

FADE IN

by
Joe Acton

based on:
Channel 79

by
Joe Acton

Episode #2:

Fading in on the Hard Questions

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FADING IN ON THE HARD QUESTIONS

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

SOUND: a phone rings, incessantly

HOWARD WEAVER

speaks the words he pounds out on his computer.

WEAVER

...NOT -- let me say it again to
erase the ambiguity of email --
NOT! NOT! NOT! going to reimburse
you for an iPhone because it plays
"bitchin videos" from YouTube that
you watch to write FADE IN.

Weaver's assistant, Jill, pokes her head into his office.

JILL

He's on the phone.

WEAVER

Who, he?

Jill stands back from the door. Holds up two fingers,
then one, then tugs her ear.

WEAVER

Oh, dear God -- don't do this to
me, I hate this ga --

Jill tugs her ear insistently.

WEAVER

OK! OK! First word sounds like...

Jill points to the phone.

WEAVER

Uhh... phone... tone... loan -- my
refi!

Jill shakes her head, animatedly points to his chair.

WEAVER

Umm... chair... bear... hair -- my
haircut tonight!

Jill shakes her head again, stabs at a pencil.

WEAVER

Pencil? Ahhh... umm... what the hell rhymes with pencil?

JILL

Beats me. But Acton's on line 1. He told me to warm you up.

Jill walks away.

WEAVER

That wasn't funny, you know.

JILL (O.S.)

It will be when I tell it.

Weaver grabs the phone.

WEAVER

What?

ACTON

Fine, thanks. And you?

WEAVER

Oh, I'm great. When my phone rings now, I just conference Legal in right away. Let's see, Ann Coulter wants to meet you on the steps of the Capital for a smack-down on CSPAN. She's giving 8 to 5 on two out three falls. I've got \$50 on her.

ACTON

Sucker bet. I'll wear a cup.

WEAVER

Clinton's campaign wants a retraction that not only was she NOT in a bathroom with Ann Coulter, she wasn't tapping her foot -- but if she was, she was only listening to her iPod and maybe snapping her fingers.

ACTON

That's what they'll all say from now on.

WEAVER

And I hear Jeff Goldblum is pissed off because you misspelled his name.

ACTON

What's he want, one more "f"?

WEAVER

No, one less "e".

ACTON

Typical Hollywood prima donna.
Probably going through his Prince
phase --

WEAVER

Not one less "e" in "Jeff" you
knucklehead. There's not supposed
to be an "e" at the end of
"Goldblum".

ACTON

Says whom?

WEAVER

Who. Says "who"?

ACTON

Well how the hell would I know?
It's your beef.

WEAVER

(exasperated)
Jesus, God almighty, take me now.
Goldblum... Goldblum says and he
ought to know.

ACTON

He's just an actor, what does he
know without a script?

WEAVER

(shouts)
Well he ought to know his own
goddman name!

ACTON

Look, when my mom's family came
through Ellis Island, their last
name was Van Schoonhoven, but the
Irishman on the desk couldn't
pronounce that, so he just cut it
down to Van.

WEAVER

So what?

ACTON

So the same Irishman probably
dropped the "e" on Goldblum's
family name when they came
through. I was just using the
traditional European spelling.

WEAVER

I'm hanging up now. And if you don't e-mail me FADE IN RFN I'm calling Goldblum and giving him your home address so he can beat the crap out of you.

ACTON

You already beat the crap out of me with that whacked formatting you did on my first episode.

WEAVER

We had a template malfunction.

ACTON

The Janet Jackson defense? You're using the Janet Jackson defense on me? Just how dumb do you think I am?

Weaver feels the worm turning in his favor.

WEAVER

'Bout the same as any other boob.

ACTON

Oh, rah ha! You think humiliating me in front of the dozens of readers you have from all over the U.S. is fair?

WEAVER

No, but it is perk.

ACTON

Well, the joke's on you Tundra Boy, because I just uploaded Episode #2. Try not to make a boob out of me on this one.

WEAVER

Oooo, a challenge. I love a challenge. It'll be kinda like discussing the unified field theory with Britney Spears.

ACTON

You know, this isn't as funny as you think it is.

WEAVER

(happily)
Oh, it will be when I tell it--

WEAVER

(a beat)
 Oh, look -- Episode #2 just popped
 into my Inbox --

ACTON

-- Wait a minute, there's some
 stuff I gotta explain --

Weaver hangs up and begins to read...

FADE IN:

SOUND: Dramatic, stirring, serious news music.

INT. CHANNEL 8 STUDIOS - 6 PM NEWS

Modern, high-tech, expensive news set, alive with the
 army it takes to pump out the local news.

CAMERA PUSHES IN

past two broadcast cameras, boom mics and a snake-pit of
 cables.

Anchors JIM HAMILTON and SALLY MICHAELS could be models.
 Mid 30s, impeccably dressed, with perfect hair and teeth,
 they look just like every other team on every other
 channel. They're an advertiser's dream come true.

The lead-in music plays out as,

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

From around Puget Sound and
 neighboring communities, this is
 the news at 11, on KRAM Channel 8,
 Eye on the Northwest.

JIM

Good evening. I'm Jim Hamilton.

SALLY

And I'm Sally Michaels.

JIM

Our top story tonight is the same
 bullshit we reported last night,
 just in a different order and with
 even more useless analysis. Let's
 go to Kevin Westerfield for our
 first load of crap.

MALE VOICE/BILL MARLIN (O.S.)

You know there's this little outfit called the FCC that tends to want to fine us when we go big potty on the air, right?

INT. CHANNEL 8 CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Modern conference room with all the amenities corporate America can afford. A flat screen TV adorns one wall.

The usual snack shrapnel litters the table in Starbucks bags and donut boxes.

BRAD FRANKLIN, mid 40s, Station Manager, an optimistic cynic.

BRAD

Yeah, but wouldn't you really want to run that one? Just one time. Just to let them know, we know.

BILL MARLIN, white, late 30s, News Director, pragmatist.

BILL

They know. They just don't care.

JANE LEE, Asian, early 30s, Sales Manager, jerks back into the conversation from her Blackberry.

JANE

Just to let who know? The whales? We're not messing with our money, are we?

BRAD

No, we're just talking about our audience. Nobody important.

JANE

But we're not going to say "bullshit" on the air or embarrass our advertisers, are we?

BILL

Jane, go back to your e-mail, you're embarrassing yourself.

Jane dives back into the Blackberry.

JANE

You can't embarrass me, I'm in sales.

MIKE THOMPSON, black, mid 30s, Programming Director.

MIKE

Much as it pains me to agree with Jane --

JANE

(doesn't look up)
Bite down on it, Mike --

BRAD

Do I have to separate you two?

JANE

Not since the divorce.

BILL

May I please go to the bathroom?

Brad points to the three in order.

BRAD

Tie a knot in it... Play nice...
What?

MIKE

I was just going to say that I don't know what's wrong with giving our audience what they want. I mean, they expect us to report the same thing as everyone else.

BRAD

Why?

MIKE

Why? Because it shows they can depend on us to...

BRAD

To what? Report what everyone already knows? By the time we reported that Thompson came out on Letterman, everyone with a computer had already read it on CNN.

MIKE

Leno.

BRAD

Leno, what?

BILL

Thompson came out on Leno, not Letterman.

BRAD

Same thing.

JANE

Thompson came out?

BILL

Yeah, where you been?

MIKE

Leno and Letterman are NOT the same thing. Way different.

BRAD

I'll close my eyes and describe them, you tell me when they get different.

(puts hand over eyes)

Both middle-aged white comedians wearing expensive suits.

MIKE

Yeah.

JANE

Thompson's gay?

BRAD

They both have bands, do monologues about current events, interview people from behind a desk and are on at the same time.

JANE

How can he be gay, he's a Republican.

BILL

For President, Jane. He came out for President.

JANE

Oh, you mean "vote for me" came out, not foot tapping came out.

BRAD

AND the questions they ask make Katie Couric look like Walter Cronkite.

JANE

Hey -- lay off Katie, she's doing the best she can.

Brad opens his eyes.

BRAD

And that's what I'm afraid of. I'm afraid sameness and mediocrity are being substituted for insight and originality.

BILL

Well, yeah, but how you gonna do something different with a pile-up on I-5, or a murder in the central district or --

BRAD

That stuff's gonna report itself, we're gonna be stuck with some me-too reporting. But we gotta do something more -- something better for the Presidential race.

Brad flips the TV. The screen buzzes alive with the snow of a non-signal.

BRAD

Check out some stuff I recorded over the last week on Channel 79.

JANE

79? The wingnuts and lunatics at the public access station?

BRAD

Just because you're a lunatic, doesn't make you wrong.

MIKE

I got a bad feeling about this...

INSERT

Brad's finger as it presses "Play".

SERIES OF SCENES

-- A Latino is being interviewed in a shabby two-stall converted filling station auto-repair shop.

LATINO

... cuz, dude, der's like 45 million Latinos runnin' 'round dis country, so unless anglos want to pick veggies n mow lawns, don't tell our guy he can't speak our language on our own TV. "Richardson" may not sound Latino to gringos, but we got 45 million reason you better start payin' 'tention...

-- a serious young man in an ill-fitting, mismatched suit gives his political analysis from a park bench.

YOUNG MAN

And while Labor Day formally kicks off the 2008 Presidential Race, the betting line favors Giuliani for the Republicans because every Republican who has led the Gallup Poll on Labor Day has gone on to win their nomination. The Democrats, on the other hand, have shown an uncanny ability to snap defeat from the jaws of victory no matter who's ahead on Labor Day.

-- A young black man flying gang colors stands amid other gang members on a bleak neighborhood corner.

GANG-BANGER

... das whack, man. One of them said we're gonna stay in Iraq 'til Iraqis can walk around their hood without fear of being shot?

INTERVIEWER

Actually several have expressed that view.

GANG-BANGER

We gonna stay 'til the Iraqis can walk around safe?

(motions)

Look at this. I can't walk around THIS neighborhood without being afraid some fool bust a cap in my ass.

INTERVIEWER

Something like 20,000 Iraqis died last year from the violence.

GANG-BANGER

So what? Something like 30,000 people died in the U. S. of Goddamn A. last year from gunshots, you know what I'm saying?

(then)

Them dumb bastards runnin' for President want to do something? They can put the goddamn National Guard on foot beat in my goddamn hood 'til I can walk a-goddamn-round at the night without runnin' from dumpster to dumpster. I am sick and goddamn tired of livin' my life on the goddamn floor. Screw Iraq and the white men that put us there.

-- Four black women do their version of "The View".

WOMAN #1

But you gotta like Barack Obama --

WOMAN #2

(interrupts)

-- Why do I have to like Obama?

WOMAN #1

Because he's a brother with a plan.

WOMAN #2

He's a brother with a idea --
Hillary's a sister with a plan AND
experience.

WOMAN #3

I hear that girl friend.

WOMAN #4

What do you think about a Hillary-
Obama ticket.

WOMAN #2

I think that's about as likely as
the next Jackie Chan-Chris Tucker
movie being named "Rush Hour 4:
Still No White People".

END OF SERIES

The TV goes back to snow.

BRAD

There's more if you want to see
it.

A long, uncomfortable silence hangs over the conference
room. Finally,

BILL

What the hell was that?

JANE

I quit.

MIKE

We're not going to do that are we?

JANE

I can't sell into that. I got a
better chance of selling into Mike
Gravel's next rock throw.

BILL

No you don't.

JANE

Then I'll quit and remarry Mike.

MIKE

You got a better chance of selling into Mike Gravel's next rock throw than remarrying me.

(then)

My staff's not going to work with those nitwits at 79. They don't even like it that we share the same building. They sure as hell aren't going to share their technology with them.

BRAD

Everybody just take a big gulp of calm-down juice.

BILL

Brad, I'm as disenchanted as you are with the state of news reporting. But the kid on the park bench was right -- Giuliani's got history on his side. And unless Bill can't keep his dick in his pants, Hillary's a machine that's gonna eat Obama's lunch. Hell, most people have never even heard of half the candidates.

JANE

I thought Tancredo was a tequila.

MIKE

You thought Thompson was gay.

JANE

I have two words for you -- and one of them is "you".

BILL

(ignores the byplay)

Why not just lay back, wait for the wheat and chaff to separate and concentrate on the real candidates?

BRAD

Play it safe?

BILL

Play it smart.

BRAD

Yeah, see the problem is that when you let somebody else decide what's smart, it generally winds up biting you in the ass, kinda like when Clinton's campaign said Hsu was 100 percent legit. They want that one back so bad, they're coughing up 850 grand and hoping it all gets buried on page 4.

JANE

Page 4? I'll give you a hundred dollars if you can find New Orleans anywhere in the first section.

MIKE

Here we go...

JANE

You don't have family down there, I do.

MIKE

Your parents are doctors for Christ's sake, they're not standing in a welfare line.

JANE

But they know plenty who are. Tell me this Mr. Ditto Head --

MIKE

-- And there it is: crabs walk sideways and lobsters walk straight, that's why the two can never mate.

JANE

Are you calling me a crab?

MIKE

If the claw fits --

BRAD

Kids, before the recess bell rings,
(to Jane)
what's your point?

JANE

The reason most people don't trust politicians is that they lie about what they're going to do and then their checks bounce.

Brad's confused.

JANE

OK, so maybe I'm a little prejudice.

(a beat)

But if we're going to do something different, we should start by asking questions nobody else is and stop waiting for somebody else to supply the answers.

BRAD

And against your better judgment, you have a question, right?

JANE

(explodes)

You damn right, I do. Here's a question everybody in America ought to be asking: how is it that we're prepared to rebuild Iraq when we're not even prepared to rebuild New Orleans?

BILL

Well, that's a little different...

JANE

You bet it is. You have any idea how much of New Orleans could be fixed if they "surged" 30,000 troops there for a year?

The room goes dead. Then,

BRAD

So, we're all in agreement. We'll ask the hard questions and team up with some of the 79 lunatics to stir up some hate and discontent.

MIKE

What the --?

JANE

Oh, hell no. I didn't --

BILL

Can I please go to the bathroom?

AD LIB animated protests as the meeting breaks up.

SOUND: bring up closing music

with a group walk-away, arguing.

CROSSFADE

and

ROLL CREDITS

over

INT. CHANNEL 8 HALLWAY - DAY

Brad walks with

LU O'NEIL, black, late 40s. Fans herself with a clipboard.

LU

So'd, you tell 'em?

BRAD

That I hired the former GM at 79 to come up with some alternative news ideas?

LU

Yeah, that.

BRAD

Kinda got lost at the end in the Petraeus Report.

LU

So'd a lot of stuff.

BRAD

We're not talking about the same things are we?

LU

I think you better get used to that.

BRAD

What's with the clipboard?

LU

I'm flashing like a bar-b-que.

BRAD

I'm not supposed to know that kind of stuff, am I?

LU

Nope. Thinking about suin' 'ya already.

BRAD

You and my ex-wife would get along fine.

LU

You were married?

FADE SOUND

BRAD

Just the three times.

LU

That your car in the parking lot
with the "catch and release"
bumper sticker?

FADE OUT

