Writing the Second Season of Muckrakers

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

The webisode series is a new, emerging format of online video. Much like a television show, it consists of short episodes that make up a series. First, I analyze popular webisode series and categorize them based on the structure of the plot and their method of distribution. Second, I create a list of ten traits that nearly every popular webisode series share, and describe how they’ve been applied. Finally, I use this knowledge to write the first half of a new season of my own webisode series, Muckrakers. Throughout the scripts I include notes to show how the research I’ve gathered is applied to the episodes.
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AUTHOR’S STATEMENT

Back in the spring of 2010, my first webisode series made its debut. It consisted of five episodes, each six to ten minutes long. The series was a comedy that followed the misadventures of two freshman journalism students and was called ‘Muckrakers.’ I had already directed two feature films, and I wanted to try my hand at a television-like format. The project took months, but my crew and I worked tirelessly to make the series as high quality as possible. We were quite proud of the series as we began distribution.

It became moderately popular within the confines of Ball State, but it never took off on the wilds of the internet. View counts reached a little over a thousand on the first video, and each subsequent video had less and less viewers. I advertised relentlessly, throwing up posters and creating Facebook events. It was no use, the amount of new views per day continued to plunge until it became a tiny trickle. After the last episode debuted, only a handful of new people watched it every week. By the standards of the internet, Muckrakers had failed.

After spending some quality time denying to myself what happened, I decided to look into why it didn’t take off the way I expected it to. The content itself was fairly strong, and we had excellent actors and a top notch crew. Many people thoroughly enjoyed it and it even won a David Letterman Scholarship. I couldn’t understand why it didn’t explode across the internet. I decided to do what I should’ve done before I even got started on Muckrakers, to research and attempt to truly understand the webisode series. For this project, I have written the first few scripts of a second season of Muckrakers, except this time following a set of rules I discovered upon researching successful webisode series.
With the vast amount of video that exists on the modern internet, it can be easy to forget that the entire medium is still in its infancy. In 2005 YouTube made its debut, granting everybody the ability to stream videos online without having to pay for server space and complex web coding. Computers and internet connections constantly improved and paved the way for video content to filter through the internet. Suddenly text and audio was being replaced by original videos. Even banner ads became little Flash shorts. Then, in 2007, the iPhone appeared and brought with it a mobile version of YouTube. Internet video was effectively everywhere. Over the past few years thousands upon thousands of sites have provided video content created by millions of users, both amateur and professional.

One is able to grasp the general scope of Western film and television. Most Americans are able to identify most major television shows and networks. Unlike traditional broadcasting, this new world of online video entertainment is unknowable. One could sit and watch YouTube videos for the rest of their lives and only scratch the surface of the content that is available. Academia has long standing categories and methods to understand film and television, but this new universe of web video does not abide by these rules. Even if rules and methods of categories are created, they are obsolete within a few months. Film theory has existed for over a century, modern web video hasn’t even reached a decade yet.

With the rise of online video, some wondered what would become of traditional media. Some bemoaned that the free online content would spell doom for television and film networks. Why pay for television if one could get it free online? However, it quickly became obvious that cat videos weren’t going to replace CSI anytime soon. Amateur
video just wasn’t up to snuff. But there was one type of amateur online video that was more than just a toddler video or family film. A new format was emerging from the wilds of the internet: the Webisode Series.

The term ‘Webisode’ has been around since the nineties [1], and was finally added into the dictionary 2009 [2]. A webisode series is essentially a television series for the internet. Generally, each webisode clocks in somewhere between one minute and ten minutes in length, although they can be much longer. The content is intended to be distributed through video host website (such as YouTube, Vimeo, or any independent website), or through a smartphone app. What differentiates webisode series from other types of online video is that each episode generally follows a template and is part of a ‘show’ of some sort. Webisodes exist in every genre known to film and video, but by far the most popular and enduring series seem to be comedies. As filmmakers struggle to create the next big webisode series, one thing has already been revealed: webisode series does not follow the same recipe for success as traditional film and television. [3]

Comedic webisode series tend to fall under two major categories no matter how successful or obscure. The time limitations of having to tell a story within 1 to 5 minute chunks necessitate that the series must either be made up of a bunch of episodes that are all entirely independent from each other, or for the episodes to all be little ‘chapters’ in a bigger story.

Many successful webisode series tend to be the former, requiring no knowledge of previous episodes or even the series itself to enjoy the video. This way if a viewer stumbles upon a video midway through the series they will not be confused. From here on I shall call this form of webisode series ‘episodic’. The stories that this kind of series
tells is necessarily limited, and the episodes themselves tend to revolve around a single joke. The format is very similar to sitcoms, which are under some of the same pressures as webisode series in viewer habits and length. Examples include ‘Jake and Amir’ and ‘Epic Meal Time’. The only thing that ties episodes together are reoccurring characters, situations, and themes. Some, such as the hugely popular ‘Key of Awesome’, are connected only through the lead actor and type of content (music video parodies in this case).

In order to tell more complex stories, many webisode series utilize a single story that is broken down into individual chapters for each episode. I’ll call these types of series ‘serial’. These episodes require viewing in order, which tends to lower views on later episodes in a series. However, many webisode series have been successful in this format, such as ‘The Guild’ and ‘Red Versus Blue’. Viewed on their own, individual episodes may not even contain a full beginning, middle, and end. Unlike complex, continuing storylines on television, these series can’t depend on a ‘previously on’ segment to catch the viewer up, often confusing a viewer who has arrived at the series from a later episode. Obviously, many webisode series fall between the two extremes of episodic and serial. Black20.com’s ‘Network’ is essentially episodic but occasionally incorporates serial elements when it creates two or three episode story arcs.

In addition to classifying comedic webisode series as episode or serial, one can also categorize them based on their creation and distribution. The easiest method, and by far the most common, is for the series to be distributed by the creators, which we can call ‘independent’. YouTube, Vimeo, or another video sharing site hosts the video. There may or may not be a website that accompanies the videos as well, expanding on the content
slightly. There is no corporate backing and money is limited. ‘The Guild’ may be the highest profile webisode series that started out alone. Later, ‘The Guild’ received sponsorships from companies like Microsoft and showed up on Netflix, but still remained independent from a network or media conglomerate.

Because the amount of online video is so vast, a brilliant webisode can easily drown in the waters of obscurity. Thus, the internet has seen the rise of new online ‘networks’ in order to help promote content. These networks consist of a central website or YouTube channel that houses multiple webisode series. When a viewer is attracted to one webisode series, they often check out others on that network, increasing viewership for all videos connected to the network. Next New Networks is one of the largest, housing ‘Barely Political’, ‘The Key of Awesome’, ‘I Got a Crush on Obama’ and ‘Auto Tune the News’. These networks usually exist outside of major media conglomerates, although they can be purchased as they grow (Next New Networks was actually purchased by YouTube/Google as of this writing [4]). From here on, this method of distribution shall be called ‘Independent Network’.

Finally, in addition to Independent and Independent Network distribution, there’s ‘Corporate’. Like it sounds, these are webisode series created by the big six conglomerates (Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, News Corp., General Electric, and CBS) and are either featured on their own websites or content hosting services. Generally, these webisode series are created with the intention to generate more value or buzz for an existing television series. The Office’s webisode series, hosted on NBC’s own website and Hulu.com, was quite popular and even won several Webby awards [5]. These series usually provide new content that doesn’t appear on the television show itself.
Occasionally a series is created that doesn’t directly connect to an existing brand, such as ‘Clark and Michael’ and ‘Dr. Horrible’s Sing Along Blog.’ Unlike most webisode series on the internet, these benefit from professional production values and expertise.

In the land of online video, views are king. Webisode series live and die by views. Views are a strange thing; a video of somebody’s pet cat can easily rack up tens of thousands views in a matter of days [6], while an indie filmmaker can pour his heart and soul into an expertly crafted film and struggle to get all of fifty views [7]. There doesn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason for one video to be more successful than any others. However, after watching all the most popular webisode series on the internet, a pattern does begin to emerge.

The elements of a successful webisode series can be broken down into a top ten list that would make Letterman proud. Below are the Top Ten Things to Remember When Creating a Webisode Series, based off of common traits in every successful webisode series.

2. Get a famous actor.
3. Use popular culture to connect to an audience.
4. Have catch phrases, then put them on t-shirts.
5. Get distributed on an online network.
6. Produce new episodes on a regular basis.
7. Make each episode as independent as possible.
8. Put it up on YouTube to make it easy to find.
10. Do something new!


If I learned anything from my first webisode series ‘Muckrakers’, it was that the shorter the episode, the better. The ideal length is one to two minutes, three maximum. Keeping each episode short forces the filmmaker to cut out all the fat and unfunny jokes, resulting in a stronger overall series. More importantly, any video over three minutes long becomes a time commitment for audiences. While surfing around the internet on a break, one might have time to click on a minute long video, but they’re going to have to wait on that eight minute video. And if they’re going to wait, chances are, they’re going to forget. The shorter the video, the higher its viral potential.

2. Get a famous actor.

It may be depressing, but it’s true. Many of the biggest webisode series feature television and movie stars. Michael Cera constantly pops up in new webisode series (‘Clark and Michael’, ‘Bad Dads’), and his built-in fan base watches every single one. Even a good cameo (such as Elizabeth Banks in ‘Wainy Days’) can generate just enough awareness to raise a webisode out of the mire of obscurity. Corporate and independent network webisode series can usually pick up celebrities, but small-time, independent filmmakers have a huge disadvantage here. Doesn’t matter. Does your second cousin’s ex-girlfriend’s brother know Jon Hamm? You better find out, because getting him on
your show for even a few second cameo can mean the difference between success and failure.

3. Use popular culture to connect to an audience.

Anybody who spends far too much time on World of Warcraft can relate to ‘The Guild.’ Halo fanatics get a kick out of ‘Red Vs Blue’. ‘Chad Vader – Day Shift Manager’ spoke not only to Star Wars fanatics, but to everybody who ever had to work in a supermarket. Each of these shows had a connection to a little slice of pop culture that makes them particularly relevant for a specific audience. A show that’s vaguely about a group of friends hanging out is so unspecific that it’ll be impossible to make anybody watch it. However, make that group members of high school marching band and suddenly there is a core audience that the webisode can target itself to. Find an angle and don’t be afraid to work it.

4. Have catch phrases, then put them on t-shirts.

If you got a good show, one is bound to start making a least a few fans. Make it easy for them to love you. Give them catch phrases. For our purposes, catch phrases are short lines of dialogue that are funny enough to be quoted by people outside of the webisode series. Pay attention to what lines people like the best and respond to (YouTube’s Hot Spots feature will help you out), then build on them and refer back. Television comedies are great at this; just think about how many lines are quoted from ‘It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia’ and ‘Seinfeld’ on a regular basis. Once your webisode series has a catch phrase established, slap that bad boy on a t-shirt and start
making money from your true fans. Recent examples include the phrase, “Bacon strips, and bacon strips, and bacon strips...” from ‘Epic Meal Time’.

5. Get distributed on an online network.

An independent film can’t get anywhere without a distributor, and the rules still apply for independent webisode series. Especially if one’s webisode series doesn’t have a celebrity or pop culture hook, debuting solo in the wilds of YouTube is a recipe for nobody watching. Audiences are bombarded with so many videos that they often rely on networks to and content aggregators to find the good stuff for them. Those aggregators look to networks for reliable content that’s easy to find. Like getting a celebrity, this can be tremendously difficult for independent filmmakers with no money, but it’s worth a try. Often obscure independent webisode series are picked up by networks after they’ve been around for a season. If all else fails, many independent networks were launched with a single moderately successful webisode series, as Next New Networks started with the ‘Obama Girl’ series. [3] One can safely assume that ‘Barely Guys’ would not have gotten the attention it has without it being connected to the insanely popular Barely Political network.

6. Produce new episodes on a regular basis.

Producing many short episodes on a regular basis is much more effective than a handful of long ones. More episodes means more opportunities for people to find the webisode series, and a predictable schedule of reoccurring episodes will lead audiences back when it is time for them to watch a new episode. If you miss an episode without an
explanation or simply stop production, whatever audience there is will feel betrayed and
tune out. There’s nothing more depressing than a webisode that just fizzled out rather
than properly ending. An early webisode series, ‘Jesus Christ Supercop’, started to
become popular but when they stopped making new episodes it quickly fizzled out into
obscurity. ‘Epic Meal Time’ produces a new video every Tuesday and ‘AutoTune the
News’ reliably pumped out new videos leading up to their super hit ‘Bed Intruder Song’
video.

7. Make each episode as independent as possible.

If one is writing a webisode series, it would be wise to make it an episodic series.
Each episode will have a chance to be its own viral hit (which will in turn draw viewers
to the rest of the episodes), and audience members won’t have to watch everything in
order. In a serial webisode series it is common for views to decline sharply with each
episode [8], as people steadily tune out while new viewers are still restricted to the pilot.
There’s a reason why most television shows that contain complex plots are an hour long;
keep it simple with the webisode series.

8. Put it up on YouTube to make it easy to find.

YouTube is the undisputed king of internet video. It just is. As of April 2011, it
ranks third in worldwide web traffic [8]. Putting videos up on one’s own website is all
fine and well, and Vimeo is a pretty cool place, but audiences can’t find you unless
you’re on YouTube. Videos on YouTube are instantly search optimized by Google
(YouTube’s owner) and are easily watched on even the most wretched internet
connections and computers. Many webisode series and networks have their own websites, but the way people find these websites is through watching the videos on YouTube first, then following the links. Don’t make life hard for yourself. Hop on the YouTube bandwagon. Every webisode mentioned thus far has been on YouTube at some point.


This goes for independent filmmaking in general, but is even more egregious in a three minute long video. Nobody cares who made the webisode series unless it was Quentin Tarantino (or if you have a celebrity actor!), and they already know the name of the show. Time’s a-wastin’, so that intro better be a few brief seconds at the most. Even if the intro is brilliant and awesome, it gets boring after the first view, and will be skipped. A few webisode series such as ‘Jake and Amir’ throw in a quick exchange of unique dialogue during their 3 or 4 second long intro, which keeps things fresh and interesting even when watching multiple episodes in a row. Be smart. If a thirty second intro feels excessive in a half hour television show, just imagine what it’s like sitting through that same intro for a three minute long webisode.

10. Do something new!

Webisode series are the Wild West of video content, and there are no hard and fast rules. Content creators are increasingly throwing interactivity into their videos, using YouTube annotations to create buttons onscreen that allow the viewer to decide what happens next (‘Totally Sketch’ has been incorporating this in almost all of their new...
videos as of spring 2011.) Respond to comments in videos. Create an episode that centers on an event that happened earlier that day. Webisode series are free from many of the restrictions placed on television and film content. Get crazy. Go where film and television can’t follow.

Looking back, it’s easy to see why the first season of Muckrakers failed. I violated nearly every single one of those top ten tips I mentioned above. There were only five episodes, it had to be watched in order to make sense, episodes were an unwieldy 7-10 minutes long, there were no famous actors, it wasn’t being distributed by an online network, the only pop culture connection was with newspaper reporters (not a huge crowd on the internet), and it had a lengthy intro that was over 20 seconds long.

So after researching and watching all the major webisode series up on the internet, and comparing it to my own data that I collected through Muckrakers, I wrote scripts for a season that wouldn’t violate all those rules. Without further ado, here are the scripts for the first four episodes of the second season of Muckrakers, complete with notes about specific elements included to satisfy the top ten tips.
Works Cited


   http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/01/business/media/01webisodes.html_r=1&em=&adxnnlx=1303351283-LpinCaOg/UaS+XF1rP5FPg


   http://www.webbyawards.com/webbys/current.php?season=11#webby_entry_movie

   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyO2BEaEmU

   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcEqV7Eag

Referenced Webisode Series and Other Popular Webisode Series of Note

Annoying Orange
http://www.youtube.com/user/realannoyingorange
Episodic, Independent

AutoTune the News
http://www.barelypolitical.com/
Episodic, Independent Network

Barats and Bereta
http://www.baratsandbereta.com/
Episodic, Independent

Between Two Ferns
Episodic, Corporate

Chad Vader – Day Shift Manager
http://www.youtube.com/user/blamessocietyfilms
Serial, Independent

Clark and Michael
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6mvUkFFVJJ
Serial, Corporate

Cyanide and Happiness
http://exploso.net
Episodic, Independent Network

Epic Meal Time
http://www.youtube.com/user/EpicMealTime
Episodic, Independent

Fred
http://www.youtube.com/user/Fred
Episodic, Independent/Corporate

Jake and Amir
http://www.collegehumor.com/jakeandamir
Episodic, Independent Network/Corporate

Mirandasings08
http://www.youtube.com/user/mirandasings08#p/u/0/e\-Oy3Z\Xn8g
Episodic, Independent
Muckrakers (Season 1)
http://watchmuckrakers.com
Serial, Independent

Network
http://www.youtube.com/user/wwwBLACK20com
Episodic, Independent Network

Onion News Network
Episodic, Corporate

Potter Puppet Pals
http://www.youtube.com/user/potterpuppetpals
Episodic, Independent

Red Vs Blue
http://redvsblue.com/home.php
Serial, Independent/Independent Network

Sassy Gay Friend
http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=A43590CEDA1EEB62
Episodic, Independent Network

Smoosh
http://www.smosh.com/
Episodic, Independent Network

The Guild
http://www.watchtheguild.com/
Serial, Independent/Corporate

The Key of Awesome
http://www.barelydigital.com/awesome
Episodic, Independent Network

The Middle Show
http://www.youtube.com/user/wwwBLACK20com
Episodic, Independent Network

The Office Webisode Series
http://www.nbc.com/The_Office/webisodes/
Serial, Corporate

Totally Sketch
http://www.youtube.com/user/TotallySketch
Episodic, Independent Network

Very Mary Kate
http://www.collegehumor.com/video:1945787
Serial/Episodic, Independent Network/Corporate

Wainy Days
http://www.wainydays.com/
Serial, Independent Network
INT. CHICAGO TRIBUNE EDITOR’S OFFICE - DAY

Frank and Paul sit across from a grizzled newspaper editor. They both wear suits, although Frank still has his cap on.

(For those unfamiliar with our heroes, Frank and Paul are both recent college dropouts who have been best friends since high school. The first season dealt with their freshman year at college, where they attempted to complete a single journalism assignment.)

EDITOR
I just had to lay off twenty of my best reporters, guys who have been working here since before you were born, and you’re telling me I should hire you?

PAUL
I’ll handle this Frank. Now, I don’t want you to take this personally mister... uh...

Paul looks for name plate. Frank grabs one from under a stack of papers and shows it to Paul.

PAUL
...Purchello. But. Newspapers are... how do I say it?

FRANK
Old.

PAUL
Dead. Reading one is the news equivalent of having sex with a corpse.

FRANK
That’s necrophilia.

PAUL
That’s gross, that’s what that is. So liven it up a little. Bring in some fresh blood. And you can start today, right now, by hiring both of us.

FRANK
Now, I would like to talk insurance. I have a very peculiar rash that...
PAUL
Frank! It is rude to talk about insurance at this point in the hiring process!

FRANK
What? I just thought...

PAUL
Please excuse my friend, he's drunk.

FRANK
I only had five beers!

EDITOR
I'm not hiring you! Or you! This isn't even an interview!

PAUL
...Then what is it?

EDITOR
You tell me. You called my secretary and said that you had information about a bomb threat.

PAUL
That... was a lie.

Pause.

FRANK
I'm a little confused here. When do we start?

EDITOR
Never! Get out of my office!

Frank and Paul stand.

PAUL
Obviously you can't see a great thing if it stands in front of you with an awesome resume. Which it is. Right now.

Paul drops a resume on the editor's desk.

PAUL
Boom.
FRANK
I wrote mine on the back.
The editor picks up the paper. There are crayon doodles on the back.

PAUL
We'll be awaiting your call.
They exit.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY
Frank and Paul burst out of the newspaper building and walk down the sidewalk.

FRANK
What are we going to do?

PAUL
There are no jobs anywhere...

FRANK
It's like getting a degree in journalism was a bad idea!

PAUL
Who knew there was only a single newspaper per city?

FRANK
I sure didn't, I don't read the things.

PAUL
Me neither.

Paul stops.

PAUL
Wait. That's it. Why don't you read the newspaper?

FRANK
Because... they're boring?

PAUL
Exactly. What if we made our own newspaper?

After the funny scene, we get around to explaining what the general plot will be of the second season. In the first season our two protagonists were journalism majors in college trying to complete a single assignment. The second season shows the process as they try to start a newspaper in Chicago. Later in the season the transition will be explained for season one viewers.
Episode length has been significantly shortened from the first season, down to two or three minutes per episode from seven to ten minutes. In order to give the shorter episodes a nice cap, a new 'Next on Muckrakers' bit is added at the end. It contains one quick joke that references back to earlier in the episode.

FRANK
Whoa. YES.

PAUL
We spray our journalism all over this town!

FRANK
We could have shiny pages and it would be smaller, like a book almost, and it would be in color...

PAUL
That's a magazine Frank.
FRANK
Oh.

They arrive in front of their apartment.

FRANK
Well. When do we start?

PAUL
Right now.

INT. FRANK AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - DAY
Subtitle: 'Next On Muckrakers'

Frank and Paul sit in front of a computer with a blank word document.

FRANK
Oh! I know! Somebody gets murdered by a man wearing a dog suit.

PAUL
You can't just make things up!

FRANK
Then where are we supposed to get the news?

They look over to the floor where there is a newspaper. They look at each other.

FRANK
It's not plagiarism if we change a few words, right?
PAUL
Seriously Frank, we went to college. Of course it’s not.

FADE OUT.
FADE IN:

INT. FRANK AND PAUL’S APARTMENT - DAY

Paul sits in front of the computer with his head in his hands.

Frank sits on the floor flipping through a newspaper, comparing it to a stack of blank white printer paper. There is ink smeared all over Frank’s hands and face.

FRANK
It’s in my mouth. There is ink in my mouth. This is why nobody reads newspapers anymore!

Paul doesn’t respond.

FRANK
Paul. Paul? What’s wrong?

Without blinking or turning away from the computer screen:

PAUL
I don’t remember how to use this program at all.

FRANK
What? Didn’t you take two semesters of InDesign in college?

PAUL
Yeah, but I outsourced it to some Indian exchange student.

FRANK
There you go. Just outsource it to him again.

PAUL
Can’t. They’re too expensive now.

FRANK
Indians are too expensive?

PAUL
Yup. India’s like the new Canada.

FRANK
Hm. What about the Chinese?
PAUL
Hah! You don’t even want to know.
Face it Frank, America’s the new third world.

Frank has a small coughing fit.

FRANK
Wait. You know what that means?

PAUL
What?

FRANK
We can outsource our work to poor Americans.

PAUL
We take advantage of our lower class!

FRANK
Yes! Exactly! Oh. Oh man... I think my body’s absorbing the ink. Can you get ink poisoning? I’m going to take a nap. Like right now.

Frank lies down on the floor.

PAUL
Whatever Frank. I’m going to go get us a homeless person to be our wage slave.

Paul exits.

FRANK
I think I’m dying...

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Paul runs down the street towards a homeless man named DALE. Dale is fairly young and looks like a hipster who has been left outside for far too long.

Dale is going through some trash as Paul runs up to him.

PAUL
Hey! Hey homeless guy! Hey!

Paul reaches him and takes a moment to collect his breath.
PAUL
Do you know advanced newsprint layout technique and application through digital rendering software?

Dale stares at Paul, expressionless.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Paul arrives at the apartment with Dale the homeless hipster. They find Frank passed out on the couch still covered in ink.

Paul wakes up Frank.

FRANK
How many days has it been? Have I been sleeping for weeks?

PAUL
Frank! I found our guy! Apparently half of Chicago’s homeless are all just journalism and design majors!

FRANK
(Clearly disturbed.) ...Wow... that’s great...

PAUL
And the best part? He’s going to work for Ramen noodles!

FRANK
Nice! Way cheaper than India! Why don’t you toss him a cup of noodles to celebrate?

PAUL
Sure!

Paul tosses Dale a single serving of cup of noodles.

Immediately Dale ferociously tears into the packaging, sending cardboard and plastic all over the room. Once he hits the dry noodles he begins to pick it apart with his teeth, making a mess of dry powder and noodles.

Frank and Paul watch the gory scene with a mixture of concern and curiosity. Dale pauses to look at them.
INT. APARTMENT - DAY
Subtitle: 'Next on Muckrakers'
Frank and Paul are cleaning up the mess of dry Ramen on the floor.

FRANK
...You want a glass of water or something?

PAUL
Nah, mice only eat real food.

FADE OUT.
MUCKRAKERS SEASON 2 EPISODE 3

By

Dan Finnen

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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Paul is taking a nap on the floor in a pile of old newspapers.

Frank arrives in the apartment with a staples bag. He speaks incredibly fast.

FRANK
So I go to the lady and I say I need some paper so she hands me a stack of white printer paper and I said no, I need newspaper so she hands me a newspaper and I said no I need paper for a newspaper and she said she didn't have that and I said that was a lie and she said that I was stupid and then I...

Frank finally takes a breath.

FRANK
I'm not allowed in Staples anymore.

Paul wakes up.

PAUL
What? When'd you get here?

FRANK
Where'd the homeless guy go?

PAUL
I sent him home. He got the layout done but we still don't have any stories.

FRANK
That's not a big deal. I mean, we're reporters...

Paul stands up.

PAUL
Ah, ah, ah...

FRANK
What?
PAUL
You're a reporter. I'm more of a... manager.

FRANK
Manager?

PAUL
I'm the boss. Of this newspaper.

FRANK
Oh...

Paul puts on his jacket.

PAUL
And as the boss, I'm telling you to go get us a story.

FRANK
How?

PAUL
Frank, I'm not going to micromanage you. A good manager gives his employees room to breathe.

FRANK
Okay, where are you going?

PAUL
I have boss things to do. Just get it done. Okay?

FRANK
But...

PAUL
Results! Inspiration! Teamwork!

Paul leaves.

FRANK
...But I'm by myself.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul returns to the apartment and puts his jacket back on the rack. He flicks on the light.

Frank sits passed out with his face on the television screen. Scraps of paper sit all over the floor around him. Paul kicks him and he wakes up.
PAUL
Frank, what are you doing? You're supposed to be copying stories!

FRANK
Huh? Oh! I am! Here.

Frank hands Paul a story.

PAUL
"Evil Immigrant Muslims Rape Old White Man's Job." Have you been copying stories off of Fox News shows? This isn't real news, it's just stuff racist old people like!

FRANK
I just...

PAUL
Clearly you are incompetent by yourself! Get ready, tomorrow you're going to get a real dose of leadership.

EXT. CITY STREET - NEXT DAY
Frank and Paul walk down the street.

FRANK
So if you're the boss, can I be head reporter?

PAUL
No, I'm head reporter.

FRANK
Then what about lead editor?

PAUL
I'm lead editor.

FRANK
You can't be both.

PAUL
Fine. Which one is higher up?

FRANK
Head reporter.
PAUL
Okay, I'm head reporter.

FRANK
Hah! Fakeout! Editor is better.

PAUL
What? That's not fair!

FRANK
And as your manager, the first thing I want to you to is to eat that piece of gravel.

Frank stops and points to a small piece of gravel sitting on the sidewalk.

PAUL
I'm not eating a rock!

FRANK
You have to. I'm the boss. DA BOSS.

Frank does a little dance to illustrate 'Da Boss.'

Paul sighs and grabs the rock.

PAUL
Fine.

Frank smiles. Paul suddenly throws the rock at Frank's face.

It bounces off and lands on the ground as Frank grabs his forehead.

FRANK
Ow!

PAUL
Okay, if that's the game we're playing, I'm the CEO, and that beats editor, and that means I'm making you eat the rock!

FRANK
You know what? I'm going to be honest here. I don't think either one of us should be the boss.

PAUL
Well... we are a team.
FRANK
We’re a duo.

PAUL
Yeah. I hate it, but you’re right.

FRANK
We need to outsource ourselves a boss.

EXT. CITY ALLEY - DAY

A homeless man named HUGH sifts through trash. He’s in his late forties and wears a tattered executive’s suit.

Frank and Paul jump out from behind the dumpster and Hugh screams and cowers down in the corner.

PAUL
Homeless citizen of Chicago! Do you have any experience as a corporate executive of an emerging media venture?

Hugh stands up and pulls out a tattered professional binder and starts to hand Paul papers.

HUGH
Here’s my resume, my card, and a link to my professional website.

PAUL
You willing to work for ramen noodles?

HUGH
Do I s[censor beep]t in the woods?

PAUL
Welcome aboard sir.

They shake hands.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Subtitle: ‘Next on Muckrakers’

The two homeless people are busy working as Frank and Paul watch.
FRANK
Man, I don't know why other companies don't do this. Exploiting desperate people is great.

PAUL
Yup. Oh! I got to run, I'm going to stop by Walmart and get us some more noodles.

FADE OUT.
FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Frank and Paul walk down the street. Frank has a pile of card stock samples in his hands.

PAUL
Nobody cares about the actual paper of a newspaper.

FRANK
Break it down. News. Paper. Paper is half the equation! Just by using awesome paper like card stock we're already fifty percent ahead!

Frank and Paul arrive at their apartment and enter.

INT. FRANK AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - DAY

They arrive in their apartment and are greeted by a giant mess.

The two homeless employees are laying on the floor, passed out in a pile of scattered uncooked Ramen and powder.

FRANK
Oh no. I had some Ramen this afternoon and I forgot to lock the cabinet.

Paul shakes his head in disapproval.

PAUL
It was bound to happen at some point. It's too dangerous. We need to let them go.

Frank sighs sadly.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

The two homeless ex-employees scurry away while holding scraps of dry Ramen.

Frank and Paul stand in the door and watch after them. Paul wipes a tear from his eye.
PAUL
That was the most selfless thing
I've done since that time I gave my
cat to the pound so other children
could play with him.

Paul turns to Frank and wipes a tear out of his eye.

PAUL
Looks like we need a new designer.
A real one. And I know just the
place to find one.

BOTH
Hipster coffee shop.

Frank pats Paul on the back and they go back inside.

INT. TRENDY COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Frank and Paul sit at a table at a trendy little independent
coffee shop and bar.

Frank is decked out in an ugly suit and has his hair gelled
back. He sweats as she shifts nervously in his seat.

Paul sniffs the air.

PAUL
Are you wearing perfume?

FRANK
Got to make a good first
impression.

PAUL
You smell like my grandma.

FRANK
Concentrate! Our first target is
the guy on the computer in the
corner.

PAUL
Good choice. He looks smart. Go get
him.

Paul pushes Frank out of his chair. Nervously, Frank
approaches Chaz, an intelligent looking man in his late
twenties.

Chaz is typing away intensely at his computer.

Characters that appear for only a single episode are excellent places to bring in
celebrity guest stars, especially if the series doesn't have a celebrity as one of the
main characters. Michael Cera would be the perfect Chaz in this episode.
FRANK
Why hello there... you have a very big computer.

Chaz notices Frank’s movement and pulls out his headphones.

CHAZ
Can I help you?

FRANK
(Frozen with terror.)
You have... pretty eyes.

CHAZ
Uh... thanks.

Paul rushes up to the table.

PAUL
Jesus Frank, you’re not trying to sleep with him.

CHAZ
Do I know you guys?

PAUL
We’re founders of a new independent newspaper and we’d like you to be our new designer.

CHAZ
How much?

FRANK
Whatever you want.

CHAZ
One hundred thousand a year plus full benefits.

Paul erupts into laughter.

PAUL
No. Seriously. How about... twenty dollars cash a week plus a box of Ramen?

Chaz puts his headphones back on and returns to working on his computer.

PAUL
Unlimited Ramen? Damn it!

Frank goes to touch Chaz and pulls Frank away.
EXT. TRENDY COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Subtitle: Next on Muckrakers.

Frank and Paul walk out of the coffee shop.

FRANK
I had that one!

PAUL
Frank, you don't seduce people to work for you.

FRANK
No! That's not... You didn't give me enough time!

Frank and Paul are suddenly stopped by CARRIE.

Carrie is a rough looking woman in her early twenties. Covered in tattoos and piercings, she looks like somebody who has experienced a wide variety of life in her time on earth.

CARRIE
You ass clowns making a new newspaper?

PAUL
...Yes...

FRANK
Did you call us ass clowns?

CARRIE
I want in.

FRANK
What does ass clown mean?

PAUL
Who are you?

CARRIE
Carrie Ballenstew. Your new designer and co-founder.
FADE OUT.