

## **A Moment Behind the Scenes with Jamal (Jonathan Bangs) - Transcript**

CHRIS PORTER: Hey, this is *SOLAR* writer and creator Chris Porter. Director and producer Jenny Curtis and I got to sit down with Jonathan Bangs, who leads the show as Jamal, and talk through some of our favorite moments in the story with him. Here we're jumping into the discussion of the two contrasting Mercury flybys in episode four. Here's some excerpts of what we had to say.

JENNY CURTIS: Okay, we want to talk about episode four, where we experienced two Mercury flybys, one pre-solar event and one post-solar event.

JONATHAN BANGS: Yeah.

JENNY CURTIS: I know, John, we said we're talking to you, but I'm actually going to throw this to Chris first. Would you talk about the impetus for this story structure and why there were two flybys and what it meant to the story of solar?

CHRIS PORTER: So pretty early on, I was spending a lot of time, almost as much time developing the characters as trying to figure out what the mission was and what the experiments were that everyone was doing and physically what it would be like. How long would it take to get to the sun? How long would they be there? How long would it come back? And I realized that in close orbit to the sun would end up pretty much just inside of Mercury orbit. And because Mercury orbits the sun so fast, and I think it's like 88 days, they would end up seeing Mercury at least twice on that mission. And it suddenly occurred to me because obviously time is a big aspect of the story and the refractory nature of it, the past feeding into the present and feeding into the future and future, feeding into the past, etc., etc.. And so it became really important for this Mercury parallel thing, two milestones of Mercury flying by with which to examine how the relationship has changed from this point in time to that point in time, specifically in relation to Wren and Jamal.

### *SOLAR CLIP PLAYS*

WREN: Mercury...look at it.

JAMAL: Are you surprised? The flyby has been on the calendar...

WREN: I know, I haven't been on the side of the ship all morning.

JAMAL: You should look out windows more. It's something, isn't it? Hey, can you hold this light right there? I need both hands to unhook this thing. Perfect. I got up early just to watch Mercury for an hour, and I've been excited about this day since before we launched. It's one of the reasons I wanted to go on this mission so badly.

WREN: For Mercury?

JAMAL: Look at it. We'll look at it in a second. I need you to keep the light here.

WREN: Oh, sorry.

#### *SOLAR CLIP ENDS*

CHRIS PORTER: In the first one. It's totally Jamal that has the upper hand. And he's like, look out the window, look at this thing, look at it. And they have this whole discussion. And then at the end, he can't even, his window's not pointed in the right way and he has to get Wren to describe it to him. And it just became total, a shift of power dynamic isn't the right word, but it just became a different exchange between these two individuals. And that just really resonated with me, and that's why I wanted to pursue it and frame the episode in that way.

JONATHAN BANGS: Yeah, listening to it and getting refreshed on it, they do have a shift because, well, Jamal is asking for it, but Wren becomes the poet in that moment. It's very heartbreaking at that moment because in the very beginning, at the first Mercury flyby, he's such an optimist and he's like, yeah, you just got to look out windows. He just has so much joy. And then the second, you could just feel all that being detached and the one thing that can help him muster a little bit more hope was just hearing how it looks.

#### *SOLAR CLIP PLAYS*

JAMAL: It's day 548, right? The second Mercury flyby, our last sighting. My window is pointing away, so I can't... Can you look out your window and describe it to me?

WREN: I don't know, Jamal. You're better at words than I am.

JAMAL: Please, Wren...Please.

#### *SOLAR CLIP ENDS*

JENNY CURTIS: So there's these two mental states with Jamal: the pre-solar, post -solar. How did you approach them as an actor?

JONATHAN BANGS: Well, acting is reacting. That's the first thing you're told and taught. And I was just reacting to the world around me. Obviously, 2020, we started recording the first, second week of 2021. And it's also kind of been in my life, this show. I've had it on and off for three years, maybe?

JENNY CURTIS: Yeah. For those of you who don't know, which would be all of you, Jon was with us since the beginning of this project.

JONATHAN BANGS: And honestly, you dream for roles like this that really feel like your magnum opus as an artist or whatever your career is at this point. And I just feel so connected. I

felt so connected. I was able to think how Jamal thought rhythmically, the poeticism, his wittiness, his humor, his lightheartedness, his anger, his fire, all of those different components I could relate to. So it was, pun intended, easy to step into the spacesuit and, you know, just blast off.

CHRIS PORTER: I would actually like to dig into your acting as reacting thing, because Jamal is alone a lot of the time. And the only person who he really has to talk to is ALI, who is also joining us at this table.

JENNY CURTIS: Oh, hi.

JONATHAN BANGS: Reveal?

CHRIS PORTER: How did that work for you? How did that work for you mentally as you were doing this role? How were you reacting? Were you trying to think of the thought process through, Jamal? Were you responding to something?

JENNY CURTIS: We were talking about four? But I'm glad Chris is bringing it here because we weren't going to make it through this conversation without bringing it back to episode one.

JONATHAN BANGS: Yes.

JENNY CURTIS: Holy shit, John.

JONATHAN BANGS: Well, that's the that's the whole genesis of my relationship with this project was the monologue first time I saw it, the first pages where the monologue. And Chris, you have this ability to write in this intricate way that if the actor gets it, they're flying. And it's a high like no other, and the audience can receive that, and their channel's open, their vessel, where you make people cry, you impact them, you get right to their heart. And that monologue I just latched right on to it. I think what it did was I was in a very introspective space in my life. I was going back and forth from The Bay to Los Angeles because of personal reasons, and I was talking to myself a lot at that time. I feel like a lot of us were. And so I just understood the complexities that he was going through, not the full totality. Which is another thing I wanted to say before I even came here is like, what makes things translate is the occupations of the characters may be far fetched, like an astronaut or like Ssuccession, where they're all multiple trillionaires or whatever, but what always rings true or is that humans going through relatable, circumstantial things. And that was always the driving force that got me attached to Jamal, made me understand what he was thinking and why the monologue kind of was like the first impetus of that.

CHRIS PORTER: Well, that's a little bit of our behind the scenes with Jonathan Bangs. If you'd like to hear the whole discussion, you can find it in the Solar Panel on our Apple Podcasts premium channel. Thanks for listening.