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AWARDS

The keys to the writing nominees' episodes explained



Charles (Steve Martin), Oliver (Martin Short) and Mabel (Selena Gomez) meet Poppy White at a diner to discuss her theory about the killer. "Those four actors in that booth in the diner are so funny, wry and spot on — and are playing layered things that will play out later," says executive producer John Hoffman. (Patrick Harbron / Hulu)

BY RANDEE DAWN

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The critical instant within an Emmy nominated episode — what we here at The

Envelope like to call its “key scene” — is often best-defined by the writer (or writers) who crafted it. But in this unusual Emmy season in which writers are on strike, we’ve reached out to producers, editors and directors to lend insight into that moment that encapsulates the season, a character arc, or even puts the whole series into perspective. Writers, we miss you — but we still want to honor your work. Here, then, are 11 of the 13 episodes nominated for writing in comedy and drama this Emmy season. See if you agree with their “key” moments:

COMEDY

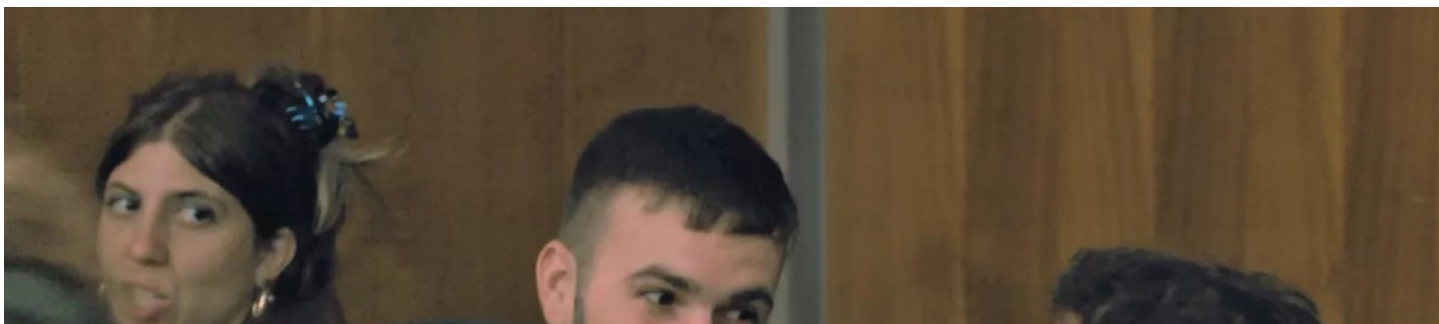
“[Only Murders in the Building](#)”

(Hulu)

Episode: “I Know Who Did It” (written by John Hoffman, Matteo Borghese and Rob Turbovsky)

Here’s the key: Poppy, Charles-Haden, Mabel and Oliver gather in a diner as they try to figure out a way to entrap the person they believe is the murderer: Cinda Canning.

The big deal: “It does a world of things for us, and does it in a way that seems particularly strange,” says Hoffman, who also executive produces. “There are things happening in that scene that won’t be understood until later in the episode. Those four actors in that booth in the diner are so funny, wry and spot on — and are playing layered things that will play out later.”





Ronald Gladden covered for James Marsden's antics often in "Jury Duty," demonstrating "how incredibly kind and caring he is," says showrunner Cody Heller. (Amazon Freevee)

"[Jury Duty](#)"

(Amazon Freevee)

Episode: "Ineffective Assistance" (written by Mekki Leeper)

Here's the key: Ronald takes the blame for [Marsden](#)'s giant, toilet-clogging, bowel movement.

The big deal: After he clogs Ronald's hotel toilet, concerned that his reputation might be at stake if the plumber recognizes him, Marsden asks Ronald to pretend the giant mess is his. Ronald agrees. "It's just one example of many moments throughout the season where Ronald shows us how incredibly kind and caring he is," says showrunner Cody Heller. "Ronald Gladden restored my faith in humanity and it is my hope that during this significant moment in Hollywood history, the [Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers] can be more like Ronald."





That each player kept a piece of Coach Lasso's torn up Believe sign, shows the impact he had on them. (Apple)

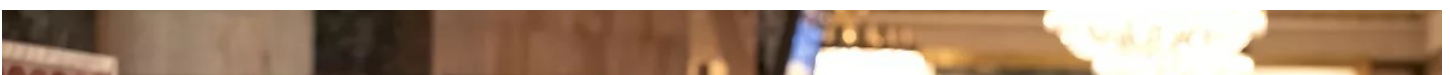
"Ted Lasso"

(Apple TV+)

Episode: "So Long, Farewell" (written by Brendan Hunt, Joe Kelly and [Jason Sudeikis](#))

Here's the key: Midway through their final game, team members reassemble a torn-up sign Ted had created that reads "Believe."

The big deal: "Everyone kept a piece of the 'Believe' sign, and they put it all back together," says director Declan Lowney. "They've done something they couldn't have done when they started out. This was a metaphor for everything Ted has brought them. Three years ago, there's no way they could have even thought about that."





From left, Michelle Moughan, Case Walker, Helene Yorke, Ken Marino and Wanda Sykes share the tension in “The Other Two.” (Greg Endries / Max)

”The Other Two”

(Max)

Episode: “Cary & Brooke Go to an AIDS Play” (written by Chris Kelly and Sarah Schneider)

Here’s the key: At the end of the play, Lance and Brooke have a fight.

The big deal: According to executive producer Andrew Singer, “it’s complex (from a writing, direction and performance perspective). It is funny, but also painful and real, and has resonance in pop culture.”

DRAMA

"Bad Sisters"

(Apple TV+)

Episode: "The Prick" (teleplay by Sharon Horgan, Dave Finkel and Brett Baer)

Here's the key: Most of the Garvey sisters gather at their beloved swimming area, but Grace no longer is with them. Over a few moments, the sisters go from being disappointed that Grace's husband JP keeps Grace apart from them — to plotting his murder.

The big deal: "It had to be done with the sense of, 'Are they even being serious?'" says series developer and star Horgan. "Scenes like that could be over the top, or could capture the imagination and not seem too crazy. If the scene works, it unites them with the audience to come on this journey."



Rhea Seehorn as Kim Wexler has always been the moral center of “Better Call Saul” but is willing to kill someone to save Jimmy. (Greg Lewis / AMC / Sony Pictures Television)

”[Better Call Saul](#)”

(AMC)

Episode: “Point and Shoot” (written by Gordon Smith)

Here’s the key: Upon being given deadly marching orders from Lalo, Kim approaches Gus’ house.

The big deal: As the moral center of the series, [Kim](#) has dedicated herself to righting wrongs — but she is now approaching the home of someone she doesn’t know to murder him in cold blood to save Jimmy, explains executive producer Melissa Bernstein. “Each second of her journey is excruciating as Kim puts one foot in front of the other, and the most shocking part is how close she comes to pulling that trigger,” continues Bernstein. “This one scene with no dialogue tells us everything we need to know about this beloved character’s arc and the uniquely toxic love story that spans the series.”





Kim (Rhea Seehorn) visits Jimmy (Bob Odenkirk) in jail where they share a cigarette, silently reconnecting with each other. (Greg Lewis / AMC / Sony Pictures Television)

"Better Call Saul"

(AMC)

Episode: "Saul Gone" (written by Peter Gould)

Here's the key: With Jimmy locked up, he and Kim share one final cigarette.

The big deal: "True to form, by reuniting Kim and Jimmy as we initially met them in the pilot episode," says executive producer Melissa Bernstein. "This scene provides crucial closure by bringing these two back together reconnecting in their love language of shared cigarettes and the law and, to me, suggesting the possibility that Jimmy may finally be worthy of having Kim as an advocate."



Prisoner leader Kino Loy (Andy Serkis) is the key to rallying the detainees in "Andor" to revolt. Cassian Andor (Diego Luna) must convince him the only choices they have are attempted escape or death. (Lucasfilm Ltd.)

”[Andor](#)”

(Disney+)

Episode: “One Way Out” (written by Beau Willimon)

Here’s the key: Cassian has a chance to get Kino on his side, empower him as a leader and start the prison revolt needed to make his escape.

The big deal: “In this scene, we see the deft operator that Cassian has become,” says director Toby Haynes. “Hardened by his experiences and educated by the atrocities he’s witnessed, he knows this time he can’t just go it alone. It’s a key step on the journey to becoming the kind of rebel that the Alliance needs in order to take down the Empire.”



Bill (Nick Offerman, right) reveals to terminally ill Frank (Murray Bartlett) that he too has taken enough pills to die alongside him. Not wanting to go on without his love. (HBO)

"The Last of Us"

(Max)

Episode: "Long, Long Time" (written by Craig Mazin)

Here's the key: Bill and Frank sit down for their last meal together. Crippled with a terminal illness, Frank is about to take his own life.

The big deal: "A revelation. This is a pact between two people deeply in love. Who depend upon each other. Who can't live without the other," says director Peter Hoar. "That's what we are all about. We need each other to make survival worth it. Bill says, 'You were my purpose' as he reveals he has taken enough medicine to die along with his beloved — what greater message of love could you want?"



"The gays" who intend to kill Tanya (Jennifer Coolidge) for her money, but she kills them first — before taking a header off their yacht and drowning. (Fabio Lovino/HBO)

"The White Lotus"

(Max)

Episode: "Arrivederci" (written by Mike White)

Here's the key: Tanya shoots and kills "the gays" aboard a yacht, then falls off the boat and dies.

The big deal: "The season's mystery of who dies is finally revealed," says editor John M. Valerio. "After foiling the plans of the conspirators trying to murder her for her money, Tanya dies a very tragic, derpy death, and fulfills the destiny related to what she said in the Season 1 finale: 'Death is the last immersive experience I haven't tried.'"



As Waystar Royco crisis manager Hugo (Fisher Stevens) looks on, Roy siblings Roman (Kieran Culkin), Kendall (Jeremy Strong) and Shiv (Sarah Snook) confront a crisis they can't manage: The death of their father, Logan Roy. (Macall B.

Polay/HBO)

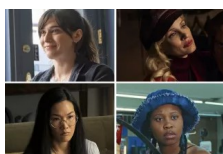
”[Succession](#)”

(Max)

Episode: “Connor’s Wedding” (written by Jesse Armstrong)

Here’s the key: An extended sequence in which Tom calls the (grown) Roy children, who are attending the eldest son’s wedding on a yacht, and informs them that their father Logan may be dying on his private jet.

The big deal: “On a ship [the siblings] are rendered incapable of controlling a narrative that has been their primary struggle: communicating with and winning Logan’s elusive favor,” says Emmy-winning editor Bill Henry. Each adult child takes a moment to speak to their father over the phone. “The cumulative effect is heartbreaking, human and wholly identifiable — which was always Jesse’s greatest hat trick with ‘Succession.’”



AWARDS

The 2023/2024? Emmys BuzzMeter predicts the winners

Aug. 10, 2023