

FADE IN

by
Joe Acton

based on:
Channel 79

by
Joe Acton

Episode #1:

Get Out Bed and Start Writing

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GET OUT OF BED AND START WRITING

FADE IN:

A blurry, fast moving, white apparition.

SOUND: blades chop through air... a propeller, a helicopter, a fan?

SPEAKERPHONE (O.S.)

Acton... Acton... Acton!

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

CAMERA slowly focuses on a rotating ceiling fan.

SPEAKERPHONE (O.S.)

Come on man, pull it together,
will ya?

CAMERA PANS

around an immaculate bedroom until it finds a king-sized bed, made to perfection, with an obvious lump in the middle. Accent pillows decorate the bed as though Martha Stewart is visiting.

SPEAKERPHONE (O.S.)

Get up... get up... get up! You
gotta get up... RIGHT NOW!

ACTON (O.S.)

(groggy)
Mom? Just a little longer, I
promise not to miss the bus,
again.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

HOWARD WEAVER, V.P. News Operations, McClatchy Newspapers. Lives on coffee, deadlines and journalism. Probably born 50 years too late. Grips the phone like an antidote.

WEAVER

(shouts)
ACTON! I AIN'T YER MOMMY NOW BLOW
IT OUT OF BED, RFN!

Weaver looks plaintively to his assistant for suggestions.

JILL CHRISTIANSEN, perky, 30s, organized, efficient, shrugs her shoulders, feigning interest in something obviously not her problem.

WEAVER

I'm gonna kill him. I'm gonna drag him through the phone and beat him to death with one of my Crocs.

Jill smiles her support, nervously checks her watch.

JILL

Excuse me, but the --

ACTON (O.S.)

Weaver? Weaver... is that you?

WEAVER

The mummy lives.

(then)

Acton, I need to talk to you.

JOE ACTON, the lump in the bed, stares straight up at the ceiling fan, trying to focus. Middle aged, shaved bald, lean as a bear cub.

ACTON

Well that explains why you're in my dream -- you're a phone call, right? You're not in my shower or anything like that, are you?

INTERCUT WEAVER AND ACTON

WEAVER

(to Jill)

Why do you let me do this? Why do you let me hire people that drive me nuts?

JILL

Because you're my boss and I don't have any choice? Because you blew me off when I told you screenwriters aren't columnists. Because everyone knows the only people who know less about politics than movie people are economists and lawyers. Because --

ACTON

Do I have to be here for this or can I roll over and go back to sl--
(a beat)

Wait a minute. I can't move. I can't move! OH MY GOD! I can't move! Weaver, I'm paralyzed. I can't move! Call 911--

WEAVER

You're not paralyzed, you moron. I had Ann make you into the bed so you wouldn't hang up on me.

ACTON

You had my wife make me into the bed? Why would she do that?

WEAVER

She likes me better than you.

ACTON

(thinks)
What's your wife think about that?

WEAVER

She likes me better than you, too.

ACTON

Before I come fully awake, can I ask what the hell you want at this ungodly hour -- what unholy hour IS it anyhow?

WEAVER

It's eight-thirty and --

ACTON

Eight-thirty!? I've been asleep 3 hours and you wake me up to tell me our wives like you better?

Jill is evermore nervous and interrupts with a sidebar.

JILL

Howard, the Management Team is waiting in the conference room --

ACTON

-- I got Rene Russo waiting for me in a dream that's illegal in three states and you got the Management Vegetables waiting for you --

WEAVER

Stop calling them that!

ACTON

Stop calling whom what?

WEAVER

The Management Team!

ACTON

You mean the Vegetables?

WEAVER

Yeah -- NO! The Management Team. They're an extremely dedicated and experienced group, committed to the highest standards of fair and honest journalism.

ACTON

Does the SEC have your phone tapped or something?

(then)

Look, if I could sit up I'd be gestating -- or is it gesticulating, I get those mixed up all the time. Whatever it is I'd be doing it all over the place to explain that "vegetables" is the new PC-speak for diversity, multiplicity, heterogeneity -- you know, like the diversity of vegetables in a garden.

(a beat)

WOW -- pretty impressive eh? Multiple syllables and everything.

WEAVER

Not buying it, Acton. I consider the term "Vegetables" inconsiderate, demeaning and insensitive.

ACTON

You live in California. Everything's inconsiderate, demeaning and insensitive to you.

WEAVER

That may be, but when you send your column in at 4:30 in the morning, I do NOT want it addressed to "Howard Weaver, Corporate Lackey and the Management Vegetables." Clear?

ACTON

I thought this was going to be fun.

WEAVER

When I said you could take equal shots at Democrats and Republicans, I meant politicians, not our Management Team --

ACTON

But they're Democrats and Republicans, right?

WEAVER

Right. OK - and now as if by magic, we're no longer on the fourth grade debating team and we're moving on to your column.

ACTON

I sent it to you this morning...

WEAVER

And if you'd been paying attention, you'd know I got it this morning with a 4:30 time stamp on it.

ACTON

So why is Rene in the back of my 57 Chevy at a drive-in theater watching "Body Heat" all by herself?

WEAVER

Because, your column -- FADE IN -- runs twice a month and we go over it the day you send it in. Which is today. Which is now... because, well, you know, the rest of the world is busy working while you're doing God-knows-what in a dream I don't want to hear about.

ACTON

Trust me, if it were a movie you'd be standing in line.

WEAVER

And so, back on point... we're not sure we understand the premise of FADE IN.

ACTON

What don't you get? It's about a -- can you get me out of bed or something? I can't get a deep breath.

(then)

Man, she really did a great job, I bet you could bounce a quarter off this bed.

WEAVER

It's about two television stations? One's a network broadcast station and the other's a public access station? And I'm going to bounce a quarter off your head if you don't start focusing.

ACTON

Geez, you corporate types are edgy in the morning. Yeah, the idea is that the two stations share the same building -- I don't know why yet, but they do. The Broadcast station represents the traditional news gathering process and the public access station represents the alternative view.

WEAVER

But they wouldn't.

ACTON

Wouldn't what?

WEAVER

Occupy the same building.

ACTON

So what? It's a sitcom. Movies, TV, Cable - don't matter. Everything's got to have a premise that allows the audience to suspend disbelief.

WEAVER

But this just wouldn't happen. Not in real life.

ACTON

You DO know that Will Smith CAN'T fly a jet, right? And aliens DIDN'T invade the earth. And Jeff Goldblum ISN'T a computer wizard. You know all that right?

Jill cocks her head like "He's right" and then gives Weaver a "Hurry up" signal.

WEAVER

OK, so how's this gonna work? How are you gonna give our readers a different view of the Presidential race through this lens.

ACTON

"Through this lens"? You've been watching the "Actor's Studio", again, haven't you? Didn't I tell you NOT to watch that show? You're gonna pick up some jargon and the next thing you know you're gonna be wearing your sunglasses indoors and calling everyone "Babe".

Weaver shuffles through some papers, thumbs through a few business cards.

ACTON

Weaver... you still there?

WEAVER

Yeah, keep talking. I'm just trying to find Dave Barry's number.

ACTON

Forget it, he's not going write this column.

WEAVER

Why not? He's already doing a Q&A humor piece for us and he's actually prepared when we call.

ACTON

You can call Dave Barry?

WEAVER

If I can find his number, I'm gonna call him right now.

ACTON

Can you get his autograph for me? Maybe something simple like, "Of all the people I don't know, I'm happiest not to know you."

WEAVER

Acton, please -- I'm begging you. Help me understand this first column so I can explain it to people who don't have to deal with you for a living.

ACTON

It's really quite simple. The broadcast station, Channel 8 has decided the 2008 Presidential race will be played out on TV and the internet. You know, a "visual environment" if you've been watching the Actor's Studio.

WEAVER

Yeah, I get that, YouTube, MySpace, in addition to newspapers, CNN, broadcast TV --

ACTON

Yeah -- like that. Anyhow, the Management Vegetables at Channel 8 decide they want to juxtapose their traditional views against 5 alternative views from Channel 79 and --

WEAVER

WHAT? Five alternative views? THAT WAS MY IDEA! That's what we're doing here. That's EXACTLY what we're doing here. You're one of the five. You ripped off our idea!

Jill sits down with a look like, "Howard's going to stroke out, I'd better stand by the phone."

ACTON

How can I rip off an idea I'm part of? FADE IN will follow the race through the questions and observations of characters in both Channel 8 and 79 -- which ought to give us a good cross section into how mainstream America is thinking.

(a beat)

Man, I'm really cooking. I wonder if I can write tucked in?

WEAVER

Well, we do like the diversity aspect of FADE IN because there's so much emphasis in this election on the homogenization of the parties and consequent disenfranchisement of the electorate.

ACTON

I don't want to put too fine a point on it, but I really don't understand about half of anything you say. I mean I understand all the little words by themselves, but you keep playing Sudoku with 'em until I can't figure it out.

WEAVER

Speaking of words in a funny order, do I have it right that in the first episode you want Hillary Clinton to "bitch slap" Ann Coulter across a Starbucks' bathroom?

ACTON

See - I told you this would be fun.

WEAVER

Yeah, but again, it didn't happen.

ACTON

You put those two in a bathroom, I guarantee it will happen.

WEAVER

So you're just going to make stuff up?

ACTON

It's what I do. I'm a journalist now.

WEAVER

But there's going to be a point to whatever it is you make up, right?

ACTON

You mean like, "Don't drop your left when you're in close?"

WEAVER

NO! Like writing about actual events that happen, upon which you comment to illustrate, illuminate and demonstrate what the views of the candidates are, which will in turn help our readers make an informed decision in the voting booth.

ACTON

Are you familiar with the term, "buzz-kill"?

WEAVER

We want you to juxtapose traditional views against an alternative prism.

ACTON

What the hell does that mean?

WEAVER

It means an 18-year-old with an iPod is going to be watching YouTube, not the CBS Evening news, so we need you to capture that viewpoint.

ACTON

Well, no sh--

WEAVER

And that's another thing. We need to talk about language.

ACTON

Generally, I'm in favor of language.

WEAVER

I mean bad language.

ACTON

When you say "bad language" do you mean poor grammar?

WEAVER

No, I mean --

ACTON

-- bad spelling?

WEAVER

No, I mean --

ACTON

-- arcane colloquialisms?

WEAVER

(shouts)

You know goddamn well what I mean, now answer the question! Are you going to use bad language or not?

ACTON

Well, sure - if you want me too --

WEAVER

--I do NOT want FADE IN to be Good Will Hunting 2.

ACTON

How about I rate every column - PG, PG 13, R -- that way nobody'll be shocked when we use animated language ordinarily heard only in the workplace, at home, in public and at recess.

WEAVER

That's a very good suggestion.

(then)

Be sure and thank Ann for it.

ACTON

(shouts)

Honey, Weaver says "Thanks" for the rating idea.

ANN (O.S.)

Oh, he's such a sweetie.

WEAVER

What'd she say?

ACTON

She says she thinks you're gay.

WEAVER

(exasperated)

And FINALLY, the format you're using isn't a sitcom format, it's a screenplay format.

ACTON

Says whom?

WEAVER

Who.

ACTON

What?

WEAVER

Who!

ACTON

I asked you first.

WEAVER

It's WHO, not WHOM! You keep saying "Whom" when you mean "who"!

ACTON

Who says "who"?

WEAVER

EVERYONE says "who" --

ACTON

What the hell do they know about screenplays.

WEAVER

There is no "they" -- we're talking about the word "who" and all I'm saying is that a producer friend of mine said it's not a sitcom format.

ACTON

Well now I know you're just making this up because producers don't have friends, they just have deals.

WEAVER

OK -- I READ IT IN A BOOK ABOUT SCREENWRITING. Satisfied? Now why is it written like a screenplay and not a teleplay?

ACTON

Oh. Well that's easy. Because a sitcom format is too hard for civilians to read. So when your "whos" call, tell them your "whom-ies" got it covered.

WEAVER

And there's also a bunch of stuff in it like camera directions, right?

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Weaver's BOSS in the doorway, listening

WEAVER (CONT'D)

I thought that was bush league writing.

ACTON

Yeah it is, but civilians like it because it helps them understand what's going on, plus which it drives producers nuts AND it pisses off all the elite writers that are going to e-mail you with how much better they could do this column.

WEAVER

Oh, perfect. So people I don't even know are going to be applying for your job?

ACTON

Yeah, but that ain't even the cool part.

WEAVER

Oh, good. There's a cool part. You didn't say there was a cool part. I could really use a cool part about now --

ACTON

Dude, in every column --

WEAVER

Did you just say, "Dude"?

ACTON

I'm working into my audience, go with it. So, in every column we'll link to stuff on the web that either we've found or our readers have.

WEAVER

How are you going to work that into a sitcom?

ACTON

We'll tell the readers that if they send in links, ideas, or storylines we use, we'll shamelessly rip them off, give them attribution at the end of the column and throw in a year's subscription to their favorite McClatchy newspaper.

WEAVER

WHAT? I gotta pay you AND readers?

ACTON

You're paying me?

WEAVER

Why do you think Ann made you into the bed?

(then)

What if readers want to send in video clips or audio or god knows what else?

ACTON

Then me and God are going to use 'em. But I get first rights -- He's really more of an In Perpetuity kinda guy.

Weaver's frustration shows as he holds his head.

WEAVER

So to recap, you're taking equal shots at Democratic and Republican candidates, one of WHOM will obviously be our next president and probably hire someone to remember who tried to humiliate him or her, namely us, now. On top of that you're going to write it in a venue that wouldn't happen in real life and are going to use language that requires the movie rating system. And the format you're using is both incorrect and has unnecessary directions in it.

And as if that weren't enough,
you're looking at ideas, writings,
clips, video and anything else
sent in by just about anyone who
has access to the web.

ACTON

Bulls eye and don't forget that
some of the characters in FADE IN
are going to be both colorful and
politically incorrect.

WEAVER

(to Jill)

On the Costco list could you add a
double pack of Maalox, please?

(to Acton)

Look, my boss is waiting for me.
I'll talk to you later, after I've
thrown up in my garbage can and
mailed it to you.

ACTON

OK -- nigh-nigh, snuggles... best
to the Vegetables --

Weaver hangs up.

BOSS

The vegetables?

WEAVER

You don't want to know.

BOSS

You sure?

WEAVER

You know how you always say, "If
you can be "Good" or "Lucky", pick
"Lucky" every time"?

BOSS

Yeah.

WEAVER

Well, you don't want to know.

BOSS

Howard, that doesn't make any
sense.

WEAVER

And there you have the last half-
hour of my life.

BOSS

(obviously perplexed)
OK... Well, for some reason Dave Barry's holding for you and you're late for the Management Meeting.

WEAVER

Look, if this Alt.Campaign thing backfires, what're the chances of me getting fired?

BOSS

No worries. It's just part of our coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election. Probably the most watched Presidential election in the past 50 years, which all of our readers, employees and investors expect us to cover like a blanket. What could possibly go wrong for you?

(walks away)

Besides, I think we need an editor for that paper we're buying in Nome, Alaska.

As Boss walks down the hallway, Weaver picks up his garbage can and follows.

--FADE OUT--