

## LEVERAGE WEEK 7



Above, the writer's room. The hose in the back leads from Bessie, the air conditioner Chris brought in to combat the effects of the late-afternoon sun beaming in through the window-wall to our left.

I'm going to just stop apologizing for the posting delays and assume you know why I'm a bit pokey. And to recap:

[Leverage: Lessons from the Script Pile](#)

Leverage Week 1

Leverage Week 2

Leverage Week 3

Leverage Weeks 4 + 5

Leverage Week 6

One of these days I'm going to have to go back and finish that production diary. I stopped primarily because I was convinced it might have been considered promotional, and therefore against strike rules. Got my notes around here somewhere.

Week 7: We tweak the outlines for 105 and 106, send them into the network. At the same time the network calls -- no real notes on 103 and 104. Albert is launched on 104. He now has roughly two weeks to turn in a first draft to the room.

Sidebar on how the final writing schedule worked out. We've got four outlines approved by TNT. Every Monday from now on, we launch a new writer to tackle his/her draft. That means two writers out of the room at all times as they overlap. Or, taking into account the various loose elements Chris and I tossed together while we were working and reading the scripts, this is the pre-season:

Showrunners read scripts & hire writers: 6 weeks

Showrunners only screw around with ideas: 2 weeks (and some back in the previous segment)

Writers break stories: 6 weeks

Writers off writing before shooting: 10 weeks, but 5 of these will overlap with actual pre-production.

The writers are off working on this staggered schedule

Writer 1 Week 1

Writer 1 Week 2 / Writer 2 Week 1

Writer 2 Week 2 / Writer 3 Week 1

Writer 3 Week 2 / Writer 4 Week 1 etc.

Somewhere around where Writer 3 or 4 goes out, I should head back in to TNT with the next batch of four outlines. The cycle repeats.

There are a few "room days" built into every script's development cycle, plus some "reset" weeks where we look at both the new outlines as they fit into the season and take a last look at the final drafts before they're sent to directors for prep and shot. Taking all this into account, with safety factors in place, buffers, etc, we should (should-should-should) have 6 scripts plus the pilot written by start of shoot.

Is this the normal schedule for television? Absolutely bloody not. One of the advantages of working for a studio that's never done a television show before --

I'm sorry, I have to put a cold rag on my forehead for a moment. Back in a bit.

-- right, one of the advantages is there's no entrenched methodology. Dean started (I'm paraphrasing here) this process with: "Okay, what's the one thing every show you've ever been on has done wrong, that you swore you'd never do when you ran a show?"

"They all start the writers too late."

"Go forth, hire writers, and start 'em when you want."

Now to be fair, most network shows can't do this, because 22 episodes takes you from July/August through April-ish, and more times than not you have no idea if you're picked up again until mid-May. In addition, you must often spend a few of the remaining weeks rebuilding your staff, depending on who got deals, was fired, etc.

The longer hiatus is one of the benefits of doing 13, which is both a profitable and creatively fulfilling number of episodes to produce for a television show. Being able to fully take advantage of the longer hiatus is one of the benefits of doing this indie style.

Right, back to the workweek.

On Monday, the staff writer team of Reider and Mrs. Glenn present us with a document summing up all their research into the world of their episode. Some very, very cool stuff -- the sort of process geekery and "Hmm, I didn't know that" that made Michael Crichton a very rich man. They also have a good victim and villain, and the rough ideas of a plot. The room dives in, pulling down ideas off the wall and kicking around ways to make sure at least one of our characters has a strong emotional arc through the episode.

Nicely enough we've been talking about a backstory episode for Chris Kane's character. The ep involves horses, the setting fits the loose backstory for Eliot's character, I know Chris can ride ... okay, this one is Kane's. That's not to say the other characters disappear into the background, but story physics of ensemble shows work best if you've got at least one character who really

digs in on the plot o' the week, particularly since we don't have B-stories. And man, no B-stories... that's some hardcore plotting thrills right there.

The room plows ahead for Tues/Wed as Dean and I head to New York for Upfronts. The upfronts are traditionally where the broadcast networks present their new shows to the advertising buyers. Dog and pony show, lots of talk about "brands", the stars of the shows come out and say a few words while clips and trailers play on a giant screen behind them. A show business business show, you could say. The quirk this year is TNT and TBS (the linked cable nets) plowing in during the ABC/FOX/NBC/CBS network week and doing their upfront at the same time. It's a shot across the bow of the "networks", and me likey.

TNT has been nice enough to charter a jet for all its talent. There's a lot of talent on TBS and TNT (I'm contractually obligated to say that), so our jet's basically an old Korean airliner -- not kidding, the seatbelt sign lettering is hangul -- some charter outfit's ripped the seats out of and replaced with first class all the way back. Head for the airport for 7:45 am, and by 9 am this is the view:



That's Beth Riesgraf, who's playing our thief Parker. The seats filled in before we took off. But before that, in the terminal I see a guy using one of the Flip videocameras to grab footage of the departure.

"Showrunner?" I ask.

"How can you tell?"

"The actors are the good looking skinny ones, the execs are the skinny ones in suits. You and I are both slightly overweight guys in untucked blue button-down shirts. It may as well be a uniform."

Turns out he's David Feige, the co-creator of Raising the Bar, Steven Bochco's new show for TNT. A couple hours

into the flight, we're having a chat. I ask if it's his first upfronts. He answers, "No, first television show. Ever."

David is the former trial chief of the Brooklyn public defenders. He wrote a book two years ago called *Indefensible*, about tragicomic life in the public defender's office -- the corruption, the racism, the insane judges, the politicization of the prosecutorial process, and more. He then ignored several film options and sent the book to Steven Bochco. Mr. Bochco then calls him, invites him to LA. Six months later David's learning to write television from Steven Bochco and his show is picked up for 13. He pauses as I just stare at him.

"That is an amazing story," I say.

"I know, it's crazy." He's actually laughing, boggled.

"An amazing story you must never, ever tell any other writer in Hollywood."

We circle Newark for a day and half, head into NYC, arrive at 7:30 pm. Straight from the hotel room to the hospitality suite to do the network and actor thing -- first time I've seen the actors since the shoot. (Aldis Hodge brought his mom. Good kid.) Meet all the promo people, the advertising people, reconnect with the execs, and back to the room for 11:30. Of course, it's 8:30 LA time, so I'm awake until 3 am EST. (Where do you think I got the time to write last week's blog post?)

6:45 wake-up because we need to be at the Hammerstein Theater for 8 am. Upfront's at 10, lasts 81 minutes -- then

straight back into a van to Newark. We're delayed by an hour as all the actors and execs go through an ad hoc security screening on the runway -- because, of course, you never know when Holly Hunter's just going to lose her shit and torque an airliner into the Capitol Building -- and then we're in the air. As we land back at LAX I have the jarring realization that I've spent 14 hours in NYC without actually ever setting foot on a street in NYC. We get in early enough that I can go to the office for a few hours after getting in from the airport. My staff reacts with such amazement when seeing me in a suit that I'm a little disturbed at the prospect of precisely how ramshackle I must appear on the regular workdays.

(There's a fantastically embarrassing photo of me snoring on the flight that Aldis is sending me. I will post it just to make sure nobody's under the illusion this is a tale meant to bedazzle with glamor.)

Once back on Thursday, Chris and the room present me with an almost entirely finished story. Wow. I add a few tiny things and suggest that Reider and Mrs. Glenn go off for Friday to get their outline together to pitch to Dean. We'll take Friday to work on 107.

As soon as I say it, I can feel Berg staring through my left temple. (It should be noted that our co-producer has more one-hour experience than Chris and I added together) End of day, she cheerfully and rightfully points out that having baby writers pitch an episode outline to the studio is considered by most shows to be, well, insane. They've never done this before. Hell, they've only ever even seen one other writer -- Chris -- do this. Once.

"Hey, they have to learn sometime."

"Are you going to tell them this is not normal?"

"What, and freak them out? Nah."

And I think that's where we'll leave it for Week 8. As always, drop any questions you have in the comments. This post is already too long, so I'll tackle last week's Comments questions in a separate entry.