of the Buffy Boom comics that are signed by Jenny and myself. We're gonna be adding to that page in the next couple of weeks as well. We've raised, with your help and with your entries into that giveaway, already over \$1800, that we'll be donating to Fair Fight. That is the place that Stacy Abrams herself has asked for people to donate. The links are all found on that page, bufferingthevampireslayer.com/forgeorgia.

One other small thing. You'll notice towards the end of this episode that Mack's audio changes a bit. We had a couple of little technical difficulties with the audio. It's not a big deal, but I just didn't want you to be surprised. Luckily, everything that Mack and LaToya say far transcends any need for perfect audio. Okay! So stay tuned in the next couple of weeks for more. I'm going to stop talking now, because the reason you're here, of course, is to hear LaToya Ferguson along with Mack MacDade talk about this episode. Back to you, LaToya.

LaToya: Thanks, Kristin. This week, we're watching Angel, Season 3, Episode 3, That Old Gang of Mine. And joining me as cohost is Buffering the Vampire Slayer and Angel On Top consultant, Mack MacDade. That Old Gang of Mine was written by Angel heavy hitter, Tim Minear, and directed by Fred Keller. It aired on The WB on October 8, 2001. This is the one where Gunn discovers that his old vampire-hunting crew has decided that gang violence is actually good. This is also the one where Angel the series gives up on pretending it cares about Gunn's old vampire-hunting crew altogether, which is probably for the best, considering the makeup of who was writing the show.

[Angel On Top theme plays]

LaToya: Hello, Mack!

Mack: Hello, hello, hello!

LaToya: Mack, since this is your—I guess your first official time on Angel On Top, I've gotta know. What is your Angel origin story?

Mack: My Angel origin story was being a little girl who thought that, you know, Angel was very dreamy. And so when he got a spinoff, [laughs] followed him right into perdition.

LaToya: I mean, you're not wrong. He is dreamy and we will be discussing that in this episode. [both laugh]

Mack: Yeah, and then the other thing is, I live in Los Angeles. So it was actually kind of fun to be like, that is *not* what that very real place in LA actually looks like. That was the other fun part of the show, which is why I stuck around a lot. [laughs]

LaToya: Well no, as we all know, south LA is just all warehouses for street urchins to live in, basically. [Mack laughs] Are you excited to talk about this episode, Mack?

Mack: I am so excited because it's just—it is—I actually told Kristin. I was like, I rewatched it... and was like, maybe it's not as bad as I remember it being, right? 'Cause sometimes, you know, you'll rewatch something and like, you start to see the bad things. And so like, you get intense about it? I was like, maybe it's not as bad as I remember. And then I rewatched it and was like, oh no. Nah. It's exactly as bad as I remember it. Cool. Cool, cool, cool, cool. [laughs]

LaToya: I mean, I think there are interesting concepts in the episode. And all—most of my notes—a lot of my notes are just like, "and this could be interesting, if they did this a different way." [laughs] Tim Minear, in 2007, I saw an interview he did and he talked about this episode. And I wanna read that real quick, this quote, which is—the interviewer asked, "Prior to its airing, I read that you were pleased with the script for That Old Gang of Mine, yet the pleasure went away once it was produced. What changed?"

To which, Minear said, "No. I always pretty much loathed that script. But I felt, weak as the script was, that had it been shot differently, that it would have made a huge difference. As it happened, it was my weakest script coupled with the most unfocused direction. Just painful all the way around." Well, I like that he says it's his weakest script, but I also think that this quote basically puts all of the onus on the director. And I think that the problems with this episode are very much a writing situation. [laughs]

Mack: Yeah, like, you can only direct things so much.

LaToya: It is—it's interesting, 'cause you know, the way writers' rooms work, obviously, there are multiple writers. And they all, you know, take turns writing the scripts. But ultimately, like, the buck stops at the showrunner, because they are,

you know, imitating the showrunner's voice. And the showrunner will do the final revisions. And so you hear a lot about how, you know, when there's like a great joke or something, and the writer's like, oh, that was actually a Joss thing. You don't really hear—and then—well, this is a bad episode because of Joss. Even though arguably, the same thing could be said. He was still doing the final passes on bad episodes of television, you know?

Mack: Well, it's like, Glee—so. Something that, like, if you were a hardcore Gleek, you know when Ryan was heavily involved in an episode—

LaToya: Yes.

Mack: Based on what it sounds like.

LaToya: 'Cause the Glee writers' room is an insane thing, different from a lot of other writers' rooms. [laughs]

Mack: Yeah, so like, I don't understand when people think we also don't have the same sense with Joss Whedon projects. Like, we know when it was Joss.

LaToya: So I think there is an interesting story to be told about, you know, humans deciding that they're going to be proactive against monsters. And considering the shades of gray Angel especially the show lives in with monsters and the good or the bad or just the in between. There's a lot you can kind of get from that. And especially the idea of, like, hunting monsters for sport, as opposed to, you know, hunting monsters for science, which is what we had with the Initiative in Season 4 of the B-word show.

This is not a story that should be told in one episode and then we say goodbye. This is something that should have been a gradual thing. We've noted in the past episode that this was originally supposed to be Episode 2 of Season 3. There was a switch. So this is an episode that's just like, let's finally get this story—the Gunn/crew story—out and just done with, basically. Instead of giving it the time and care it deserved and needed.

Mack: Yeah, and it also feels like they were looking at—and again, it's a Joss show so you know it was arced out for quite a few seasons. So I feel like it's such an afterthought. Like, knowing how Joss Whedon operates, this is clearly an afterthought, if you're planning out how you want something to go. But like, also, if it's an afterthought, make it a good afterthought. [LaToya laughs] Like, you absolutely should have had this conversation. But like, once you realize you need to

have it, and like, you're gonna half-ass it? Use half of like, Nicki Minaj's ass, not like, half of Heidi Klum's ass. Like, if you're gonna do it. Like. [both laugh]

LaToya: Again, there were only white writers on this show. [laughter] We should note that again. And it's weird—one thing I was thinking, like, early in my prep for this episode, something I never really thought about but it kind of works, is that it's like a bullshit version of like, a Malcolm vs. Martin thing.

Mack: Mmhmm!

LaToya: Where Gunn is the white people's version of Martin Luther King. And obviously Gio and the crew are Malcolm X, which makes them the bad guys. Yeah, it's just like the version of MLK that's only "I have a dream" and nothing else.

Mack: [laughing] So the white version of Martin Luther King.

LaToya: Exactly. So of course, that's a good one and in the end, that wins. And south LA will just—will never be saved by Angel and company again, apparently. [laughs]

Mack: And here's the thing. It's not even an appropriate lift of Martin vs. Malcolm. It's, again, showing that Joss Whedon is a comic book nerd, because this is a direct lift of some of the worst 90s X-Men storylines.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: Like, that's really what it is. Had it been a direct lift of that conversation, of like—you know, not even Martin and Malcolm. But like, a Jesus and a John the Baptist, right. There's always those two. That's what makes a story good, that's what makes progress happen, right? They didn't even do that. Like, they didn't give it the energy of having, like, a clash of Titans idea in practice. It is very much, like, these are a caricature of Magneto's evil, these are a caricature of the righteous X-Men, you know, led by an all-knowing, slightly-too-old white dude.

LaToya: Yes. You have the good guys, who are Team Angel, and of course, the bad guys, who are not Team Angel. And it's just like—and you know especially that it's not even trying to do shades of gray with humans, surprisingly, when they get guns in there. 'Cause that's, of course, the universal B-verse sign for "bad." If you got some guns, you're bad.

Mack: Which is a question I've had through every run of both of these shows, was like, did—what? Don't we have, like, a wooden bullet gun? Like, don't we have—like, there's gotta be—

LaToya: [laughs] Wooden bullets are actually something very common in The Vampire Diaries, so. [laughs]

Mack: Which is the other show I'm obsessed with.

LaToya: Good, good, good. Yes, we're gonna get along famously. [Mack laughs] The physics of wooden bullets, of course, don't actually make sense. Because—

Mack: At all. [laughs]

LaToya: They would just burn up as soon as they were shot, yeah. But they're cool, and that's the thing.

Mack: Okay. But I mean, physics—we're talking about physics. We have vampires! [laughter]

LaToya: But no, science matters, okay?

Mack: [doubtfully] Mmhmm. [both laugh]

LaToya: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I have to bring it up every time wooden bullets come up. Because again, they are cool. But they wouldn't—they would just burn if shot through a gun. That's just the way it is! Before we get, like, right into the beat by beat of the episode, I do wanna say that—so at the end of Season 2 of Angel, we were just talking about how, you know, everyone's kind of learning their lessons while they're in Pylea. Except for Gunn, which like, it seemed like his only lesson is to learn that Wes is the leader, basically. [laughs]

Mack: Yeah.

LaToya: Because Gunn basically just chooses to be a subservient soldier, instead of like, a leader, is what happens. And I understand there is a—like, again. There is a story to be told about, like, he—like, his self-loathing. Because like, basically he puts himself in the soldier role because what happened with him as a leader. But like, even Rondell notes, like, "you know, you actually were a good leader and we still needed you." And you would think the story would eventually be for Gunn to step up as a leader. That's, like, what it should be. And that's just not it.

Mack: [laughs] Not even a little.

LaToya: Not at all. And just one more thing. I believe this episode is what officially reveals that the whole "no demon violence" in Caritas is actually a spell and not just, like, something Lorne hopes everyone will do, you know?

Mack: Which always made me a little sad. 'Cause I just kind of felt like, we respect Lorne, this sweet little baby, so much that we are not gonna act a fool, so that we don't have to be gathered. Great. But no, it's magic. [both laugh]

LaToya: I watched this on Netfl—uh, on Hulu and there were no previouslys. And I note that because—so the opening scene in this episode really works better when you have the previouslys. Did you see it with previouslys, Mack?

Mack: Uh, no 'cause I watched it on Hulu as well.

LaToya: Yeah, so in the previouslys, part of that is obviously the Merl stuff, you know. But the other part of that is Darla and Angel and what—where Angel left Darla in Season 2 and how he treated her, you know, after they had sex. So, this opening scene, of course, is supposed to be a fake-out that he's apologizing to Darla, who we know is on her way, pregnant, to go see Daddy, basically.

Mack: Yeah, I actually—when it first started, like, I haven't seen this episode in a very long time. And—but I remembered that that was the previous storyline. I was like, I don't remember him losing his goddamn mind. What? [laughs] Then it pulls out as like, got you!

LaToya: Yeah. 'Cause the bit only kinda works—'cause the bit only works if you know what the context is for why—why the shot's like a closeup like that. And just otherwise, like, who is he—who are we supposed to think he's apologizing to? You know?

Mack: I mean, he should be apologizing to Cordy for many, many reasons. But. [both laugh] I'm a Cordy stan account, so. [laughs]

LaToya: Are we not all Cordy stan accounts?

[CORDELIA jingle plays]
Cordelia... (ah-ahh)
I love you, Cordelia (ah-ahh)
You're perfect, Cordelia (ah-ahh)

LaToya: Angel is actually apologizing to Merl, poorly, for everything he did to him during his beige Angel/Angle arc. He's literally reading his apology off notecards. [Mack laughs] It's a bad apology. Cordy has to end up talking to Merl, which is how you basically learn that Cordy is the one who wrote the notecards. [laughs] Then we get something I love, which is petty Angel. [laughs]

Mack: It's really good that he was given his own show. He is so good at that. At like, just like, having different shades of Angel.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: And this is one of those moments where it shines through really well. [laughs]

LaToya: He gets to give you all the versions of Angel you love. Petty Angel, Shallow Angel, Old Man Angel. [laughs] Old Man Angel who is, of course, Cheap Angel.

Mack: Right? The, like, Inappropriate Sexual Tension with Cordy Angel. [laughs]

LaToya: So you—oh, you say inappropriate. So this will be at odds with our guest, Connor Goldsmith, who was on for That Vision Thing.

Mack: I just think it's inappropriate because he's so, like, emotionally constipated. [both laugh]

LaToya: But what man isn't? But yes. When Angel goads Merl into hitting him, that's how we learn that the whole "no demon violence" thing is not just a suggestion or sign. It's a thing that's—prevents demons from even trying it. And Angel knew that, and he was being a little stinker. And that of course comes into play for later in the episode.

Merl no longer wants to see these people ever again, but he does need a ride home, so Gunn gives him a silent ride. And Gunn, by the way, who was having a ball watching Angel mess with Merl, he thought it was hilarious. He took no part in, like, the mediation. He was laughing so much.

Mack: That is the black person in that situation, behaving appropriately. I will watch these white people act a damn fool and I'ma get my kicks.

LaToya: Yeah.

Mack: Like, that's what we all woulda been doing. [laughs]

LaToya: So far, so good. Merl goes home and he is murdered in his home. And it's of course filmed in a way to make you think it's another very devious monster. RIP Merl. [singing] "I will remember you..." [Mack laughs, LaToya sings tune]

Both: [singing] "Will you remember me?" [Mack laughs]

LaToya: [sings tune] So that's appropriate, right?

Mack: Yeah. It's vintage CW.

LaToya: Vintage The WB, Mack. Show some respect. [laughs]

Mack: Okay, The WB. Excuse me, excuse me.

LaToya: We respect The WB in this house. [laughs] Flashback. Gunn and his sister Alonna, after she's been turned into a vampire. Gunn is not over that trauma. [laughs] In case anyone was wondering. Because no one in—

Mack: Hm, surprise, surprise.

LaToya: Because he has not dealt with it. And it's not like anyone in the show goes to therapy. Which is just the way we like 'em! You don't have well-adjusted vampire hunters. They—like, they wouldn't be like, monster hunters anymore if they were well-adjusted. [laughs]

Mack: Uh, no, I would actually like to say that both Dawn and Giles are actually *very* well-adjusted. They could actually—you could put them in a different show and they'd be fine.

LaToya: Well, yes, and Dawn's not allowed to do anything with the Scoobies, because she's too well-adjusted! [both laugh] And Giles just left. Because he's so well-adjusted. See? Being well-adjusted, ya get outta here! In the premiere, I was like, they should get therapy, but now I'm against therapy. You try to get therapy on this show? You're outta the gang! [both laugh]

Mack: I just feel so bad. [both laugh] Like! For baby Gunn.

LaToya: I just feel so bad—yeah, for—his mental health, yeah. And he's not talking to anyone. Not even Wesley, who was like, he got—

Mack: And like, the people he works with are like—yeah, like Wesley and Angel. These are the other two men who, like—[laughs]

LaToya: Yeah. He got—'cause yeah, Wesley needs therapy too, but yeah. He—Wesley and him are close, but again, post-Pylea, after seeing leadership Wesley, that it's not—the closeness is not there anymore. And it only—like, the drift even continues at the end of this episode.

Mack: Yeah. They did both of those dudes dirty. That could have been some, like, iconic duo. And they just...

LaToya: It's lonely at the top, Mack. [laughing] That's what Wes is learning. It's also lonely at the bottom, which is what Gunn's learning. [both laugh]

Mack: It's just lonely. Like...

LaToya: Yeah, it's just lonely. That's the point of the show. So Gunn wakes up from his terrible nightmare, which is probably something—a nightmare he has all the time. And we see Gunn's apartment, wherever that is.

Mack: Can I also have like, a black girl pet peeve? That we spell her name with an "O."

LaToya: Wait, what?

Mack: So they spell Alonna's name with an "O."

LaToya: They do?

Mack: And it bothers me.

LaToya: Oh, they do—

Mack: Yeah, it's spelled with an "O."

LaToya: I don't like that at all.

Mack: I was like, why couldn't it just be Alanna? Like, from the frickin' Little Mermaid. Like, you expressly had to make everybody's name some sort of slight twist on the way which it would traditionally, quotation marks, be spelled! Also, his name is Gunn. Like, we—we are playing into a lot of interesting stereotypes very subtly. Like! [laughs]

LaToya: I mean, his name is Charles and Gunn just happens to be his last name. So it's Alonna with an "O" Gunn, as well. [laughs] She is also Gunn.

Mack: Yeah, it's just like, mmkay.

LaToya: Gunn's apartment, wherever it is—'cause he's not living in the hotel. And he's clearly not living in the same neighborhood as his old crew. Where does Gunn live, you guys? That's what I wanna know.

Mack: I think it's like, east LA. Like, it feels like before they started gentrifying [inaudible].

LaToya: I'm sure that's where it is, but I wanna see more. All I see is that he does not have a fitted sheet. He just has a sheet over the mattress, but at least, like, he has a headboard and everything. [laughs]

Mack: He's *almost* an adult man.

LaToya: He does have a beeper. He gets beeped, basically it's time to come for a case. I'm confused by the fact that—so he finally shows up at Merl's. And they say he's two hours late. So was he sleeping—like, just oversleeping, basically, and didn't hear it until now and that's why? Or did he get the beep, and then still didn't come till two hours later, which I don't understand.

Mack: I mean, also I think it might just be a way for Wesley to like, give him a hard time.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: Like, I really think that it was just—there wasn't that much thought put into it and they just wanted Wesley to give him a hard time about something.

LaToya: It is very weird, esp—the first episode has Angel coming back from Sri Lanka and he has gifts for them. And Gunn seems to be on a—like, in a good place with Angel. But like, Gunn and Angel—there's static immediately.

[Clip from episode plays]

Gunn: Look. I didn't have a beef with Merl, alright? I'm even sorry he got dead, but come on! Is this really the kind of thing we should be spending our time on? I mean, he was what he was, right?

Angel: What's that supposed to mean?

Gunn: Nothing. Means what it means, somebody killed a demon. Hello! We do that every day.

Wesley: *Merl* was harmless.

Gunn: Okay.

Angel: Sure you're not just bent because maybe we interrupted something you'd rather be doing?

Gunn: No.

Angel: Okay. Usually doesn't take you two hours to answer a page is all.

Gunn: Excuse me, but did somebody put you back in charge? 'Cause if they did, they forgot to tell me about it.

LaToya: Where the hell did that come from? [laughs] We start antagonistic for reasons I don't understand. So, they're at Merl's, investigating, 'cause his slime is everywhere.

Mack: That lightbulb makes me wanna barf, every time I see it. [LaToya laughs] It, like, makes me gag. Ugh! It's so gross.

LaToya: Yeah, he is a slimy one. Gunn of course brings up the fact that Angel's not in charge anymore. And this episode also reiterates that Wes is very much in charge.

Mack: Which is *not* an improvement, but okay.

LaToya: [laughs] Wes steps in and just sends Gunn back home. And Angel realizes he has to now get to know Merl in order to solve his murder, which is actually not the case. He wants to get in his Detective Angel hat, but it's not time yet. We will have a Detective Angel moment, but now is not the time.

Mack: I think—so speaking to the moment where, like, Wes sends Gunn home—

LaToya: Is this the White Supremacy jingle?

Mack: Yes! [laughs]

[WHITE SUPREMACY jingle plays]
You know what that sounds like to me? (What?)
White supremacy! (Oh no)
Woven in not too subtly (Ugh)
White supremacy! (Uh-uh)
Open your eyes and that's where you'll find it
Crush that (squash that)
White supremacy!

LaToya: Maybe we should just have it playing—playing underneath us for this entire episode. [laughs]

Mack: [sighs] Oh, god.

LaToya: You know what would make a lot of sense? If they, like, explicitly stated that this was like, the anniversary of Gunn's sister's death. That would put a lot of things into context, for Gunn especially.

Mack: That's too much, like, character development.

LaToya: Yeah. I'm apparently just like, workshoping how to make this episode better as we go. But yeah, he showed up at his old crew's spot and he's clearly hesitant to do so. He's immediately attacked by a jacked street youth. [laughs] But then Gunn—Gio shows up—

Mack: "Street youth." [laughs]

LaToya: [laughs] Yeah. You can tell he's bad because he has a little swag in his step. He's got a personality, so he's evil. Rondell says something that is not intended to be passive aggressive, but it is.

[Clip from episode plays]

Rondell: Vamps know better than to *even* cross Venice Boulevard these days. Crew's as tight as it's ever been. Even back in your day.

Mack: And people who don't know how to write people of color and their language—

LaToya: Yeah.

Mack: Just say things like that. [laughs]

LaToya: Yeah. So... apparently vamps don't dare cross Venice Boulevard these days. Because of [Mack laughs] how the crew has been doing. Gunn's crew clearly started—or when they were introduced in War Zone. Like, they were like a Lost Boys type of situation. So is the implication that Gunn basically grew up? Is that what the show is trying to say? He grew up and no longer wanted to help his neighborhood, that's good?

Mack: Yeah, I mean, that's literally the basis of this episode. Like, that's the root of the utter racism that is part of this episode. It's like, oh, I found the people who do this the better, the right, the more sanctified, holy way. Quite literally. And you know, I'm moving on up and I've left y'all behind. And you know, I'm coming to tell you how you need to act.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: And, you know. He's the uppity negro at this point, right? Like, he's Sadiddy. You know?

LaToya: Yeah. And—

Mack: Working out of the—and it's a horrible thing. It's this—it's a horrible, horrible, horrible message. Okay, we don't necessarily ever go back to, you know, Sunnydale, right? But, like, we don't... pretend they're not there. We don't not come help them, we don't—like, even if we're operating differently as Angel Investigations. But like, somehow, this group of humans... who do better than the Scoobies do, of doing their job, frankly—who have been holding it down and protecting a neighborhood *no one* is willing to protect.

LaToya: They're all more useful than Xander. Like, the jacked little boy who attacked Gunn. [laughs] He's great.

Mack: Yeah! And it's like, why—the only difference between the Scoobies and these kids is they're not white.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: Their system is not extremely hierarchical.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: Everyone is skilled and valued for their skill. Like...

LaToya: I mean, yeah—

Mack: It's horribly racist. It's just the implication that the ways that this works aren't *appropriate* and it doesn't follow the rules. Like, hashtag white supremacy culture, like, you know...

LaToya: And the one thing Gunn's old crew, like, had against them—before this obviously—is just that they didn't have anyone, like, on the books doing research. 'Cause like, they didn't need to, 'cause they had—they were going against vampires who were like, picking people off in their, you know, their community. Which is—that's what—now, now the issue—like, the actual issue is that they're growing. You know, they're seeking out demons but without knowing, you know, that some are like, very peaceful. Some literally keep the balance, as Wes says about one of them. And it's just like, they're kinda choosing to be—stand with ignorance. And now it's like, the ignorant black people, they're doing it all wrong. Ugh!

And I just wanna—to note that Gio is played by Khalil Kain, who at this time, I would have known from like an episode of Sister, Sister. He plays like a 21-year-old that Lisa goes on a date with. [both laugh] And like—and some episodes of Living Single and like, he went on to be on Girlfriends and like, I think—I actually—I like his performance. He has a swag I really like, so of course, the show uses that against me because he is so evil. But like, I like his personality. [laughs]

Mack: There are some really interesting things that are played with when it comes to coolness, i.e. blackness—

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: In fantasy. They're often evil as hell. [laughs]

LaToya: Yeah. Because they're cocky—

Mack: And I hate it.

LaToya: And they're too big for their britches.

Mack: Why are all the cool ones also always evil? Like... [laughs]

LaToya: He's like, really cool. And we'll get into this later, but I think—again, this is why I'm like, this could be an interesting arc. Because there is a story to be told, again, where Gio is like, the inverse of Gunn in that, like, he had a similar situation. He sought out Charles Gunn, basically 'cause he heard about him. And then he saw what Gunn did and basically, he thinks he sold out, so he's like, "I'm gonna do things the other way." That's a good story! And that'd be really interesting, 'cause I think Khalil Kain is very good in this. But no.

Mack: It just bugs me that, like, they take so many good—good moments. There's so many good morsels in here. And they just never quite give us a meal.

LaToya: Mmhmm.

Mack: That's what it is.

LaToya: Yes.

Mack: It's like, there's tiny beats everywhere that are just so good!

LaToya: Yeah.

Mack: And then they just go, and we're gonna move along and push this very awkward narrative. Like, no. You stay here. You dig in your claws here for a bit. Like... sit down, Estelle. Have some sweet tea, swing on the porch. Like... [both laugh]

LaToya: But you know what? You know what's a meal? What is good—is something I never noticed until now—is the fact that Angel is wearing leather pants with that dark blue long-sleeve shirt. And I didn't notice that before, and I noticed it—

Mack: Mmhmm!

LaToya: And rewind it numerous times, rewatching this episode this morning. [Mack laughs] I'm like, wait, is he wearing leather pants? And then I'm like, he's wearing leather pants. I need to keep going back to this for scientific purposes, because I am a podcast host. So this is important to me. And it's good.

[BI FOR BOREANAZ jingle plays]
He's got a broody stare and hot spiky hair
If you're straight or gay,
Your tingly feelings don't care
You're just being honest 'bout this

Sexy demonic and you're...
Bi for Boreanaz
Bi for Boreanaz
Bi for Boreanaz

Mack: Like, Angel in leather is just always... there's no bad. There's no bad.

LaToya: He's just—this is his "hanging around" leather pants, is what's happening here.

Mack: I mean, this was the Coyote Ugly years, like... a lot of us had pleather pants and it was a look.

LaToya: It's very much a look. Angel and his look—is having a conversation with Cordy. And they're talking about Fred. Fred is now, like, going into the courtyard and talking to shrubs. But you know, she's not leaving the hotel. And Angel, he's like—he wants her, like, to experience the world without fear. Which is why he wants Cordelia to talk to her. If anyone knows how to live in the world, it's Cordelia Chase, you know?

Mack: Mmhmm.

LaToya: Cut to a big slimy demon, drinking a Big Gulp, in the sewers. He's just drinking a Big Gulp, minding his business. And he is attacked by the crew, led by Gio. One of them says, "smoke him, Gio!"

Mack: [groans] What is he, sausage? Jesus.

LaToya: [laughs] Should we call Gio "Lil Smokey?"

Mack: [laughs] Yes.

LaToya: Back at the bookie's apartment, you can see the little bit from the crossbow that Gio was using, which was of course a Gunn creation. Gunn loves making—like, metalworking, basically. [laughs]

Mack: He's, like, extremely skilled in so many ways, and somehow, again, he's boiled down to this episode. [laughs]

LaToya: Yeah, yeah! Why don't we have more of Gunn creating weapons for the crew? For the team, like, Angel? The problem is that whoever the attacker is, isn't

making distinctions between whether they're evil or not. And then Angel comes in with the news of the slimy Big Gulp demon.

Mack: Who's in Century City. If you're not from LA, Century City is like... directly next door to Beverly Hills. It's kind of like the business-y center, a lot of law offices of people who live in Beverly Hills. It just makes no sense that there's, like, a random sewer that looks like this with a demon chilling in it. It just does not. [laughs]

LaToya: It also means that these black street toughs are coming into the rich neighborhoods now and bringing their black violence, is what's happening here.

Mack: Mmhmm.

LaToya: I'm actually—I'm really surprised that Gio's not from Chicago. I'm surprised they didn't just go with that.

Mack: [laughs] That woulda hit... too many stereotypes on the nose. Like, directly on the nose. That would have broken a nose.

LaToya: [laughing] Exactly. That would have been just a bloody nose. So Gunn also sees the evidence of his crossbow point. So he sneaks that out and he's like, "I'm gonna go to the streets to see if there's anything I can find." [Mack laughs] Again, Angel knows something's up. But like, I don't understand why, like... Angel and Gunn are just being so weird in this episode to each other in the first place. [laughs]

And I think maybe this is what Tim Minear means when he says it's the direction. Because Angel's weirdness also kinda makes sense if it's like—we're supposed to be seeing it from Gunn's perspective, how he sees Angel. Like, it's not even what Angel is, but like, how he perceives Angel in this instance and just usually? Maybe, like, it's: Gunn sees Angel as snippy towards him, even if he's not. And maybe that's what—maybe that's what Tim Minear was trying to show.

Mack: Okay, yeah, like if you follow it—if you follow Gunn, that would make sense, yeah.

LaToya: Yeah. And in that case, then it definitely is a direction problem.

Mack: Yeah, so like, if it starts from Gunn's point of view in Caritas—Caritas, whatever. [LaToya laughs] I only English mildly well. And then, you know, it goes straight to his nightmare, to him—like, if we just follow him. And even if we need to

have the Cordy/Angel thing, he's like, passing through that area and it literally is just a POV of Gunn—

LaToya: Yes. Then that explains—yeah.

Mack: I could maybe see this being less bad.

LaToya: Yes. And that also—that really explains what's—the weirdness between him and Angel in this episode. We're cracking the code on this episode. I'm actually glad that we're finally to like, the real bottom of—other than, you know, just: well, white people were behind all of this. [Mack sighs] And now I think we know what Tim Minear's intent was and what didn't come out in the production of it, and that's why he was blaming the direction.

Mack: Yeah. Intent versus impact, kids, and the impact is quite interesting. [both laugh]

[AD BREAK]

LaToya: As I was saying, the Gio story works better if like, he—you know, he set out to find Gunn and then found out what Gunn had made of himself and decided to go to the opposite way. Because, like, Gio is really smart, and he's really smart about finding, like, where demons are. He was tracking Gunn, apparently, for months. Like, he is on top of all of these things. And that again, makes—it would make more sense if this, like, is a multi-episode arc. He might be violent, but he's this brilliant hunting mind, and that's what makes him so scary. You know?

Mack: That's what it is, is they rushed making him the villain, right? So they just dumped all the villain on your head. But if you had this character that, like, maybe you just see in the background of something. 'Cause, you know, we were weird close watchers by this point. If you were watching Angel, you probably started with Buffy. You learned to watch real close. So if you have this character that was just showing up places. Maybe it's helpful, maybe it's useful sometimes. Maybe it gets to the point where like, they need—Angel Investigations needed information but the demon's already dead—like. If you can build him up to being this highly capable, highly terrifying villain that's more than one dimension, I think this would have been so much better.

LaToya: It's like, what I'm seeing is like—a street, better version of the Initiative, essentially, is what I see with Gio. And I actually think that's a really interesting idea.

Mack: Yeah. And the black guy doesn't get like a weird monstrous death. [LaToya laughs] Unnecessarily monstrous death.

LaToya: Yeah. [Mack laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mack: And like, I think that's also—but again, it's part of the power play that exists in the Buffyverse—is any power that is not bestowed by a specific kind of magic or associations with a specific kind of magic is ultimately punished and seen as wrong.

LaToya: Yeah. And now, we've got guns involved. Because they can't just be, you know, this crew, protecting their home. They've gotta be a straight-up gang. Because they're black and live in south LA, baby!

Mack: Clearly. Like, it's so upsetting.

LaToya: Yeah. It really is. Another note I had—it was like, another thing that make—would work for Gio, for just doing this in one episode, is that if he ends up being, like, a demonic manifestation of Gunn's subconscious and guilt. Like, the way he steps to—up to Gunn. And he's like, you know, "he still thinks you're a hero. We know that's wrong, right, Charles?" Like, it seems like this is something that Gunn is just manifesting. That could be another thing, if you just wanna make Gio demonic. There are so many ways to do this.

Mack: It's not even so many ways. It's so many *better* ways of doing this.

LaToya: Again, the gun thing is bad. Rolling up to demons' homes and just like—with assault weapons [laughs] is bad, just in general. But like, let's not pretend that like, Buffy, for the first two seasons, was calling patrolling "hunting." Like, she was actively hunting for these vampires. At the same time, we—since Season 2, we also have things like Willy's place. You know, Willy the Snitch's place, where like, demons could just go. So even like teenage Buffy was realizing, you know, not all evil things are evil things. Back at the hotel, Cordelia takes the time now to go talk to Fred. Fred makes a point, which is that "no one will notice me with you around." Because, you know, Fred is not blind. I'm just saying. [laughs]

Mack: Sweet mousy little Fred. [both laugh]

LaToya: Gunn shows up. He's got the evidence. I think he—he wants to do, like, a stealth, putting the evidence back thing. He doesn't get a chance because Angel is lurking. Or so it would seem. Detective Angel, yes, Detective Angel is back. Play the jingle!

[DETECTIVE ANGEL jingle plays]
Detective Angel!

LaToya: Detective Angel realizes the chaos and randomness has a purpose. And that's to have fun. Which, you know what, doesn't seem like a very demonic thing to do, now does it?

Mack: Yeah, that's a very human [inaudible]

LaToya: And then Gunn changes the subject, where he's like, I came to see the boss. And he's clearly, like, trying to do it as like, a digging way. But again, because we're not seeing this from Gunn's perspective, it falls flat.

Mack: I don't think they quite understood, as writers, like, two super damaged, super "I failed as leaders," like, alpha men? How to both write those as like, individual characters but especially, like, write them together.

LaToya: And allowing them both to be leaders instead of like, choosing one has to be subservient and it's not gonna be Angel, obviously.

Mack: It's like, if the one thing that we learned from the B-word show, is that, you know, things work a lot better when we step away from, like, the weird hierarchy that's been imposed upon us by... all of the things. And we start, like, leading from a group standpoint. So like, why are we three seasons into Angel [laughs] and not having figured that out, when someone else already did the bookwork for us? [laughs]

LaToya: And the thing is—it's weird because obviously, it's Angel Investigations. Angel is like their top fighter. But like, Angel is acquiescing to Wes. Like, he is taking orders from Wes. But like, Gunn is still pretend—acting as though Angel is imposing his will and saying he's in charge. When he's like, very much not actually. What we need to do is, we need to be able to see that—like, this from his head. That way we can figure that out. Because, like, otherwise, it's just he is reacting to something that's not there.

Mack: It's like the body switch episode from the B-word show where you follow the character who's switched. It wouldn't make sense if you just, like, did it like a regular episode. You needed to follow the character that, like, was the main plot point.

LaToya: Yeah.

Mack: That is what needed to happen here.

LaToya: Everyone is over at Caritas. Wes and Cordelia are with Fred. Fred is up there, singing Patsy Cline's "Crazy."

[Clip from episode plays]

Fred: [singing] Crazy... I'm crazy for feeling so lonely... [giggles]

LaToya: Gunn comes in, of course. He's panicking. But he actually takes a moment and stops and he sees Fred singing karaoke. And his little smile at her singing karaoke is really sweet! [laughs]

Mack: He's a sweet, sweet man who just has had a lot of trauma. Sweet, sweet baby Gunn. [laughs]

LaToya: And you know what? Lorne is actually—like, he's here for Gunn and he wants to help him with whatever it is. And then there are gunshots.

Mack: Because clearly. Because that's how you announce the black people are in. [laughs]

LaToya: Yeah but you know what? Gunn—again, Gunn immediately protects Lorne. He, like—he covers him and he immediately takes him to behind the bar. It just reminds you that these guys are bad. They are shooting up the booze and the lights, things they don't need to shoot. Rondell's ready to leave, but then Gio's like...

[Clip from episode plays]

Gio: Whoa, don't be in such a rush, man! You're in such a hurry. You're liable to miss out on some of the more interesting things in life. Yo! Charlie Gunn! Come on, now. I know you in here. Where you at?

Gunn: I'm right here.

[gun cocks]

LaToya: Lorne, as we all know, is a delightful demon. Lorne is great. There's not a bad thing to say about Lorne.

Mack: Lovely.

LaToya: But like, Lorne clearly looks like—like a stereotypical devil. [laughs]

Mack: He has horns.

LaToya: He's got horns, baby! I can understand seeing Lorne and being terrified. But you know what? If you get to know him, you'll know he's not terrifying. He loves Aretha Franklin.

Mack: Like, I love that Lorne both loves them and is also like, why are you people like this?

LaToya: He wants to send people on their paths, he wants them to be happy. [laughing] But like, every time he helps, bad things happen to him! He gets thrown across rooms. He gets his entire club shot up. He has to go back to Pylea. He hates Pylea! He loves these people. Just leave him alone! It really is just some white nonsense, drag—[laughing] like, dragging him in all the time. When Gunn apologizes to Lorne, Rondell is like, what the fuck, now you're apologizing to this thing?

Mack: And then I have to say... Wesley. Sweet, sweet Wesley. Hashtag white people. Like, we weren't doing good by ourselves, but you just made it so much worse, Wesley. [laughs] And then Rondell, knowing full well that Gunn is defending these people, that like, Wesley has clearly hunted before and is human, just goes full next level, just goes ax crazy and is like, "are you human?" Like, what? What are we doing?

LaToya: He should have a—take a moment.

Mack: Like, exactly. Just—there is nothing that is processing there. And meanwhile, while the children are all misbehaving, the sole adult has finally made the right choice and gone to Angel.

LaToya: He is ready to go to a certain suicide, as Cordelia calls it.

Mack: So you mean regular old Angel?

LaToya: Yeah. He wants the D. [Mack laughs] Which is death, of course. So Angel gives her the address to the Transuding Furies, who are the women that Lorne hires monthly to do the sanctuary spell in Caritas. And this is where Lorne brings—because now that Gio's in—Lorne brings up Miami. And how Gio ran—it's all very vague. Like, "after what you did, she trusted you. Right up to the end, she

trusted you. Did you know that?" Which is... never actually—like, the full story, we don't know. This is what gives me the impression again that Gio, like, did have a similar thing to the Gunn/Alonna with an "O" situation.

Mack: Oh, 100%. Like, he either had a girlfriend, mom, sister or someone who died because he messed up. I'm pretty sure he got overzealous doing exactly what he's doing now, thinking he's the king of the demon hunters and messed up and someone else paid the price.

LaToya: One demon tries to run. Which I've noted him as "the flesh one." Because like, he looks like... just flesh. And then you got "oh god" demon—the flesh one and "oh god" demon, and "oh god" demon's still going, "oh god." During all this kerfuffle, Gunn's able to get a gun. And he points it at Rondell and company. [Mack laughs] And so, this is where Gio really gets on his high horse. And he starts going on about the baby-killing monster.

Mack: It just becomes this weird, drawn-out, like, Bellatrix LeStrange devolution of a character, all in one go. You know, it starts being like, maybe he's really the monster. He makes all these weird accusations, and it's actually, like, very much again a ham-fisted stab at race relations. The idea that Gunn is no longer with his crew that is black and brown. He is now with these white people, so maybe he has the same questionable morals that—Gio believes—the all-white Angel Investigations team has. So—and then in, you know, full Heathers fashion, dude snaps and shoots the baby-killing monster.

LaToya: I mean, you could have—you could have shot Gio. I'm just saying. You have a shot, clearly. [laughs] And then Angel shows up, all cool-like, being like, "you gonna shoot me too?" 'Cause he's Angel. Angel decides he's gonna make it simple for Gunn. He turns on his vamp face and says, like, make a damn choice. 'Cause that's what Gunn needs to do, like, just fucking do something.

Mack: Okay, but it's dumb because Gunn has clearly made the choice. He's clearly made the choice, so that's insane. Like—

LaToya: Well, no—

Mack: He hasn't spoken to these people, he hasn't worked with them. And even—he wasn't even still like, protecting them so much as trying to figure out what the fuck was going on.

LaToya: Well no, it makes sense, if like, the tension that is supposed to be built from what we were seeing from Gunn's perspective actually worked.

Mack: Yeah.

LaToya: It makes sense based on what the intent of the story is. [laughs] Not based on what we've actually seen.

Mack: That's fair.

LaToya: Yeah. And this is when we get... the Furies. And a handheld camera situation. Mmm, Angel.

[Clip from episode plays]

Furies: Mmm... Angel.

LaToya: Despite what we all think about Angel, at some point, Angel fucked.

Mack: [laughing] Ew. [both laugh]

LaToya: You're welcome! And with that... I think it's time... for Fuck Watch.

[FUCK WATCH jingle plays]
Flirting, understanding consent, and kissing
Flirting, understanding consent, and kissing
Fuck Watch!

LaToya: My Fuck Watch, I think, makes sense. I think you can all tell from the moment I brought it up. It's not Angel. It's Angel's dark blue long-sleeve shirt, leather pants combination. Like, kinda like, anthropomorphized through a Phantom/Jenna situation? Like, that's my pick. I couldn't stop thinking about it from the moment I saw it and rewind and then saw it and rewind again. And then saw it and rewind again. [laughs]

Mack: I mean, I would actually probably go with, like, the image that we just had of like, the three witches floating in front of Charisma. Just because I have, like, a thing for the witches in the Buffyverse. [both laugh]

LaToya: Mmm. Mack. Is that what you wanna hear?

Mack: [laughs] Maybe.

LaToya: I knew it!

[FUCK WATCH jingle plays]
Flirting, understanding consent, and kissing
Flirting, understanding consent, and kissing
Fuck Watch!

LaToya: Back at Caritas. Gunn's giving a speech. He's saying that Angel could never be his friend because he's a vampire. But unlike Rondell, Angel's still got the mission. Rondell's not happy about that, and this is where Gio's like, "a monster-lover ain't no better than a monster." He's gonna kill everyone, even the humans, unless one of the humans wants to step up and kill Angel. Then they can go free. And then Fred's the one who volunteers, saying she's sorry, she just doesn't wanna die—

Mack: That's fair.

LaToya: Which, you know what?

Mack: That's fair.

LaToya: You do you, girl. Gio, patronizing this girl, is like, "you gotta shoot in the heart." And then she turns it to his throat and she uses science talk, because science is also important, how he'll bleed to death and won't be able to scream. Which is, you know what? It's nice. I like that. The magical veil lifts and Angel can fight. And this is where we learn that Mr. "Oh god, oh god"—so he's clearly an—I would say, possibly a non-violent demon. But he can be a dangerous demon. So he's able to do a little... [laughs] do a little chomp. And he eats Gio.

Mack: Honestly, I think we need to think about all of our choices that got us here when a insect demon is the one that deescalates the situation.

LaToya: Yeah, it—it is time to think about the lessons of this episode. And you know, one lesson that Angel could have learned from this entire episode, is if he watched a certain episode of television from a certain WB series.

[DUBBA-DUBBA-WB jingle plays]
Angel is a vampire
Does he even like TV?
"I think he'll *like* The WB."
They got that hot teen drama
To ease the pain and trauma
And here's the episode that he

Needs to see (aw yeah!)

LaToya: I was thinking, what episode of television from The WB should Angel watch? Should it be from one of the many black sitcoms that propped up The WB when it first started, only to be replaced by all these white teenagers and pastors. The way Fox did—started as a black network, transitioned to the white people, The WB started as a black network, transitioned to the white people. UPN started as a black network, tried to transition to the white people. It failed and then we got The CW, out of the ashes of The WB and UPN.

But instead, I chose... the white people. [Mack laughs] Episode 16 of Season 3 of Dawson's Creek, To Green, with Love. This is the episode of Dawson's Creek which deals with the open hate and racism that you can—can exist in a small New England town. Finally, more than just discussing Joey's sister's black boyfriend. And the fact that, you know, try as these white children may to make everything right, they just can't solve that inherent hate and racism. So they never try again after this episode of television.

And you know what? Angel could watch this, could really absorb—could see Joey Potter trying to save the day and failing. He could really learn something about how to treat black people. Even if it ends with them leaving town because the rest of Capeside, Massachusetts just couldn't stand that this black principal, who was the father of Bianca Lawson's Nikki Green, was punishing a privileged white man.

Mack: [laughs] That's one of many episodes of Dawson's Creek that Angel could actually probably learn something from. But I wholeheartedly agree with your analysis.

LaToya: Gunn's old crew is leaving. We don't hear the conversation, because why would we hear anything Gunn has to say to Rondell? But you can tell, basically, they just decided that Rondell and the crew will stick to their side of town. And Gunn will stick to his now.

Mack: That's hashtag segregation, quite literally.

LaToya: Literal segregation is how this story ends. [laughs] And then Wes threatens to fire Gunn if he ever withholds information again. And he says that no one on the team could ever put others in danger. Write that down in your Shanshu prophecy. Wes says basically zero tolerance, so if *anyone* on the team withholds *any* information, ever, they should be removed from the team. Do you agree, Mack?

Mack: In theory? Yes. Like many, many people we know, the theory is on fleek. The practice is nonexistent. [both laugh]

LaToya: You're gonna hear it first, guys. Wesley Wyndam-Pryce, on fleek. [both laugh] I will say, this scene works in the sense that it makes clear that There's No Place Like Plrtz Glrb leader Wesley is—was not just like a one-off. He's here to stay. He is—like, he is the leader of Angel Investigations and he's like, running a tight ship, basically. And he's not the rogue demon hunter he once was.

Gunn wants at least some brownie points, which after what he did in this episode, I don't know how. Which is that, like, "hey, at least I proved that you can trust me, since I didn't kill you." And Angel's like, "uhh, no? I'll know I can trust you when you have to kill me and you do." He knows, like, Cordelia and Wesley won't hesitate, you know?

Mack: I also think Cordy, you know, might hesitate, but...

LaToya: Based—like, from where we were first two seasons, she wouldn't have hesitated. Like, right now, they seem in a very good place and like, very—there is like a dependency.

Mack: Yeah.

LaToya: Like, they're a team, in a way. She cares so much about him.

Mack: She's grown. She's had her character development.

LaToya: And he's grown too, to be like, someone she could want to not kill when the time comes because she just cares so much about him.

Mack: This is also true.

LaToya: So that was That Old Gang of Mine. Mack, thank you so much for talking about this episode. And like, really kind of figuring it out with me, after all these years of not really having the full context for what makes this episode what it is. [laughs]

Mack: Thanks for having me. Yeah, it was actually really good 'cause I definitely came into this going, god, this—this is such a racist episode. And it was really nice to talk with—like, talk it through and be like, there were twists, there were turns.

LaToya: Understanding what works, understanding why it doesn't work, and how it could work, you know. No one wants to just come onto, like, a podcast and like, shit on something. Unless it's like, it's really, really, really bad. I've definitely shat on shows before [laughs] that have been really, really bad. But like, I don't want to shit on this show, you know?

Mack: The whole idea is to be—to not be a passive consumer of media, is really all it—all it's about. Like, enjoy it, but like, understand and be an active participant in it. And I think that's what these conversations are about.

LaToya: So Mack, where can we find you on the internet?

Mack: On the internet, you can find me on Instagram @mackmactalksback, M-A-C-K-M-A-C-talks back. On the Twitters, @mackmactlksback but there's no "A" in "talks." So it's mack-mac-T-L-K-S-back. I'm also on TikTok. [laughs]

LaToya: [laughs] Awesome. I am on Twitter @lafergs. And you—of course, you can find @angelontopcast on Twitter and Instagram. You can email us at angelontoppodcast@gmail.com. And if you wanna listen to me talk about horny vampries instead of brooding vampires, you can listen to me over at The AMPire Diaries. And thank you for listening, everyone. Our next episode is Carpe Noctum.

[Clip from episode plays]

Furies: Mmm... Angel.

[Mack laughs]

LaToya: Sounds good. Later.

[Angel On Top theme plays]