

BREAKING NEWS

Written by

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INT. UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

CONGRESSWOMAN HAYES stands before a group of REPORTERS at a small press conference. Her CHIEF OF STAFF stands nearby.

CONGRESSWOMAN HAYES

In 1949, the FCC enacted a policy that required media outlets provide honest and balanced news coverage. This Fairness Doctrine was so widely observed, it never had to be enforced. So, by 1987, the doctrine was abolished. And as a result, partisan outlets soon sprang up, from talk radio shows, to 24-hour "news" networks. Now, instead of searching for truth, these outlets merely label what they agree with as true, and what they don't as false. Bias, has now become a brand. Freedom of speech, freedom to spread lies. And our reality, an Orwellian nightmare, where "facts are merely what enough people believe, and truth lies only in how fervently we believe it." That's why today, I'm introducing a bill to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine, to restore decency to the airwaves.
(over applause)
News has never been more broken.
It's time we fix it.

Thunderous applause. Hayes inhales proudly.

HAYES CHIEF OF STAFF

We'll now take a few questions.

REPORTER

Yes, Representative, is that a new haircut?

Hayes exchanges a sigh with her Chief of Staff. Pull out to--

INT. CEO OFFICE - RNN NETWORK - DAY

The press event airs on one TV in a grid of 9 lining a wall.

Watching is CEO GIL RABBLERUCKER, 60s, seated below a large Reel News Network logo. If Jabba the Hutt were a Texas tycoon, he'd be Gil Rabblerucker.

Gil answers a RINGING phone, leans back in his chair.

GIL

Ah, hello, Mr. Mollok. No, don't you worry. That bill will be dead on arrival. Yes, I have people on it as we speak. Remember, here at RNN, we're not in the business of covering the news... We CREATE it.

ON THE CENTER TV

The logo for RNN's Reel News Nightly flashes, with the tagline "Always Neutral, Never Partisan." It's hosted by--

LESLIE LYN GLENN, 30s, a leggy, bubble-headed bleached blonde who's never let facts get in the way of her opinion. She speaks with self-righteous conviction, whether on air making a mountain out of a molehill, or onstage at a beauty pageant arguing why the face of God should be on the \$1 bill.

LESLIE (ON TV)

Good evening, and welcome to Reel News Nightly. I'm your host, Leslie Lyn Glenn. Tonight, a War on the Media? One rogue congresswoman threatens free speech with job-killing regulation. Some people say, government overreach has finally gone too far.

Behind Leslie, a WAR ON MEDIA banner appears. Pull out to--

INT. BBQ JOINT - DAY

On a wall-mounted TV, Leslie sounds off. She attracts the attention of several CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, eating lunch. They nod in agreement and make supportive grunts.

GIL (V.O.)

First, we manufacture a controversy where none exists. Then, we can devote wall-to-wall coverage, in a self-reinforcing cycle of news...

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

A similar banner appears behind RNN's ANGUS O'MALLEY, 50s, a bombastic blowhard in the tradition of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly. Between his opioid addiction, hypertension, and spiraling paranoia, he's seen better days.

Behind him are books he's written: Murdering Neil Postman, Murdering Marshall McLuhan, Murdering Walter Lippmann, etc.

ANGUS

First, they come for your speech.
Next, they'll come for your guns.
This, folks, is a communist
takeover of the airwaves, that's
what it is! And by some nasty
feminazi, no less! Where is the
public outrage!?

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Angus sounds off on a TV behind a STORE CLERK. His voice draws the attention of the clerk and a REDNECK DAD and TEEN. All three sneer and shake heads in disgust.

GIL (V.O.)

You see, the more incendiary the
message, the more contagious. It
doesn't matter if it's true or not.
As long as you hate the same people
as the audience, it'll stick.
That's the beauty of an echo
chamber.

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

Another banner appears behind RNN's REGINA LOVE, 40s, a Jeanine Pirro or Kimberly Guilfoyle type, but reincarnated as an Italian from the Bronx. She looks like a drag queen with a coke habit, as belligerent as she is buxom, with a voice that sounds like the head chef at DiMaggio's just ran out of pasta and patience.

REGINA

Wow, this story's so huge, why is
no one covering it!? I guess the
lame-stream media want to keep you
in the dark! Just like they did
with Pizzagate. Once again, RNN's
the only network you can trust to
bring you the truth!

INT. V.A. LOBBY - DAY

Regina plays on multiple lobby TVs. A DOZEN ARMY VETS are glued to the broadcast, getting riled up.

ARMY VETS

Yeah!/Damn straight!/Hell yeah!

GIL (V.O.)
 And that, Mr. Mollok, is how you
 make the news.

INT. CEO OFFICE - RNN NETWORK - DAY

Gil sits back, still on the phone, smiling at his handiwork.

GIL
 Just give it a few days, and our
 little controversy becomes part of
 the national conversation, where it
 takes on a life of its own...

The bank of TV monitors now show other networks covering the scandal, including a brewing PROTEST in Washington, D.C.

Gil hangs up the phone, takes a puff off a cigar, pleased.

His assistant, SHERRIE, 20s, stands nearby, with concern. She eyes the center TV, where Leslie sounds off.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

The Workers rally their CREW, grabbing makeshift weapons.

LESLIE (V.O.)
 Are we gonna let these tyrants take
 our freedom? I say it's time for
 American patriots to start taking
 names and kicking some tushy...

EXT. FARM - DAY

The Rednecks load their pickup with guns, ammo, and beer.

ANGUS (V.O.)
 I know you're mad as hell! I'm mad
 as hell! So let's show Congress
 we're not gonna take it anymore!

EXT. PARKING LOT - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

Truckloads of Army Vets arrive and unload confederate flags.

REGINA (V.O.)
 Someone needs to hold these people
 accountable! It's time to stand UP,
 not stand BY...

They join HOARDS of AGING, WHITE PROTESTORS at--

EXT. NATIONAL MALL - DAY

HUNDREDS of PROTESTORS swarm the area, waving hand-made signs proclaiming they want to take their country back. More than one is misspelled as "county."

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

Angus sits at his anchor desk.

ANGUS

Folks, today is the day our freedom dies, unless you stop it. At noon, that bill will be put to a vote on Capitol Hill. I don't have to tell you what's at stake. It's time to shake up these power-hungry politicians. It's time to fight!

EXT. NATIONAL MALL - SAME TIME

A group of Protestors stare at the Angus segment on someone's smart phone, but wifi is spotty, and it keeps skipping.

PROTESTORS

Where are them traitors?/Let's get 'em!/Where!?

ANGUS (ON PHONE)

At noon, that bill will be put to a vote on Capitol... at stake... shake... hungry politicians. It's time to fight!

MALE PROTESTOR

You heard the man!

The Male Protestor points to a building offscreen. The mob descends on it Braveheart-style, screaming and knocking an RNN CAMERAMAN to the ground.

As the camera screen shatters, we freeze frame.

TITLE OVER: BREAKING NEWS

An upbeat but sardonic tune starts, like Don Henley's "Dirty Laundry" meets "Little Shop of Horrors."

OPENING CREDITS MONTAGE

--News footage of the National Mall protest.

MALE ANCHOR (V.O.)
Breaking News--

FEMALE ANCHOR (V.O.)
Breaking News--

BRITISH ANCHOR (V.O.)
Breaking News out of the nation's
capitol, where protestors have
stormed Capitol Hill's busiest
hamburger joint, Capital Steak &
Shake Grille.

--Phone footage of Capital Steak & Shake stormed by the mob.

MALE ANCHOR (V.O.)
Rioters apparently mistook the
restaurant for the House Chamber of
Congress, where earlier today, a
bill was defeated that would have
required media outlets provide more
balanced news coverage.

--News footage of the chaos: DINERS loaded into ambulances;
POLICE arrest rioters; FIREFIGHTERS put out a fire, etc.

FEMALE ANCHOR (V.O.)
In what can only be called Stake &
Shake Gate, the Justice Department
is investigating claims it was
incited by cable news reports that
misrepresented the bill's intent.

--A boardroom full of RNN's Board of SUPERVISORS argue.

BRITISH ANCHOR (V.O.)
Fearing legal repercussions, RNN
founder and media titan, Rutger
Mollok, ousts more than a dozen
network executives, including CEO
Gil Rabblerrucker...

--Gil is escorted out of the building by SECURITY.

MALE ANCHOR (V.O.)
A man so shameless, when Maureen
Dowd called him the "Boss Hogg of
Broadcasting," he christened the
company yacht with the moniker.

--News footage of the RNN building in New York, on Avenue of the Americas.

FEMALE ANCHOR (V.O.)

Without its longtime CEO, RNN's future remains uncertain. As for the cause of the riot, the Justice Department now believes it was started by a lone ANTIFA activist.

BLACK MAN ON THE STREET

Ain't that some shit?

BRITISH ANCHOR (V.O.)

Some shit, indeed.

INT. NYU AUDITORIUM - ON THE MEDIA PANEL - DAY

On stage before an AUDIENCE of 200 is a female MODERATOR, 50s. Sitting across from her is our soon-to-be hero--

DAVID BISHOP, 40s, the kind of intellectual who grows more handsome with age. He's wry, dry, and down on his luck.

MODERATOR

Welcome back to our discussion on media culpability, with former UBS news producer, David Bishop. David, what do you make of the Justice Department's decision not to pursue legal action against the network?

DAVID

Well, legally, you have to prove a media outlet knowingly caused public harm, which is almost impossible to do. Unfortunately, there's no law against airing deceptive content. So networks like RNN pass off opinion as fact, to the point of provoking an audience into an uprising. They literally speak the hate into existence.

MODERATOR

They do treat information more like entertainment.

DAVID

Yeah, but the problem is, the audience doesn't know that. And as a result, many of us can no longer recognize what news looks like.

MODERATOR

Do you fault this decline to the demise of the Fairness Doctrine?

DAVID

Cable news has been deteriorating for years. It doesn't help that local stations have been bought up by media conglomerates, more concerned with bottom lines than social responsibility. Journalism's expensive. Flying a camera crew to Syria costs money. It's cheaper to read a press release on air that's written and paid for by the parent company. Or, repeat the lies of politicians, instead of correcting them, or investigating them.

MODERATOR

A mere six corporations now control nearly all media outlets in the world.

DAVID

And with each mega-merger, they lay off real journalists. Until there's nothing left but talking heads echoing whatever's trending on Twitter each day. Let's face it, instead of holding the powerful accountable, cable news has become a bully pulpit for political parties punishing perceived enemies, rather than informing anyone of anything.

(sighing)

I can remember when a news anchor got dumped for faking a single tear on air. Remember that? Now we have fake news served daily with a straight face.

MODERATOR

Which is exactly what Representative Hayes was trying to change.

DAVID

She tried to fix a broken system, which they used to crucify her. And it worked. The legislation failed.

MODERATOR

You're no stranger to this type of cancel culture, yourself. After what happened to you at UBS, where you ran a fake story about an anchor at a competing network--

David grows uncomfortable. He should've seen this coming.

DAVID

Which I deeply regret. At the time, it seemed to be "of national interest." Despite the fact it was highly suspect.

MODERATOR

We actually have a clip of the footage. Let's roll it.

David's stomach drops. He was NOT expecting this.

An overhead screen plays video of veteran journalist BUCK BROCKMEYER, 60s, at a Press Club luncheon. He speaks with the authority of Ted Koppel, the dignity of Dan Rather, and the alcohol-laced breath of Hunter S. Thompson.

BUCK (ON SCREEN)

Journalism is about...shaping public opinion. We are...ad men.

David shrinks in shame at the defining moment of his broadcast career.

MODERATOR

Now let's show the original tape.

BUCK (ON SCREEN)

Journalism is about getting to the truth, no matter how inconvenient. Not shaping public opinion for the profit of some special interest. We are newsmen, by golly, not *ad men*.

MODERATOR

Why don't we run David's again--

DAVID

I don't think we need to--

BUCK (ON SCREEN)

Journalism is about...shaping public opinion. We are...ad men.

David sinks deeper in his seat, humiliated.

MODERATOR

This was something a CBS journalist said once, that was taken out of context, and reran by your cable news show until he was forced to resign. Only after, was it revealed to be a hit piece manufactured by RNN, to take down one of the last real journalists of our generation. Simply because he tried to hold a corrupt senator to account.

DAVID

Scandalous clickbait has no place in news. That experience drove many colleagues out of news altogether.

MODERATOR

Including yourself.

DAVID

Most of us got into the business to be a government watchdog, not some lapdog dependent on who's in the White House. And definitely not a patsy for some partisan grudge.

MODERATOR

So what will it take to correct course?

DAVID

Without FCC intervention, I'm afraid it's up to the individual networks to hold themselves accountable.

The Moderator stares pointedly at David.

MODERATOR

Which means, they're only as responsible as the people running them.

David feels even more disgraced. The Moderator's phone BEEPS.

MODERATOR (CONT'D)

Speaking of which...

The Moderator stares at a headline: Socialite Heir to Run RNN

INT. RNN BUILDING - CEO OFFICE - DAY

The same headline appears on a TV, above a tabloid profile of ODESSA MOLLOK, 30s, an East Slavic beauty, as self-absorbed as she is tan, seen here puking off the side of her 152-foot yacht, the Boss Hogg.

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)

To quell shareholder concerns, Mollok announced today from his home in Eastern Europe, that his oldest daughter Odessa has been named interim head of the struggling network...

Odessa strolls in wearing sunglasses, a sun hat, and long flowing sundress, holding a miniature YORKIE, who looks more like Fizzgig from The Dark Crystal. Sherrie rushes after her.

ODESSA

I have chilled cucumber Evian with eucalyptus leaves. You waiter, yes?

SHERRIE

Uh, I'm the executive assistant. And some day, hopefully, anchor--

ODESSA

Is not for me. I no drink Evian. Is for baby. Eucalyptus good for hair.

Odessa pets the Yorkie. It yelps. Sherrie looks confused.

SHERRIE

Right. Well, this is your office, and that's--

ODESSA

Tighter than water closet. You call head of news, yes?

SHERRIE

Actually, News reports into Programming now. But--

ODESSA

Fine. Get me head, Programming.

SHERRIE

He was just let go. I--

ODESSA

Then get me highest "honcho," yes?

LARRY (O.S.)
Ahhh, Ms. Mollok.

Odessa startles at LARRY PUTZ, 50s, seated on a sofa, with a voice as oily as his shirt's pit stains. If Noam Chomsky had written the tobacco playbook, he'd be Larry Putz.

SHERRIE
I was trying to tell you-- He's
been waiting...

LARRY
Larry Putz, V.P. of Marketing.

Sherrie returns to her desk, makes a call, while Larry offers Odessa a sweaty hand. She sizes him up, doesn't take it. Her dog growls.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Let me say how happy we are to have
you here at RNN. If you need
anything, you just let me know. I
wouldn't want you to worry your
pretty little head about a thing.

ODESSA
Harry, you know why father put me
in charge of network?

LARRY
Actually, no, I don't.

ODESSA
Nor I. I should be in Barbados with
Rihanna sipping Mai Tai. Instead,
here. I no work in water closet.

Odessa gestures to the extra-large office, which is bigger than most people's apartment. Larry cuts to his concern.

LARRY
Ms. Mollok, I want to make sure we
have a smooth transition, without
compromising our lucrative formula.

Outside the door, a breathless SKIP NEWBERY reaches Sherrie's desk. He's 22, studious, trans. He looks (and sounds) young enough to still be in high school, with all the idealism (and inexperience) to match.

Sherrie gives Skip an encouraging smile. It's clear they know each other. He psyches himself up, then knocks on the door.

SKIP

Excuse me, Ms. Mollok?

ODESSA

Who are you, what they call intern?

SKIP

Not anymore! Skip Newbery, head of Programming.

Skip proudly extends a hand. Odessa looks him over, takes it.

ODESSA

Kip, I want you clean mess. Hire director, fix news, yes? Make Daddy money again, so he no call me.

SKIP

About that, ma'am... I-- I think this crisis can be an opportunity. With all this turnover, I think we can do more than just keep RNN afloat. Maybe, we can overhaul it. You know, chart a new course, and turn this ship around?

ODESSA

Boss Hogg, no turn.
(off Skip's confusion)
I believe it mean "big kahuna," no?

SKIP

Ms. Mollok, RNN's viewership tends to be white, male, and 65 to 6-feet under, a demo that's shrinking faster than you can say "OK Boomer." Maybe it's time to appeal to a broader audience?

LARRY

Ah, we amplify anger at minorities, who're multiplying at faster rates?

SKIP

Um, no--

LARRY

We harness viewer hate for statistics they don't agree with?

SKIP

No, we--

LARRY

Focus their fear on Japanese robots
who'll take away their jobs, guns,
and religion?

SKIP

I don't think we should continue to
rely *only* on old racists.

(covering)

And of course viewers who aren't
racist, but vote exactly like them.

Skip looks to Sherrie, watching intently, encouraging.

SKIP (CONT'D)

No, to save this network, I think
we need to do something bold,
something... revolutionary.
Something that's never been done in
the history of RNN.

(taking a deep breath)

I think we should make *actual news*.

LARRY

Like... infotainment disguised as
news?

SKIP

No.

LARRY

Like... opinion journalism
disguised as news?

SKIP

No.

LARRY

Like... reality TV disguised as
news?

SKIP

No. I think we should make *real*
news. Especially after--

LARRY

Look, let's not get crazy here. By
no means are we responsible for a
few fanatics acting out. There's
still such a thing as personal
responsibility, you know.

SKIP

What about corporate
responsibility?

LARRY

Ms. Mollok, I think it's best not
to risk upsetting our stakeholders.
We should probably hold off on any
changes until the Board names a
more, er, *permanent* replacement.
Someone who understands our
business model. Let's wait and see
how the restructuring plays out,
hmm?

Skip looks to Sherrie with pleading eyes. He needs a save.

SHERRIE

Excuse me, Mr. Putz? You're needed
back upstairs.

LARRY

I didn't hear the phone ring.

SHERRIE

I'm afraid it's urgent.

LARRY

Very well.

Larry makes a reluctant departure. Skip's relieved.

SKIP

Ms. Mollok, I'd like to make this
network *legitimate*. I want to
restore truth to cable news. And
save this sinking ship.

Odessa slaps Skip. The dog barks.

ODESSA

Boss Hogg no sink.

Skip massages his cheek, startled. Then retries.

SKIP

RNN has a chance to become an
actual news outlet, not one that
just calls itself news. With all
this turnover, we have an
opportunity to finally go straight.

ODESSA
Straight...? Like Kristen Stewart
before hair cut?

SKIP
Um, sure?

Sherrie hesitates, then joins them.

SHERRIE
If the network goes legit, it may
finally win some actual awards.
Like a Peabody, or an Emmy. That
would impress Mr. Mollok, right?

ODESSA
Ooh, we like award. Daddy once get
Legend Award. I ask, why I no get
Legend Award? My parties legendary,
no?

Skip and Sherrie exchange questioning looks.

SKIP
So, is that a yes?

ODESSA
Award, I like. You have month to go
straight. No work, back to crooked.

Sherrie grins at Skip and sports two thumbs up.

SKIP
You won't regret this, ma'am! And
we know just the man to save this
sinking ship.

Odessa slaps Skip again. The dog barks.

ODESSA
No sink ship.

Skip nods nervously, covers his cheek.

Behind Odessa, a TV shows the "On the Media" panel, where
Skip spots his savior--

INT. NYU CLASSROOM - DAY

David lectures before a class of 80 STUDENTS. He writes the
word "Propaganda" on the chalk board.

DAVID

"Propaganda" is defined as any information that is biased or misleading. The word comes from the Church. It literally means "propagating the faith."

The slide projector flashes: Congregatio de propaganda fide

DAVID (CONT'D)

The concept of propaganda has its roots in the field of psychology, notably the mind of Sigmund Freud. Freud, as you know, was the father of psychoanalysis. And he devoted his life to understanding human behavior, especially what lurked in our subconscious.

Skip enters from back of the room, takes a seat.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, used his uncle's insights to influence public opinion through the media, giving birth to the modern propaganda industry. Bernays believed, "If we could understand the motives of the group mind, it's possible to control the masses without them knowing it." Consider, women didn't smoke cigarettes until Bernays rebranded them "torches of freedom." We didn't begin our day with bacon and eggs until Bernays gave us the idea. Nor did we consume paper cups until he scared us into thinking drinking glasses were unsanitary. His propaganda tactics were so successful, others around the globe soon realized their potential.

David flips to the next slide, showing the quote:

DAVID (CONT'D)

"To whom has propaganda to appeal? To the scientific intelligentsia, or the less educated masses? It has to appeal only to the masses!" Any guess who said this?

STUDENT #1

Alex Jones?

STUDENT #2
Perez Hilton.

STUDENT #3
The girl from the sex tape?

STUDENT #2
That's Paris Hilton, you idiot.

David thinks they're all idiots, but tries not to show it. He flips to the next slide. The quote now shows an attribution:

DAVID
"Adolf Hitler." Now that guy could propagate some faith. He was so successful, that after World War II the word became so tainted, they had to change the name to...

David picks up a piece of chalk, draws a line through the word "Propaganda." He writes above it:

DAVID (CONT'D)
"Public Relations." All modern forms of Public Relations are essentially propaganda.

David lists the forms beneath:

DAVID (CONT'D)
Marketing, Advertising, Publicity. They are all propaganda because they're all trying to sell us something. Think a low-fat diet is good for you? That idea was marketed by the sugar industry. Think firearms make us safe? That one is advertised by the gun lobby. Think tax cuts stimulate the economy? That's promoted by a political party. The more these ideas are reinforced, the more we buy into them, just like our favorite brands of cola or cake mix.

David flicks a slide to a giant question mark.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Only one form of communication is interested in getting past all the propaganda to the truth. And it is?

STUDENT #3
Instagram?

STUDENT #1
Oh, Snapchat.

STUDENT #3
The Internet!

DAVID
It's your fucking major, people.

The slide changes to show "Journalism."

SEVERAL STUDENTS
(murmuring)
Journalism?/Ah, Journalism/Oh, yeah

DAVID
Journalism is the only form of mass communication not trying to manipulate us; its only function is to inform, so that we can tell that all the rest are merely bullshit.

David writes "Bullshit" over the forms of P.R.

The bell RINGS. The class files out. Skip approaches David.

SKIP
Excuse me, Professor Bishop?

DAVID
Yes? Are you in my graduate class?

SKIP
I was, last year. This semester I'm interning at RNN.

David scoffs and grabs his bag.

SKIP (CONT'D)
About that, sir, I was hoping you might have a minute to talk?

David eyes Skip skeptically.

INT. COFFEESHOP - DAY

Skip and David sit at a corner table having coffee.

DAVID

So, you were interning at RNN to build your resume? And now you're V.P. of Programming? I don't know what's more disturbing, that a grad student's running a network, or that News reports into Programming.

SKIP

News is considered scripted content. But that's beside the point. What it means is that I get to hire the new head of News.

Skip smiles wide and sits back. David doesn't make the leap.

DAVID

I pity the poor schmuck stuck with that task. Then again, they don't hire real journalists anyway. Only salesmen or beauty queens, right?

SKIP

Not anymore. We've been given a chance to change that. The network is being completely overhauled. Haven't you seen the news?

DAVID

No, it just makes me angry.

SKIP

As you used to say, if you're not angry, you're not paying attention.

DAVID

I'm glad *someone* in class was paying attention.

SKIP

I did, sir. That's why I want you run the News division.

David spits up his coffee.

DAVID

You want *me* to clean up that shitshow?

SKIP

Well, it's not quite *that* bad...

David looks to the nearest mounted TV, tuned to RNN. It shows Leslie, with a "War on Easter" chyron.

LESLIE (ON TV)

I'm sorry, but the Easter Bunny
just IS white!

BLACK OPPONENT

But don't you think a brown bunny
would make all kids feel welcome--

LESLIE (ON TV)

No. Just no. He is what he is. Just
because you feel uncomfortable does
not mean something has to change.
The Easter Bunny's white. Just like
ghosts, or the abominable snowman.
I mean that's just scientific fact.

Leslie breaks a dark chocolate bunny in half, defiantly, with
a gleam in her eye. David shoots Skip a WTF look.

SKIP

That's why we need someone like
you, to help restore truth to
broadcasting.

DAVID

I think you've got the wrong
person, kid. Haven't you heard? I'm
a media hack.

SKIP

I don't believe that, Professor. I
know how much you hate cable news,
after what happened at UBS. But
this is a chance to change that.
Just think about it: you'd have
Complete. Editorial. Control. You
could turn the world's worst news
outlet into a legitimate newsroom.
How's *that* for a legacy?

David is, admittedly, tempted. But still realistic.

DAVID

What makes you think it can be
fixed? Or that I could fix it?

SKIP

Because you taught me everything I
know.

DAVID

Sorry, I don't mean to sound
cynical, but--

SKIP

"A cynic is nothing more than a frustrated idealist."

DAVID

Who's been mugged by reality. If you're gonna quote me, at least--

SKIP

Help me create a better reality, Professor Bishop. One that's not so cynical... I know you believe truth is worth fighting for. You've just lost *hope* that things can change.

David sighs, guilty as charged.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Look, if we don't try, they'll find someone who will. And they won't share our commitment to truth, or journalistic integrity. And *that* should terrify you more than anything.

It does.

David looks warily to the TV, where Leslie bites the ear off a white chocolate bunny.

EXT. GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE - DAY

David drives onto the bridge toward New Jersey, where traffic slows to a crawl. He slows his car to a complete stop.

DAVID

What, is there an accident...

He lowers the window and looks around, but sees nothing amiss. He turns on the radio for a news report.

RADIO PERSONALITY #1

Why would he put that spoiled heiress in charge of a network? She ain't ever worked a day in her life. Unless you count that sex tape. Mmm hmm, I said it.

RADIO PERSONALITY #2

Bitch, please. He had to pick somebody. He's so old he looks like an Oompa Loompa on life support.

DAVID
God, radio news is as bad as cable.

RADIO PERSONALITY #2
Literally!

David spots a well-dressed FEMALE hurrying down the pedestrian walkway. He gets out of his car and follows her.

The Female reaches a schlubby, middle-aged JUMPER.

FEMALE
Wait! Don't jump! Please!

The Jumper glances back at her. The woman turns her back on him to face a CAMERAMAN. She's a FIELD REPORTER.

FIELD REPORTER
How's my hair? Is the cowlick cooperating?

The Cameraman gives her a thumb's up. She clears her voice.

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)
I'm here on the George Washington Bridge with an RNN exclusive. As you can see, it's not quite sunset, but the sun is setting on poor-- What's your name?

JUMPER
Uh, Kevin.

FIELD REPORTER
Where the sun is setting on poor Kevin. Too many souls are being driven off the edge by the radical fringe, from the immigrant caravan of criminals to the corrupt Clinton Foundation. Kevin, what's driven you here today? Is it ANTIFA?

She extends the mic to Kevin.

KEVIN
Wh-Who?

FIELD REPORTER
Was someone trying to take away your freedom? Or worse, your guns?

KEVIN
What?

FIELD REPORTER

Were you forced to bake a gay cake for a gay wedding? A *polygamous* gay wedding?

KEVIN

Huh? I'm gay. And there's not gonna be a wedding. I ch-cheated on G-George.

Kevin breaks down in tears.

FIELD REPORTER

A breakup? A gay breakup?
(to Cameraman)
Cut the tape. That narrative doesn't work for us.

CAMERAMAN

Well, we could edit it to imply George Soros?

FIELD REPORTER

Great idea, Chuck! Keep rolling.

David finally reaches them, appalled.

DAVID

What is wrong with you? This man needs help. Kevin, look at me. You don't want to do this, Kevin. It's going to be OK. I promise.

KEVIN

N-No it's not. I f-fucked up.

DAVID

We all fuck up, Kevin. That doesn't mean you give up.

KEVIN

But I fucked up b-bad.

DAVID

Kevin, look at me. Don't do this. Do not let one mistake define you.

KEVIN

But he'll n-never forgive me.

DAVID

You don't know that. You have to give him a chance.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)
 Prove to him that you've changed,
 that you can change. Please, give
 me your hand.

KEVIN
 I don't know. You r-really think
 he'll forgive me?

DAVID
 I do. But first, you have to
 forgive yourself.

Kevin considers his words.

DAVID (CONT'D)
 Just give me your hand. Please?

Kevin snuffles and nods. Finally, he takes his hand. David
 helps Kevin down to safety, now attracting ONLOOKERS.

FIELD REPORTER
 Well that's a bust. Pack it up.

CAMERAMAN
 If it doesn't bleed, it doesn't
 lead.

FIELD REPORTER
 Probably for the best. He didn't
 look very camera-ready anyway.

David sees them load gear into an RNN news van, and scoffs.

DAVID
 I should have known...

Disgusted, David grabs their camera, tosses it in the river.

CAMERAMAN
 Hey, you can't do that!

FIELD REPORTER
 Who do you think you are?

DAVID
 Your new News Director. The one
 who's gonna turn REEL News into
 real news. Oh, and by the way,
 you're both fired.

David walks to his car, more hopeful and confident.

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

David and Skip walk down a corridor.

SKIP

Professor Bishop, I can't tell you how excited I am to have you onboard! Does this mean you'll be my thesis chair? I was thinking, maybe we could do a case study on turning RNN around...

DAVID

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

SKIP

Right. So, where to first?

DAVID

Why don't we start with the bullpen, see what we have to work with. Where is the newsroom?

SKIP

Well, RNN doesn't exactly have one.

DAVID

How can you do news without a newsroom?

SKIP

Technically, RNN doesn't do "news." They only brand themselves that way. Oh, here we are.

They reach the door to Room 101, marked "Writer's Room."

DAVID

What is this?

SKIP

The newsroom, sort of.

INT. WRITER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

What should be a morning meeting of producers, assignment editors, and assistants is instead a TV writer's room. A dozen WRITERS are seated around a long table. A female SHOWRUNNER, 40s, stands before a dry erase board.

Everyone turns to David and Skip as they enter.

SKIP

Hi everyone, I'd like to introduce you to Professor David Bishop.

DAVID

Just David.

SKIP

Professor David. Our new head of News.

Everyone nods and waves.

DAVID

Please, continue. I just want to hear what stories you're pitching.

SHOWRUNNER

I was just saying how we need a new story arc for Leslie, now that the War on Easter is winding down.

WRITER #1

What about a War on Data? We can play up how Big Tech sells user data to the highest bidder?

SHOWRUNNER

No, Silicon Valley buys too much ad time. We need an antagonist that plays to our audience without alienating our sponsors.

WRITER #2

We can probably drum up something about big government. "Is Smokey the Bear infringing on your freedom to smoke stogies?"

SHOWRUNNER

We should save the whole "loss of liberty" thing until we can pin it on a politician, and knock him down a few points in the polls.

WRITER #3

We could reintroduce the War on Terror? It's always a ratings hit. And I'm just spitballing here, but what if we follow a ragtag group of Muslim extremists, as they plot to overthrow an American embassy?

SHOWRUNNER

Ooh, that's so Homeland. I like it.
But can we guarantee the suicide
bomber won't blow up before sweeps?
David, what do you think?

David stands there in shock, mouth agape.

DAVID

What the hell is this...?

SHOWRUNNER

We're breaking down narratives for
the next news cycle.

DAVID

Well it sounds pretty broken to me.

David walks around the room, pauses at a wall fully taped
with color-coded index cards, the majority yellow.

DAVID (CONT'D)

What is all this?

SHOWRUNNER

That's where we plot the season's
emotional arcs. Each color
represents a different protagonist,
or "anchor." Leslie is yellow.
Angus is red, naturally.

The Writers snicker. David takes a closer look at the cards.

DAVID

Are you telling me the anchors have
emotional journeys, like in
scripted TV?

SHOWRUNNER

This is scripted TV. It's just that
our characters don't actually arc.
The emotional journey is all about
the viewer. See, when we ran the
Voter Fraud plot line last season,
the audience went from Anger, to
Rage, to Outrage. We always try to
end with Outrage, as Marketing has
found that it provokes the highest
level of arousal in our audience.

David looks at Skip, incredulous. He leers at card labels.

DAVID

"Muslims, Mosques, Jihadists?"

SHOWRUNNER

Each topic has a different Outrage Index, which correlates to Nielsen ratings. The more anger the story generates, the more retweets, which means more control over the conversation, more impact, and ultimately, more ad dollars. So we select stories most likely to elicit that emotional response. Like immigration, or, what we call, the "Caravan of Criminals." A story, after all, is only as strong as its antagonist. How else can we define ourselves as the good guys?

DAVID

Sorry, the good guys?

SHOWRUNNER

You know, "Reel Americans."

The Showrunner points to a card that reads "REEL Americans."

SHOWRUNNER (CONT'D)

Christian nationalists, QAnon theorists, Scott Baio...

DAVID

So "real" in the same way Reel News is real. Which is to say, unreal.

WRITER #1

I loved that show. It was SO real.

David pulls an antagonist card off the wall.

DAVID

"Liberal Media." You know that's not really a thing, right?

SHOWRUNNER

But that narrative plays so well with our base.

DAVID

That "narrative" was created by the Nixon Administration, to undermine news coverage that was unfavorable to the President. It's a bullshit term. Just like "Real Americans." It's not a REAL antagonist. None of these are. They're just B.S. used to scare people.

SHOWRUNNER

We can't very well go after Big Oil or Wall Street. They pay the bills. So we often fall back on things like multiculturalism, as it most consistently enrages our target demo. It's just good for business.

The Showrunner gestures to a TV showing Leslie.

LESLIE (ON TV)

Coming up, is Dora the Explorer indoctrinating your kids with a pro-DACA agenda? Our panel of white males weigh in.

David tries to wrap his head around the insanity.

DAVID

Let me get this straight. You intentionally divide the audience against some perceived enemy? And you create this conflict by choosing narratives according to how angry it will make them? Because they respond most strongly to negative stimuli, which is good for ratings?

SHOWRUNNER

Welcome to the writer's room!

DAVID

Newsroom. You are going to be a newsroom, if it fucking kills me.

SHOWRUNNER

Well that narrative would be redundant if we go with the suicide bomber, don't you think?

David stares dumbfounded. Skip pulls awkwardly at his collar.

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

Live on air, on the morning show couch, is DAPHNE CALHOUN, 30s, a beautiful black woman suffering from white privilege. She's a "Karen" in every sense of the word. Like Stacey Dash or Candace Owens, the only thing black about her is her coffee, and the only black life that matters is her own.

DAPHNE

And I say, if we don't want segregation, we need to get rid of all the stuff that segregates us. Like Black History Month, the BET, and Black Friday.

Next to her sits J.P. GAVIN, 30s, with a fixed smile and perfect teeth, the type of model/actor so gorgeous he must be in TV, but only talented enough to be a cable host.

J.P.

Actually, Black Friday is just a day of shopping. It has nothing to do with black people.

DAPHNE

Oh, then we can keep that.

J.P.

My wife will be thrilled!

DAPHNE

But hashtag "Black Girl Magic"? How about "All Girls Magic"?

Daphne purses her lips and rests her case.

J.P.

Well you can't argue with that. Let's now turn our attention to the latest overreaction by the lame-stream media. The so-called ICE "detention centers."

DAPHNE

Well, I don't see what the big deal is. Sure, the kids are separated from their parents, but their parents are all drug smugglers.

J.P.

And rapists, Daphne. Let's not forget the rapists.

J.P. has a smile plastered on his face, totally disconnected from the footage playing on a TV screen behind him. It shows ICE OFFICERS pulling SCREAMING KIDS from their pleading HISPANIC PARENTS, who are cuffed, hooded, and escorted away.

DAPHNE

For more on this topic, we go to Regina Love, with a little segment we call 'Gina's Eye for Justice.

Regina sits at a nearby anchor desk.

REGINA

Thanks, Daphne. Let's be frank. These child detention centers are basically summer camps for border bandits. It's like their own fenced in playground away from the scalding summer sun.

The monitor behind her shows kids being put in dog kennel cages, where they can't move. The kids are WHALING scared.

J.P.

I wish I'd've had my own chain link fence to keep *me* safe as a kid.

Daphne sympathetically pats J.P.'s leg.

REGINA

What I don't get is why all these people on Fakebook and Twitter Twatter are complaining. I mean, they don't even have kids. How can they say it's inhumane when they haven't popped an ungrateful little twitter out their own twatter? Plus, it's not like we aren't giving these buggers a better home.

On the monitor, a WASPY WHITE COUPLE strolls through the kennel. The woman points to a shy kid in tears. An ICE agent unlocks the cage, hands the kid to the woman. She winces at snot dripping from his nose, and is put back in the cage.

REGINA (CONT'D)

See how happy he is? Looks like Justice to 'Gina!

Regina winks, while the kid screams bloody murder.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

And we're out.

David stares, appalled. Skip shrinks in chagrin.

DAVID

What is this pep rally of piss...? This isn't news. It's entertainment with an agenda. Is anyone here an actual journalist?

Crickets. Finally, Leslie raises her hand.

DAVID (CONT'D)
You're a journalist?

LESLIE
No, but I was Miss New England, and my talent was journaling.

DAVID
Why did you raise your hand?

LESLIE
I had a question. Um, who are you?

SKIP
This is David Bishop, the new director of News. Professor David--

DAVID
Just David.

SKIP
David will be reforming the news division. I trust him completely.

Leslie raises her hand again.

LESLIE
Sorry, who are you?

SKIP
I'm Skip. The head of Programming.

J.P./DAPHNE/REGINA
Ah.../That's who that is?/I thought he was an intern?

DAVID
Thanks, Skip... As journalists, and in this room, I use that term loosely, you have a duty to serve the public. *All the public*. Not just a narrow market share you've untethered from reality. Viewers assume you have their best interest in mind. So let's start acting like it.

Leslie raises her hand again.

LESLIE
Did you run this by marketing? I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this.

DAVID

Says the woman who wants to deport Dora the Explorer. As lead anchor, Leslie, you should be setting a higher standard for this network, and for your colleagues. You can start by learning to be objective.

(to everyone)

"Outrage" is no longer your brand. Our brand is "objectivity."

LESLIE

But if we don't rile up viewers against some perceived enemy, how will we alienate them from other news sources?

DAVID

Um, you don't.

ANGUS

So, you don't want me to rant like I'm mad as hell and not gonna take it anymore?

DAVID

OK, let's start with the basics. This is the first tenet of journalism, so please write this down: News should not tell people what to think, but what to think about... Any questions?

Everyone raises their hand.

SKIP

Maybe we need a demonstration?

DAVID

OK, I can't even, with this--
(waving at Daphne, Regina)
So let's start with something simple. Can we play Angus' piece from last night? On gun violence?

On a nearby monitor, footage comes up of Angus:

ANGUS (ON TV)

Some nightclub in Florida was shot up the other night, and they're blaming it on "lax gun laws." Folks, this is just another attempt by the liberal media to attack our second amendment rights.

(MORE)

ANGUS (ON TV) (CONT'D)

The answer isn't fewer guns, it's more. We all know the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. Or in this case, a drag queen with a gun. But try telling that to Big Government, who want to take away your guns.

DAVID

OK, Angus, what're you saying here?

ANGUS

That the answer to mass shootings is more guns.

DAVID

That's not information. It's an opinion.

ANGUS

But it's *my* opinion.

DAVID

That doesn't make it true. Or newsworthy. My own opinion is that Congress will do nothing about gun violence until their own offspring are gunned down at preschool. But broadcasting that belief, or saying the answer's more guns, is telling us what to think. Try telling us what to think *about*.

ANGUS

Well, to fight gun violence, we need more guns.

DAVID

No, what to think *about* is asking the right questions, not giving us an opinion, and pretending it's an answer.

LESLIE

What if we pose it as a question? Like, are hijabs hiding terrorists? Is the only thing that stops a bad guy, a good guy? You decide!

DAVID

You're still reinforcing an unfounded idea.

LESLIE

But it appeals to our base.

DAVID

But it's a baseless argument. Can anyone provide the facts, and only the facts, on the nightclub shooting?

SKIP

(reading)

It occurred Tuesday, around 11:30PM. At a dance club in Miami, on "drag night." Thirty two wounded. Eight dead. Shooter killed by police.

DAVID

Thank you, Skip. Now that we've established the basics, we should consider how it fits into the broader context, like...

(referring to notes)

This is the 212th mass shooting this year. Christ, is that right? And it's the 183rd with fatalities. Wow. Just, wow... Now can anyone tell me the three consistent elements of mass shootings?

SKIP

(reading)

One, a long standing grievance by the perpetrator. Two, mental illness. And three, access to firearms.

DAVID

The U.S. has the highest rate of gun deaths of all wealthy nations. Other countries have the same violent video games, and the same rate of mental illness. But what they don't have is easy access to firearms. Meanwhile, we are less than 5% of the population, yet own half of the world's guns.

LESLIE

That's because we have more crime.

DAVID

Actually, we don't. That's a false narrative. But because we have more guns, our crime is more deadly.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

That's a hard truth. In fact, in countries like Australia, where they've enacted gun control, they've reduced mass shootings to 1 in 25 years. *These* are facts people should be thinking about. Because they challenge popular opinion.

LESLIE

But I thought owning a gun makes you more safe.

DAVID

No, quite the opposite, but you've illustrated my point. Because we can't believe everything we think. Most of what we think comes from marketing slogans and ad campaigns. The most notable of which remains, "The good guy with a gun." A slogan which you, Angus, continue to push, that conveniently can be purchased on a T-shirt from the NRA website for \$24.95, with an easy link from your Facebook page. Which brings me to motive: who benefits financially from selling this "good guy" myth?

ANGUS

Me, I own stock in Smith & Wesson.

LESLIE

Oh, me too. I've stock in Remington.

Daphne, J.P. and Regina all raise hands to a shocked David.

DAVID

Can we say "conflict of interest"? Good God, I wish I had one of those handguns about now.

Angus pulls the handle of a gun out of his pants. Skip frantically shakes his head and signals him to put it away.

INT. CEO FLOOR - RNN NETWORK - DAY

David and Skip approach Sherrie, at her desk, on the phone.

SKIP

Professor Bishop-- Um, David. You remember Sherrie McIntyre?

Sherrie covers the receiver.

SHERRIE

I was in your undergrad class a few years back.

DAVID

I remember. You wanted to be a reporter, right?

SHERRIE

A news anchor, yeah-- Excuse me.

Sherrie answers a RINGING phone, annoyed, really wanting to continue this conversation. Skip sympathizes with her.

Larry walks out of Odessa's office.

LARRY

You must be Mr. Bishop.

DAVID

Sorry, you are?

LARRY

Larry Putz, head of Marketing & PR.

Larry extends a hand to David, who instantly dislikes the guy.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Perhaps you could swing by my office sometime. I'd love to familiarize you with strategies for activating our audience.

DAVID

I'm not sure I have the time--

LARRY

Mr. Bishop, this network is a 10 billion dollar business. It's important that you understand how our profit machine works.

DAVID

Um, sure then.

David forces a weak smile and follows Skip into--

INT. CEO OFFICE - RNN NETWORK - CONTINUOUS

Odessa talks on her cell phone, while repeatedly swiping on a desk monitor she mistakes for a tablet.

ODESSA

All I say is, if son vegan, why you
breastfeed? Oh, must go.

Odessa blows kisses through the phone and hangs up.

ODESSA (CONT'D)

You fix network, yes? Clean mess?

DAVID

I'm not so sure it can be fixed.

ODESSA

What problem? I no like problem.

DAVID

Can we replace an anchor?

ODESSA

Which one?

DAVID

All of them.

ODESSA

What wrong with anchor? I hear
Leslie favorability higher than
Rosie O'Donnell.

SKIP

I think you mean Nora O'Donnell.

DAVID

If only her skills matched.

ODESSA

This America. Pretty blonde more
important than brain, no?

DAVID

In sitcoms, sure. In marriage,
maybe? But not network news.

David extends an open arm toward the bank of TVs. On a
monitor, Leslie sits at the anchor desk:

LESLIE (ON TV)

Tonight, the push for privatizing
the Fire Department. Why should we
pay to save the unsightly homes of
poor people? And later, are
community dog parks a slippery
slope to socialism? Our gaffer's
cocker-spaniel barks yes.

Odessa's dog barks twice.

ODESSA

They under contract. No fire. That more work.

DAVID

Can we at least force Angus into early retirement?

ODESSA

Daddy say he bedrock of institution.

DAVID

I don't know about bedrock... Fossil, maybe?

ODESSA

I know Angus for years. He get Medal of Freedom. That honor, yes?

DAVID

"Honorable" isn't the word I would use. I'm concerned he's got more than a few screws loose. As we speak, he's on air confusing the Dukes of Hazard with the KKK.

On a monitor, Angus sounds off in front of his wall of books:

ANGUS (ON TV)

This poisonous P.C. culture has finally gone too far, folks. Just listen to this. This David Duke guy, some sort of wizard? Well apparently, his poor cousins Bo and Luke can no longer drive their Dodge Charger down Martin Luther King Boulevard without the P.C. police tearing them a new one!

Angus shakes his head, and pops an Oxycontin.

DAVID

Look, to make this work, we need A-level talent to anchor the nightly news. That's our flagship program. We need a heavyweight. Someone distinguished. Like... Buck Brockmeyer.

SKIP

The man formerly known as the Most Distinguished Name in News? I thought he retired?

DAVID

Not quite, which is why he might be desperate enough to do it.

SKIP

You really think he'd work for this sinking ship?

Odessa slaps Skip. Her dog barks.

DAVID

Flagship.

SKIP

Sorry. Sinking flagship.

DAVID

Just, flagship.

(to Odessa)

Look, to fix this place, we need someone like Buck. The staff could learn a lot from him...

SHERRIE

(entering, coaxing)

Ooh, Mr. Brockmeyer's won lots of journalism awards.

This gets Odessa's attention.

ODESSA

Fine. Maybe he teach anchor to win award, like Angus.

David looks doubtful.

DAVID

One step at a time. First, we have to convince him to come aboard.

It's clear from David's face this won't be easy.

INT. PODUNK BAR - BFE MONTANA - DAY

David and Skip enter a seedy dive bar in the middle of nowhere, full of REDNECKS, FARMHANDS, and DRUNKS.

SKIP

You're telling me, Mr. Brockmeyer's here? A man who covered the fall of the Berlin Wall? Who won a Peabody for his piece on Rwanda? He's HERE? Doing what?

DAVID

(pained)

Local news... It's all he could get after, you know...

David spots Buck, looking as dignified as ever, despite standing in front of a raggedy pool table topped with a piece of plywood. He holds a microphone and faces a CAMERA GUY.

BUCK

We're here, live, at Podunk Petey's for the quadrennial Chicken Drop. This local tradition has correctly predicted the winner in 18 of the last 20 mayoral elections. This year's chicken, Mother Clucker, has been personally selected by the incumbent Mayor, the venerable H.H. Thornton the third. Ah, it looks like it's time for the main event.

Buck stands aside as a BAR-BACK carries a live CHICKEN to the pool table. He tosses it onto the plywood, marked down the middle with a strip of duct tape, labeled side 1 and 2.

The chicken struts across the plywood, crosses the duct taped line. It SHITS on side 1. The crowd goes WILD.

BUCK (CONT'D)

And there we have it. Mayor Thornton is predicted to win the upcoming runoff election. This is Buck Brockmeyer, signing off.

Skip doesn't know WTF he just witnessed.

SKIP

What was that?

DAVID

Local culture. Gotta love rural voters.

Skip comes face to face with Buck, awestruck.

SKIP

Wow, Mr. Brockmeyer?

BUCK

Oh, you must be the kid from West Brook High. Yes, I'd be delighted to speak at graduation.

SKIP

Um, no sir, I'm--

Buck spots David, knows he looks familiar, but not sure how.

BUCK

Do I know you?

David eyes the ground, feeling guilty.

DAVID

Not officially. David Bishop.

David extends a hand. Buck takes it, searches his memory.

BUCK/DAVID

UBS.

Buck sizes him up. David averts his eyes.

BUCK

And what brings someone like you to a place like this?

David tries to lighten the mood.

DAVID

I needed a break from all the bullshit. Imagine my surprise... Buy you a drink?

Wary, Buck follows them to the bar. David buys a round.

BUCK

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I hear you have a new project. RNN?
(off David's nod)
Still fighting the good fight, I see.

David isn't sure if that's meant to be sarcastic. Buck's so even-keeled, even off camera, it's hard to tell.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Well, good luck with that sinking ship.

SKIP
Actually, that's why we're here.
We'd like you to helm that sinking
ship.

DAVID
Flagship.

SKIP
Helm that sinking flagship.
(off David's look)
Sir.

DAVID
What he means is, we have a
proposition for you.

BUCK
Oh? Some sort of peace offering?

Buck empties his flask into his drink.

DAVID
Buck, we need you. Someone with
your level of integrity. I'd like
you to headline the nightly news.

BUCK
But I'm not a natural blond.

Buck gestures toward a nearby TV. It shows Leslie.

LESLIE (ON TV)
As the New York race for governor
heats up, we look at voter I.D.
laws. Why some people think
elections are more fair when only
white people vote. And later, are
bidets gay if you never turn them
on? Milo Yiannopoulos reports.

DAVID
That's exactly why we need you.
You're the only person out there
who is genuinely neutral and never
partisan. You have a commitment to
truth that, over your 40 years in
the business, has never wavered.
Hell, you're The Most Distinguished
Name in News.

BUCK
Was the most distinguished. Not
anymore, thanks to you.

DAVID

And I still feel like shit because of it. I should've known you'd never say those things. It had "hit job" written all over it. But the pressure to run the sensational over substance...

BUCK

(philosophical)

The world in which we now live. Chasing any object that catches the light, never realizing we're moths to a flame... Sadly, that's just the business.

DAVID

Well, we're trying to change that business. We're trying to make news out of all that-- that, *noise*. That's why we need you at RNN.

BUCK

You want me to work for the very network that made that video? And report to the news director who unwittingly promoted it?

The sentences hangs in the air, more statement than question.

DAVID

Well, when you say it like that... Look, I take full responsibility for what happened. I made a bad call. And I hate myself for it.

BUCK

I guess that's the mark of a good journalist. Undying loyalty to the truth, despite the popular narrative.

DAVID

I'm offering you the chance to write a new narrative. You don't have to be the disgraced former journalist taken down by some partisan hack. You are the most Distinguished Name in News, and always have been. Please, let me help you reclaim that legacy.

BUCK

So, what, you're offering me a redemption narrative?

DAVID

Buck, your career can't be reduced to that one scandal. And neither can mine. We have to prove that truth still matters. If we can fix this network, it means it's still *possible*. Help me prove it's not too late. That we-- that *news*, can still be saved.

This point really speaks to Buck.

BUCK

And in turn, I help you with your own redemption narrative?

DAVID

I'm not asking for forgiveness. I'm just asking for a second chance.

David holds up his drink. Buck hesitates, then nods.

BUCK

Very well. But on one condition. You guarantee RNN hosts the New York gubernatorial debate. And by RNN, I mean me. I've never been on network news and not hosted. And I won't start now.

DAVID

Deal.

Buck clinks glasses with David, hopeful and relieved.

INT. CORRIDOR - RNN BUILDING - DAY

David and Skip walk to the studio.

DAVID

What do you mean "no deal"?

SKIP

The organizing committee said they wouldn't legitimize a network like this with a governor's debate.

DAVID

Not even with Buck at the helm?

SKIP

Not unless they see a noticeable difference in the next two weeks.

DAVID

The debate's in three? That doesn't give us much time... What metric would they use?

SKIP

Media Matters. They keep a daily tally of RNN's errors. If we can score single digits three days in a row, they'll consider us.

DAVID

Well, what's our baseline?

SKIP

Triple digits. Today's tally is 117. Wait, no, 118. Make that 121.

DAVID

So to land the debate, we have to become a real news outlet. In only 14 days. And curb roughly, what, 1600 mistakes?
(ironic)
No pressure, right?

David shakes his head as they enter--

INT. RNN STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Leslie sits at the anchor desk with Buck. David's pleased with his level of professionalism, but it has yet to spread.

DAVID

OK, if we want that debate, we need to improve our on-air accuracy. This means no falsehoods and no mistakes. So lets run through the welfare segment, to make sure we're on the right page.

Buck clears his throat, his voice stoic and monotone.

BUCK

Our lead story tonight, should recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program be drug tested to determine eligibility?

(MORE)

BUCK (CONT'D)

That's what a new bill introduced today in the Senate would mandate if passed. This comes on the heel of other restrictive welfare bills being struck down in states across the nation.

LESLIE

(with contempt cranked up
to a 10)

The state court in Kentucky recently overturned legislation that would have prohibited food stamp recipients from purchasing seafood, steak, or sodas. So now, welfare recipients can buy all the lobster they like.

DAVID

Hold up. What was that?

LESLIE

We ran a story last week where a welfare moocher bought lobster.

DAVID

But why is that your go-to example?

LESLIE

We caught him on film.

DAVID

But why assume a random guy who bought lobster once is typical of half a million homeless people who rely on food stamps to survive? You can't cherry-pick an example to fit a narrative.

LESLIE

That narrative is the only one I know.

DAVID

And that, sadly, is part of the problem. Because news outlets like this fail to correct it. But we are going to change that. Because, despite what we may believe, all welfare users are not abusers.

(to everyone)

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

Second tenet of journalism: If you put a face on an issue, it should speak to the FACTS, not be some isolated incident that confirms a bias.

(to Leslie)

Try it again, please, without the commentary.

LESLIE

(with contempt at a 10)

The state court in Kentucky overturned legislation that would have prohibited food stamp recipients from purchasing seafood, steak, or sodas.

DAVID

Let's try it again, with a little less contempt.

LESLIE

I was aiming for "self-righteous indignation."

DAVID

Maybe aim for neutrality, like the banner above you says.

LESLIE

(with contempt at a 9.9)

The state court in Kentucky overturned legislation--

DAVID

Again. And please dial it back.

LESLIE

(with contempt at a 9.9)

The state court in Kentucky overturned legislation--

DAVID

Again.

LESLIE

(with contempt at a 9.9)

The state court in Kentucky--

DAVID

I'm sorry, there's still too much judgment.

LESLIE

Then what's my motivation?

DAVID

Come again?

LESLIE

My motivation. If I'm not indignant, am I disgusted?irate?

DAVID

How about no emotion at all? Can you do that?

LESLIE

I don't understand. How will the audience know what I think?

DAVID

They won't. You're an anchor, not an actor. Emotions don't belong in news. They're for storytelling, which is why you see them every night on your favorite TV shows. It's why you laugh at Modern Family, or cry at This is Us.

REGINA

Sometimes I laugh at This Is Us.

DAVID

Stories are designed to make you feel something. That's why they exist. But news exists for a different purpose. It's not entertainment. It's information. And information may make you laugh or cry, but *not in its delivery*.

SKIP

Perhaps Buck could demonstrate?

David motions to Buck, who clears his throat, sits up.

BUCK

The state court in Kentucky recently overturned legislation that would have prohibited food stamp recipients from purchasing seafood, steak, or sodas.

LESLIE

I can do that.

(with contempt at a 9.8)

The state court in Kentucky--

BUCK

The state court in Kentucky--

LESLIE

(with contempt at a 9.8)

The state court in Kentucky--

DAVID

Please stop already before I have
an aneurysm.

David suppresses frustration, writes calmly on a dry erase board: "I use emotion for the many and reason for the few."

DAVID (CONT'D)

Is anyone familiar with this quote?

DAPHNE

Is that from a Real Housewife?

J.P.

Sounds like the guy from Marketing.

DAVID

Skip?

SKIP

It's from Adolf Hitler.

DAVID

It was one of Hitler's directives. Because it's easier to ignite the masses through emotion than it is to sway one man by logic. Emotion is a hallmark of propaganda, because you want the audience to hate the same people you do. Because their anger will override logic. Emotion changes information into *opinion*, which is the opposite of news. So if a viewer detects emotion in a newscaster's voice, and it's anything but detached empathy, an alarm should go off, saying, "uh-oh they're trying to manipulate me."

(to Leslie)

I want you to deliver the news without passion.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

(to Angus)

Without editorializing it.

(to Daphne)

Without criticizing it.

(to Regina)

And without justifying it.

(to everyone)

You are not the news. You are its custodian. And as its custodian, you must be dispassionate. *That's* your motivation... Now, can we please try it again, without any emotion. Please.

Leslie clears her voice and sits upright.

LESLIE

(with contempt at a 9.8)

The state court in Kentucky--

David tosses his paperwork in the air, giving up.

DAPHNE

Well, I think I'd look fabulous on the food stamp diet.

J.P.

Swimsuit season *is* just around the corner.

Daphne and J.P. nod, as Larry observes from afar, concerned.

INT. CORRIDOR - RNN BUILDING - DAY

A stressed David hurries to the studio. He runs into Larry.

LARRY

Mr. Bishop, just who I wanted to see. I've been waiting for you to swing by Marketing...

DAVID

Sorry, I've been a little busy.

David tries to leave, but Larry blocks his path.

LARRY

How are things in News? Keeping the talent happy, I hope?

DAVID

If you mean the anchors, yeah. We're, uh, honing their skills.

LARRY

Actually, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I'd hate for our talent to lose their edge. You see, it's important we retain our brand DNA, and not compromise the market share we've worked hard to secure.

DAVID

Sorry, I don't follow.

LARRY

Marketing has a very specific target audience. I worry you're no longer speaking to them. What I'm saying is, you need to tailor your news to engage them, and stick to the narratives they want to hear.

DAVID

I think you've got it backwards, Mr. Putz, is it? Marketing serves programming, not the other way around. News comes first. Then you market it to viewers. I don't select stories to serve an agenda. My obligation is to the truth, whatever that may be, even if people don't want to hear it. Especially if it's at odds with their opinions.

LARRY

Let's be honest, Mr. Bishop, people don't want the truth. They want those ill-informed opinions confirmed in nice little soundbites. They want their prejudices parroted back to them so they can feel justified in their convictions, however wrong they may be. They want to maintain their false sense of security in a world they only think they understand. They don't want the cognitive dissonance from learning the truth. They want to be spared the crippling existential dread of realizing the planet's dying, their kids are worse off than they are, and that they've been complicit in supporting the very people responsible for their economic demise.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

They don't want that discomfort. They don't want to be corrected, or challenged. They want to remain willfully blind. That's what this network provides.

DAVID

I'm not concerned with what people want. That's for product developers and ad men. I give them what they need, info they didn't know they needed, but is required to make informed decisions. Like, how tax cuts redistribute wealth to the wealthy, not the other way around.

LARRY

You shut your mouth!
(whispering)
You never know when a Koch Brother may be listening.

Larry looks around to make sure no one heard him.

DAVID

Look, there's too much bullshit out there already. How about instead of pandering to the audience, we educate them, wake them up from their comfort-eating, sofa-binging state of autopilot. Arouse their concern, inspire them to act, give them actual food for thought, not junk food for, I dunno, jerking off. News shouldn't placate people. It should serve them, by shining a light wherever they remain in the dark. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm late for a segment.

David turns and hurries to the studio.

LARRY

I'd be careful rocking the boat, Mr. Bishop. You wouldn't want to get thrown overboard.

Larry's threat amplifies David's stress.

INT. RNN STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

David passes Buck, at the coffee station.

BUCK
David, any word on the debate?

DAVID
I'm on it. I promise.

David reaches Skip, with a wary look.

DAVID (CONT'D)
How bad are today's numbers?

SKIP
Good news, we dropped to double
digits, but barely. We're at 98.

Not what David wanted to hear. His stress is only compounded.

DAVID
We have to get those numbers down.
If we can't reform the anchors, we
can't land the debate. If we can't
land the debate, we lose Buck. If
we lose Buck, we've basically lost
any hope of restoring truth to this
network. And if that happens, what
hope is there for the rest of us?

SKIP
I know it's been a long week, but
try not to lose hope. I think the
lessons are finally sinking in.
Just yesterday, I saw Leslie
watching a Family Guy clip of
Tricia Takenawa. You know, to see
what unemotional anchors sound
like. That's progress, right?

DAVID
It's like training puppies around
here. Except there's no retention.

SKIP
Actually, training pups is easier.
I used this shock collar on my
Collie, and she's like a new pet.
Maybe they have something like that
for people?

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)
On in five--

David rushes to Buck and Leslie, at the anchor desk.

DAVID

Leslie, let's run through the climate segment real quick.

Leslie clears her throat.

LESLIE

In other news, NASA has reported that the Earth's warming trend continues, making this the second-hottest year on record. And the tenth consecutive year of record-breaking temperatures.

DAVID

Not bad.

LESLIE

For the other side of this story, we go to--

A spotlight flashes on an empty guest seat.

DAVID

And, I spoke too soon. Leslie, who are you bouncing to?

LESLIE

Someone who can weigh in on the other side of the debate.

DAVID

There is no debate. There's science, and resistance. Period.

LESLIE

Some people might say that's biased reporting.

DAVID

Leslie, there is rarely a debate about whether or not a problem exists. The only debate should be on how to solve the problem. The only reason people think there are two sides to this debate is because A) they are paid to say that to protect someone's profits--

A harsh spotlight flashes on Angus, at the snack table.

DAVID (CONT'D)

And B) because they believe the crap sold to them by A.

A harsh spotlight flashes on J.P. and Daphne. David looks up at the control booth.

TECHNICIAN (O.S.)
Sorry, just a quick light check.

LESLIE
But my research shows that 120% of Americans believe scientists are lying about climate change.

DAVID
You might want to check that math. Because my notes say that 99% of scientists agree. And 100% of peer-reviewed papers prove it.

LESLIE
So, we aren't cutting to another viewpoint?

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)
Twenty seconds...

DAVID
Leslie, I applaud your newfound need for balance, which, by the way would've been very welcome in the welfare segment. But two points of view on climate change would create a false equivalency, staging a conflict where there is none. That may be great for drama, but not for news. So if you really want to see two sides of a pointless debate, try watching Angus pick out a pastry.

Leslie sees Angus debating between a scone and a bear claw.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)
Three, two, and one!

BUCK
Welcome back to Reel News Nightly. As unseasonably warm temperatures continue to plague the country, we go to Leslie Lyn Glenn with the latest report on climate science.

LESLIE
Today, NASA reported that the Earth's warming trend has made this the second-hottest year on record.

(MORE)

LESLIE (CONT'D)

And the tenth consecutive year of record-breaking temperatures. Despite what 120% of people may believe, science says otherwise.

DAVID

(defeated)

I'll take it.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

Back in two. Set for Regina.

Leslie takes off her mic and approaches David.

LESLIE

You know, if you'd like us to change our opinions, it would help if you changed your opinion of us.

DAVID

I'm not trying to change your opinion, Leslie. I'm trying to teach you the difference between *fact* and opinion. And the *fact* you can't tell the difference is the problem. At least, in *my* opinion.

Leslie considers his words, as Buck pulls David aside.

BUCK

About that debate...

David sighs, at a loss. He looks to Skip for encouragement.

SKIP

We're back up to triple digits.

BUCK

I assume you have a plan?

All eyes on David, desperate, as we cut to--

INT. WRITER'S ROOM - RNN BUILDING - DAY

David opens a box of Pavlock bracelets, passes them out.

DAVID

Good morning. In attempt to turn this Orwellian outhouse into a functioning newsroom, we need to speed up the learning curve.

The writers put the bracelets on, with hesitation.

WRITER #1

What is this?

DAVID

Think of it, as a bullshit barometer. Since you're so fond of negative stimuli, I thought we'd try some negative reinforcement. Each time you suggest something that does not belong on network news, you'll feel the same shock I do each time I hear it. And yes, my hurt is only spiritual, but I assure you, it's no less painful. Now tell me, what story ideas do you have for tonight?

WRITER #1

What about a followup to our White Supremacy Power Hour--

BUZZ! David presses the remote, shocks Writer #1 who recoils.

WRITER #2

Well, I read something on Lies4Liberty.com--

BUZZ! David shocks him.

WRITER #2 (CONT'D)

On PostTruthPatriots--

BUZZ! BUZZ! David shocks him again.

WRITER #2 (CONT'D)

On CharlottesvilleCharlatans--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!

WRITER #2 (CONT'D)

But I didn't tell you the story--

DAVID

Can any story on those sites be corroborated by at least two other sources, who weren't informed by the same site?

WRITER #2

...no.

Writer #2 hangs his head in shame.

WRITER #3

I've been wondering if Bin Laden's son is old enough to want revenge? Everyone loves a good sequel.

SHOWRUNNER

Ooh, someone should get on that--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! David shocks the Showrunner and Writer #3.

DAVID

This is not Homeland. We are not creating stories. We are covering them. Anyone else?

WRITER #1

(hesitant)

There's been talk of changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. That could be something?

DAVID

Yes! Now that's what I'm talking about. Anything else? Come on...

WRITER #4

I read a story about how the more time people spend online, the more likely they are to be antisocial or suffer from depression and stuff.

DAVID

Topical, relevant. That's good! Let's consider it for a morning show piece.

WRITER #4

Oh, I was thinking we could just throw it on the website.

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! David shocks her.

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

Buck, Leslie, Angus, and Regina are behind anchor desks, now wearing shock bracelets. Daphne and J.P. slip theirs on, while relaxing on the sofa. Leslie scoffs at hers.

LESLIE

Some people would say this doesn't really go with my coloring.

DAVID

I'm not worried about "some people." We can't afford anymore gaffs. Skip, what's today's number?

Skip stands before a countdown calendar to the debate, showing 6 days remaining. He writes "78" on today.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Good, but not good enough. If we want to qualify for that debate, we have less than a week to drop to a 9. So every time you even think of drifting into old patterns, you'll get a "reminder" to get back on track. All clear? It worked in the writer's room-- I mean, newsroom. So I'm sure it'll work here.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

On in three, two, and one.

BUCK

Good evening. And welcome to Reel News Nightly. I'm your host, Buck Brockmeyer.

LESLIE

And I'm Leslie Lyn Glenn.

BUCK

Tonight, protests continue in the streets of Detroit, as another unarmed black man is gunned down by police. For her take on this story, let's go to our own Daphne Calhoun.

David gestures frantically: "Not Daphne! NOT DAPHNE!"

DAPHNE

Oh, well, first, let me say, All Lives Matter--

BUZZ! A shock startles her.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

Just like Blue Lives Matter--

BUZZ! BUZZ!

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

Personally, I've never witnessed systematic race--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
I mean, what about--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
He WAS wearing a hoodie--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
These people--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
ANTIFA--

BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!

David makes a "throat slash" symbol.

 BUCK
Er, we'll be right back with more
Reel News after this break.

 FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)
Back in sixty.

Flustered, David tries to focus and move on.

 DAVID
What's up next?

 SKIP
Regina's author interview.

 DAVID
I thought that was in the C-block?
I was hoping to run through it.

 SKIP
It's just an interview. How hard
can it be?

David answers Skip with a wary look, his nerves frayed.

Sherrie enters the set to observe. She waves to Skip.

 SKIP (CONT'D)
Um, you know, if we ever want to
try a fresh face on air, I think--

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)
We're live in three, two--

DAVID
Hold that thought.

David puts on a headset and focuses on Regina, who sits across from ISAIAH EMMETT, 30s, a black scholar.

REGINA
We are back with author Isaiah Emmett. Now, Mr. Emmett, I see you've written a book about the Clemson Tigers.

ISAIAH
That's correct.

REGINA
But you attended Buffalo State.

ISAIAH
That's correct.

REGINA
I don't understand. You are a Buffalo State Bengal. But you wrote a book about the Tigers?

ISAIAH
To be clear, I am a sports journalist. I've written a dozen books about college football. I just happened to have attended Buffalo State.

REGINA
But it still begs the question, why would you write a history of the Tigers, if you're a Bengal?

ISAIAH
Because Clemson athletics hired me to write a history of the Tigers.

REGINA
But you're a Bengal. How can you write about being a Tiger?

David presses the remote, but Regina doesn't react.

ISAIAH
No, I'm a Tiger writer who just happens to be a Bengal.

REGINA

But you're still a Bengal, not a Tiger.

David presses the remote again. Still no reaction.

ISAIAH

You're assuming I can't write about the Tigers because I'm a Bengal?

REGINA

Right. What does a Bengal know about Tigers?

ISAIAH

Huh?

David presses the remote, hears a BUZZ. Sees Regina's bracelet on a nearby chair. He fumes.

REGINA

You are a Bengal, by your own admission, and not a Tiger. So why write about the Tigers?

ISAIAH

I can be a Bengal and still write about the Tigers.

REGINA

But why would you?

ISAIAH

Because it's my fucking job!!

Isaiah loses his shit and storms off set. David fumes.

DAVID

Commercial! Go to commercial!

The "live" lights go off. David yanks off his headset, livid.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Regina, a word?

Regina takes off her mic. David's pressure valve blows, weeks of frustration boiling over --

DAVID (CONT'D)

Regina, I know it's hard to imagine that experts in a given field can actually do their job AND be impartial, especially since you are incapable of impartiality or expertise, except perhaps when it comes to hair extensions or breast implants. But if I book a Pulitzer-Prize winning writer to discuss his latest work, we can assume he's capable of separating his personal life from his professional, which, I know comes as a shock to everyone in this studio. But we are no longer a network of conspiracy theories, scapegoating, fear mongering, vilification, rationalization, misinformation, disinformation, and partisan paranoia. This is a newsroom, not a war room where you get to attack any person, place, or cartoon character you disagree with. We are a news outlet concerned with REAL reporting. Not REEL, E.E., but real, E.A. I want actual facts, not vapid opinions. I want actual truths, not things that sound like truth, but aren't. And if we claim our news coverage is always neutral, then it damn well better be. From now on, you're going to start acting like a real journalist, all of you. Because we will NOT be the laughing stock of Media Matters, or any other media watchdog. And I will NOT be just another media hack!

(getting riled up)

And, by the way, the next time you see kids in cages, crying because they've been abducted from their parents, you might wanna question if the punishment fits the crime. You know, the third tenet of journalism: Hold the Powerful Accountable. You're a judge for Christ sake. Start acting like it. Justifying injustice is NOT justice.

(to Angus)

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

And Angus, for the last time, "political correctness" doesn't actually exist. That's just a label reactionaries use to defend bigoted behavior. Also, while we're on it, not once in the last 50 years has anyone in public office actually threatened to take away anyone's handguns. Since we have twice as many guns as people in this country, trust me when I say, no one in this administration is competent enough to take a quarter of them. And if they did, there'd still be enough for each of us to blow our fucking brains out if we have to keep hearing you blather about nonexistent bogeymen. Because let's face it, because of our easy access to guns, America's suicide rate is DOUBLE the homicide rate. Not that anyone would know that from listening to your shock jock gibberish.

(to Daphne)

And Daphne--

DAPHNE

Uh oh, he's doing me.

DAVID

Until I met you, I didn't know a black person could be racist toward black people. I have to wonder if you've ever met any black people--

DAPHNE

I have a black friend.

DAVID

Nicole Ritchie doesn't count. And I know you may find this hard to believe, but if you don't care for black beans, black Russians, or even Black Panther, you don't have to consume any of them. They are free to exist without your endorsement, approval, or, God willing, your opinion.

(to Leslie)

And Leslie, for the love of God, the Easter Bunny can be whatever color people want him to be! Because HE'S NOT REAL.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

Don't shove your preference for white fur down everyone's throat. That's the beauty of a democracy, where we each have individual liberty. Each of us can choose for ourselves the color of our imaginary animal friends. Choosing for other people is called a dictatorship, and reiterating it every night on the news is called indoctrination. Neither of which belong in broadcasting. Am I clear!?

GWYNETH

Why are you looking at me? I'm not Leslie.

DAVID

Are you sure?

SKIP

This is Gwyneth. Gwyneth Lacey.

Standing before them is GWYNETH LACEY, 30s, a bubble-headed bleached blonde who's basically interchangeable with Leslie. But instead of New England, she's from Orange County.

DAVID

Where did Leslie go?

SKIP

(reluctant)

Hair and Makeup. With that bracelet, she wanted a bronzer.

Mentally exhausted, David collapses in a chair, head in hand.

INT. CORRIDOR - RNN BUILDING - DAY

Skip catches up to David, walking down the hall.

DAVID

Hey, how bad are today's numbers? Buck's on my ass about the debate.

SKIP

We're still trending downward. From 37 yesterday, to 24 today.

DAVID

Better, but we're running out of time.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)
 Hopefully, this marketing
 meeting'll be quick. You know what
 it's about?

SKIP
 Maybe something about the reorg?

Skip and David reach Larry's door. Odessa walks out.

ODESSA
 David, Kip. You meet new boss. I
 leave for Maldives. Bye-bye, water
 closet. No bother me again.

DAVID
 Why are you always wearing
 sunglasses?

ODESSA
 So you no see when I roll eyes.

Odessa strolls down the hall, her dog in tow. It yelps.

INT. PRESIDENT OF MARKETING'S OFFICE - RNN BUILDING - DAY

Larry waves in David and Skip.

LARRY
 Have you seen last night's numbers?

DAVID
 Yes, and I couldn't be more pleased.

LARRY
 That's what concerns me. See here,
 audience engagement was down for
 Leslie and Regina. If viewers
 aren't engaging with the talent--

DAVID
 You mean, the anchors.

LARRY
 Then they aren't loyal viewers. Our
 test sample found your lead guy,
 what's his name, Brock? They found
 him very dull. Neither girls nor
 guys want to sleep with him. That's
 a death sentence in cable news.
 Can't we find someone leggier?
 (off their look)
 At least Angus turns people's
 dials.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Not always for the right reason, mind you. But it's worth noting the amount of hate mail he receives correlates directly with his Nielsen rating.

DAVID

Sorry, what does this have to do with News?

LARRY

Haven't you heard? You now report to me.

SKIP

But News reports into Programming.

LARRY

And Programming now reports to Marketing & P.R.

David and Skip exchange looks of confusion – and concern.

DAVID

How does that make any sense?

LARRY

It's purely a matter of business.

DAVID

But the problem with broadcast news is that it shouldn't BE a business.

LARRY

Mr. Bishop, everything's a business. That's why Marketing's far more important than the product it markets. In a way, you could say that Marketing IS the product.

DAVID

But news is a public service, a social responsibility--

LARRY

And the social responsibility of business is to make money for its shareholders. This isn't a charity.

DAVID

But if news serves *only* a business interest, it becomes little more than propaganda.

LARRY

Exactly! And you need to get back to that business model. Or I'll find someone who can. See, I've been put in charge because you've drifted away from our mode of operation.

DAVID

And in the process, delivered an actual news program, which is why a news outlet like this exists.

LARRY

Now that's where you're mistaken. RNN was never intended to be news. That's just clever marketing.

DAVID

So, what, it was created to be a propaganda machine? To counter information with, what, ideology? In service of the almighty dollar?

LARRY

Now you get it! Oh, I'm late for another meeting. Walk with me?

David and Skip follow Larry out of his office, both uneasy.

INT. CORRIDOR - RNN BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Skip trails behind Larry and David.

DAVID

You know, they say the 3 greatest developments of the last century are: the growth of democracy; the growth of corporate power--

LARRY

"And the growth of propaganda, to protect corporate power against democracy."

DAVID

You're saying RNN exists solely for this purpose? If it's always been a propaganda outlet, then why hide behind a "Reel News" label?

They pass a Reel News logo on the wall.

LARRY

Well, it is spelled E.E., so technically, it's not "real."

DAVID

No, it's as fake as a film reel. Just like "reel glass" is used in movies to appear real, but breaks on camera. I'm guessing that's where RNN gets its name, to make viewers think it's real news, while actually breaking the traditional news model... If so, then why all the subterfuge?

LARRY

You say subterfuge, I say, good marketing. Fair and Balanced. Always Neutral, Never Partisan. We Report, You Decide. None of those are meant to be descriptive. They're just good branding. Branding, as you know, is about carefully constructing an image, one based in emotion, not reason. Being true is far less important than *appearing* true. That's the beauty of branding. You don't have to be right, or best, or even news. You just brand yourself that way, and people won't even know, or care. It's a matter of perception.

DAVID

But you PRETEND to be news, thereby misleading and misinforming the public, training them to reject info at odds with your bullshit.

They arrive at the Research and Development group.

INT. R&D DEPARTMENT - RNN NETWORK - CONTINUOUS

David and Skip follow Larry.

LARRY

You say, bullshit. I say, alternative facts. If you weren't aware, Professor, linguistics is MY specialty. I'm the one who came up with the name Clear Skies Act, for a bill that actually lowered pollution standards.

DAVID

Am I supposed to be impressed by this "newspeak"?

Larry leads them past a FOCUS GROUP in progress.

LARRY

See, we poll focus groups to find just the right slogan to resonate with our audience. Like Family Values, or Law and Order. Effective propaganda must be limited to a simple slogan, until the last member of the public understands what you want by your slogan.

DAVID

Are you quoting Hitler?

LARRY

Why yes, I am. You didn't tell me you taught history too?

DAVID

I don't. But I feel like I'm reliving it.

Larry reaches a conference table. He pulls down a SLOGAN chart on the wall, with a list of correlating words:

LARRY

For instance, we never use the word "healthcare." Instead, we say "health insurance," so that viewers experience the conversation through a business frame, replete with profits and premiums. Whereas, "healthcare" suggests a moral obligation on par with food safety or fire prevention, which our corporate sponsors do not like.

David and Skip stare at the chart, dumbfounded.

DAVID

We say "progressive," you say "socialist"?

LARRY

Actually, you say, universal healthcare, free college tuition, or collective bargaining, and we say socialism.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Basically, anything that threatens corporate America and our stream of ad revenue.

SKIP

So instead of "global warming" or "climate change," you prefer--

LARRY

"God's way of giving his sheep more warm summer days."

Larry gestures to a nearby window showing a warm sunny day.

DAVID

But news and facts are objectives, Mr. Putz, not just branding.

LARRY

But, as you've noted, this isn't a news network. It's "branded entertainment." And that brand is outrage. Do you know why outrage works so well, Mr. Bishop?

DAVID

Because emotion overrides logic. And no emotion overrides logic more than anger. Yes, I am now very familiar with the Negativity Bias.

Larry points to a wall plaque, with a cartoon Hitler. It reads: Hitler's Propaganda Directives: 1) Appeal to Negative Emotions. 2) Repeat Falsehoods. 3) Direct Anger at Adversary.

LARRY

Emotion activates the brain 3,000 times faster than logic. And studies show consumers will pay double when emotions are activated. So of course we use emotion.

Larry leads them past a picture window, overlooking a dozen PARTICIPANTS sitting at computers. Each screen shows a different image: a migrant caravan, a BLM protest, a Muslim in hijab, Colin Kaepernick, etc.

LARRY (CONT'D)

We cultivate anger, spite, and fear for economic ends.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

We rile up audiences to ensure brand loyalty, secure a reliable market share, and guarantee a large enough viewership to continue selling diet pills that don't work, drugs you don't need, and mega-churches that cleanse your soul for the right donation. Yes, outrage is indeed our product, and as long as you focus it on anyone who's different than you, you've got an audience for life. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a meeting with some behavioral scientists. Did you know, if we make guests hold a cold drink in their hand, we can make them less agreeable?

Larry opens a conference room door. David blocks him.

DAVID

So you don't actually believe any of the bullshit you're selling? The immigration fears, the welfare abuse, gun rights?

LARRY

Of course not! The whole point of propaganda is persuading people of things you don't believe yourself. We're not dealing with facts or reason here. We're exploiting blind spots in cognitive thinking for financial gain. The narratives we spin are beside the point. They're just a means to an end.

DAVID

But why all the manipulation? You don't have to peddle propaganda to make a profit.

LARRY

If we don't do it, Mr. Bishop, someone else will.

DAVID

Well that's pretty cynical.

LARRY

No, that's capitalism.

DAVID

But a news model can still be
successful--

LARRY

Tell that to the 2,000 newspapers
that went under in the last 10
years. News is a dying business,
Mr. Bishop. The future is
entertainment. And if you want to
compete in this brave new world,
you need to play by its rules. Now,
you two get back to work, spinning
stories that make our viewers mad
as hell and not gonna take it
anymore.

Larry closes the door on David and Skip, both at a loss.

INT. CORRIDOR - RNN BUILDING - DAY

Skip and David mope down the hall, mourning their reality.

SKIP

I guess you were right...We have to
face the fact RNN can't be fixed.

DAVID

Face the fact... That's it, Skip!

David picks up the pace, his motors churning with an idea.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I've been going about this all
wrong. If we want the anchors to
face the facts, they need to get
out of this polluted piss can and
into the real world. Firsthand
experience, that's the best source
of information.

SKIP

What about the reorg?

DAVID

We've just started making progress.
I'll be damned if we turn back now.
But if the man wants outrage, I'll
give him outrage. At the right
things.

SKIP

How?

DAVID

First, by making the anchors a little outraged. If it works, we might just nab that debate. And Media Matters'll have a lot less math to do... We're not dead yet.

David shoots Skip a mischievous look. Skip smiles through his uneasiness, as they enter--

INT. RNN STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Buck is on set with Daphne and J.P. The countdown calendar shows 4 days remaining.

DAVID

Buck, can you man the fort for a few days?

BUCK

Of course. What's going on?

DAVID

We're done with lectures. If you want that debate, it's time for a little practicum.

BUCK

What did you have in mind?

DAVID

Your colleagues are going out in the field.

BUCK

Lord help us.

Buck takes a swig of his flask as a BLONDE walks by.

DAVID

Leslie! Pack a bag. You're going to Kentucky to find us a lobster.

SKIP

That's not Leslie.

DAVID

Sorry, Gwyneth.

SKIP

Not Gwyneth.

DAVID
Are you sure?

SKIP
This is Cassidy. Cassidy St. James.

Looking through her purse is CASSIDY ST. JAMES, 30s, bubble-headed bleached blonde #3. Like Leslie and Gwyneth in every way, except she's from South Carolina - and sounds like it.

DAVID
Jesus, where do you come from, an assembly line?

CASSIDY
I just came from Casting.

SKIP
It's called Human Resources now.

CASSIDY
Sorry, Human Resources. It was either here or Koch Industries.
(whispering)
And I refuse to let some German nanny tell me when I can poop.

David's winces, but doesn't want to know more.

DAVID
Well, it's all hands on deck. You free for an afternoon slot?

CASSIDY
Absolutely!

DAVID
Skip, let Gwyneth know she'll be covering the morning show. Also, I'm gonna need a guest host for Nightly. Any ideas?

SKIP
Actually, I know just the person!

DAVID
Great. Get her prepped. Oh, and can someone point me in the direction of Standards & Practices? I can't find it on the org chart.
(off blank stares)
You know, the department that handles ethical concerns?

J.P. and Daphne laugh.

SKIP

Um, we don't have one of those.

DAVID

Well then, this just got a whole lot easier.

David shoots Skip another mischievous smirk.

TRAVEL MONTAGE

--At the airport, Angus, Leslie, and Regina board different planes, none looking very happy about their assignments. They're joined by FILM CREWS, and a late arrival by J.P.

--Regina lands in Texas, to sweltering heat and mosquitos.

--Angus and J.P. land in Miami, to a jubilant gay pride.

--Leslie lands in rural, poverty-stricken Kentucky.

--Regina takes a tour of an ICE detention center, ruffled.

--Angus awkwardly meets the LATIN OWNER of a gay bar.

--Leslie is disheartened by all the POOR PEOPLE and poverty.

INT. RNN STUDIO - DAY

Skip joins David in the control room. The CREW man their stations. The countdown calendar shows 2 days remaining.

DAVID

Gimme some good news, Skip.

SKIP

With the anchors out, we dropped to an 8 over the weekend.

DAVID

Nice. Only two days left. Let's hope our hard work pays off.
(speaking into headset)
Daphne, remember, there will be no ad libbing. You are to read off the teleprompter. Am I clear?

ON THE SET

Daphne nods. Gwyneth sits up, professional, ready for action.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)
We're on in three, two, one.

DAPHNE
Welcome back. If you're just
joining us, I'm Daphne Calhoun.

GWYNETH
And I'm Gwyneth Lacey. J.P. Gavin
is on assignment. Today, in our
ongoing series about the ICE
detention centers, one of RNN's own
goes in for a closer look.

DAPHNE
We now go live to Regina Love, in
El Paso, Texas, with this report.

On the monitor behind them, Regina is locked in a cage and
can barely move, but she holds a microphone.

REGINA (ON TV)
Hello, Daphne.

DAPHNE
Regina, how is it down there--
(to David)
Do I have to say this?

DAVID (O.S.)
Read it.

DAPHNE
How is it down there at "summer
camp"?

REGINA (ON TV)
Well, Daphne, it's a lot less of a
playground, and a lot more of a
tally wack for wetbacks.

GWYNETH
But at least you're not feeling the
scorching heat of the Texas sun.
You must be thankful for that.

REGINA (ON TV)
You would think, but none of these
warehouses have A.C. So it's hotter
in here than a Dallas Cowboy in
compression pants.

DAPHNE

At least you've got your own chain-link fence to keep you safe from all the drug smugglers and rapists.

REGINA (ON TV)

Daphne, I gotta be honest. I have not seen many drugs, smugglers, or rapists. I don't know about you, but I'm beginning to think we've been misled about a few things.

A GUARD slides a dog bowl of water into her cage.

DAPHNE

Would you say the conditions down there are "less than humane"?

REGINA (ON TV)

Yes, Daphne, I definitely would.

GWYNETH

But would you, Regina, be the best judge of that, never having popped a twitter out of your twatter, as you would say?

REGINA (ON TV)

That's a tough call, Gwyneth. But as a former judge, I'm gotta say these conditions do NOT look like justice to 'Gina.

GWYNETH

Would you go so far as to say the punishment doesn't fit the crime?

REGINA (ON TV)

From what I've seen, I'm starting to think this entire situation may be a dangerous breach of the law.

Regina rests a hand on the cage bars. A Guard beats it off.

GWYNETH

Ouch, looks like the truth hurts... We'll have more with Regina Love tomorrow. Tune in to see if she'll be one of the lucky detainees adopted by a nice white couple. But don't go anywhere yet. We'll be right back after a quick break.

Gwyneth flashes a smart, confident smile.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

David and Skip exchange looks, pleased.

DAVID

Wow, Gwyn may look like the rest,
but sure doesn't sound like 'em.

GWYNETH (THROUGH HEADSET)

Thanks! I just pretended to be dumb
to fit in. Now that you're here, I
can drop that whole "girl game."

DAVID

(realizing headset's on)
Oh, well, uh, good. Keep it up!
(to control room)
Is Leslie ready?

CONTROL ROOM TECH

On standby. B-roll's coming up now.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

And three, two, and one.

ON THE SET

GWYNETH

Welcome back. Next up, a special
report from America's heartland. We
now go live to Leslie Lyn Glenn in
Owsley County, Kentucky. Leslie?

The monitor behind them shows--

EXT. KENTUCKY FARMLAND - DAY

Footage of run-down homes, overgrown lawns, dilapidated
roads, rusted automobiles. A closed-up main street.

LESLIE (V.O.)

Booneville, population 4,461. Home
to the largest number of food stamp
recipients in the country. In this
small rural town, in a state with
the lowest median household income,
more than 60% of citizens rely on
supplemental nutrition assistance.
To put a face on this issue, I sit
down with 19-year old mother of 4,
Caylee Kentley, to learn more.

INT. RURAL KENTUCKY HOME - DAY

Leslie sits down with CAYLEE on a very outdated sofa. The curtains behind her are confederate flags.

LESLIE

Ms. Kentley, what shocked me most about Booneville is that it's 98% Caucasian.

CAYLEE

Well yeah. Don't ya know half all welfare recipients are white? Only like a quarter are black.

LESLIE

I did not know. But some people say-

CAYLEE

And half those households got kids.

A TODDLER walks past holding a shotgun. Leslie's mortified.

LESLIE

But some people say, those households have extra kids just to get more welfare money.

CAYLEE

Huh? You ever had a kid for a tax break? Most people having sex for money try NOT to have kids. We got 44 million people in this country on food stamps, 50 million in poverty. And a million living off \$2 a day. More kids mean more poverty. Duh.

LESLIE

Wow, how do you know all that?

CAYLEE

Your producer gave me them stats. Don't you get 'em at work?

SCREAMING KID (O.S.)

Momma, what's a stat? Is that what you got from Mr. Murray?

CAYLEE

That was staph! And you mind your own biscuits and gravy!

LESLIE

So... you've never bought a lobster
with your food stamps?

CAYLEE

Why would I? We got one out back.
Wanna see?

EXT. RURAL KENTUCKY HOME - DAY

Leslie follows Caylee outside to a slimy kiddie pool. ELROY,
age 4, picks up a lobster out of the water.

CAYLEE

This is Pinchers. He's Elroy's
favorite pet.

Elroy holds the lobster up to Leslie, now somber.

LESLIE

Well, this certainly gives me lots
to think about.

(turning to the camera)

This is Leslie Lyn Glenn. Reporting
from Booneville, Kentuckyyyyyy!

Leslie jumps. The lobster's pinched her ass.

INT. RNN STUDIO - EVENING

Onscreen, Leslie reacts to the pinch. Buck now sits at the
anchor desk, joined by Sherrie.

BUCK

Much to think about, indeed,
Leslie. And excellent reporting. We
can always count on you in a pinch.

Buck smiles at his own joke. Sherrie tries not to giggle.

SHERRIE

We'll have more with Leslie
tomorrow, where she'll try eating
off \$2 a day. That won't be easy
with her gluten intolerance.

BUCK

Will there be lobster on *that* menu?

Onscreen, Leslie shakes her head, devastated.

LESLIE (ON MONITOR)
There will not be, Buck.

BUCK
Tune in tomorrow to find out. We'll
be right back with more Reel News.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

DAVID
So far, so good.

SKIP
We've still got Mr. O'Malley.

Wary, they glance at a monitor showing Angus getting mic'd.

ON THE SET

BUCK
Welcome back. We now have an
exclusive report from Angus
O'Malley, reporting live from
southern Florida.

SHERRIE
I understand this is his first
field piece.

BUCK
That's correct, Sherrie. He's down
at Miami Beach, putting his money
where his mouth is. Angus?

The monitor shows Angus, uncomfortable, in the middle of--

INT. THE FLAMING FLAMINGO NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The Latin gay club is dim, smoky, full of drunk PATRONS. An
occasional, colorful strobe light flashes. DANCE MUSIC plays.
On stage, a very voluptuous DRAG QUEEN prepares for a number.

Angus stands before a camera man.

ANGUS
I'm here at the Flaming Flamingo,
where a controlled demonstration
will soon commence. We've arranged
a little "mock massacre," to prove
once and for all that the only
thing to stop a bad guy with a gun
is a good guy. Our own J.P.

(MORE)

ANGUS (CONT'D)

Gavin has volunteered to be our bad guy stand-in, armed with a semi-automatic paintball gun, that will discharge red ammo at innocent bystanders. The sixty-four patrons in attendance, our good guys, are all armed with paintball handguns to defend themselves, which will fire green paint at their targets.

All the drunk patrons HOOT and HOLLAR.

ANGUS (CONT'D)

The two dollar tequila shots enjoyed over the last three hours have surely given these brave men and women the courage to thwart any unwanted attacker.

The lights dim. Onstage, the drag queen begins lip synching to Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive."

GLORIA GAYNOR (V.O.)

AT FIRST I WAS AFRAID, I WAS
PETRIFIED...

ANGUS

No one knows when or where J.P. will appear. But rest assured, everyone is perfectly safe, and packing heat.

J.P., covered in black from head to toe, quietly appears from a side door. He pulls out his paint gun and fires into the crowd, immediately hitting Angus, who dives under a table.

GLORIA GAYNOR (V.O.)

DO YOU THINK I'D CRUMBLE? / DID YOU
THINK I'D LAY DOWN AND DIE? / OH
NO, NOT I, I WILL SURVIVE...

J.P.'s shots are overpowered by 64 paintball GUNS going off.

Red strobe lights flash, as green paint sprays across the club, even hitting the camera lens. A fog machine smokes up the place and adds to the confusion.

GLORIA GAYNOR (V.O.)

I'VE GOT ALL MY LIFE TO LIVE / AND
I'VE GOT ALL MY LOVE TO GIVE AND
I'LL SURVIVE / I WILL SURVIVE / OH!

Finally, the full lights come on. Angus crawls out from under the table and stands before the Camera Man.

ANGUS

As you can see, the demonstration
has ended, and we will see once and
for all how a good guy, always
beats a bad guy--

The fog dissolves to reveal all 64 patrons covered in green
paint, from head to toe, while only 10 show a few hits of
red. None have stopped dancing or drinking.

Nor has the Drag Queen stopped her routine, but her sequined
dress is drenched in green paint.

GLORIA GAYNOR (V.O.)

GO ON NOW GO, WALK OUT THE DOOR /
JUST TURN AROUND NOW / 'CAUSE
YOU'RE NOT WELCOME ANYMORE...

J.P. walks into frame and takes off his face mask. He's the
only person in the bar showing no trace of green paint.

J.P.

How'd we do? Whoah, I guess you
must have been a bad guy, huh?

The Camera Man pans down to show Angus, too, covered in more
green than red paint. For once, Angus is speechless.

GLORIA GAYNOR (V.O.)

AND I'LL SURIVE / I WILL SURIVE / I
WILL SURVIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIVE...

INT. RNN STUDIO - NIGHT

Buck sits at the anchor desk, as the footage of Angus ends.

BUCK

Thank you, Angus, for that
unforgettable demonstration. It
certainly leaves one with lots to
think about.

SHERRIE

Ain't that the truth, Buck. Kinda
makes you wonder how safe we might
be if no one had a gun.

BUCK

Join us tomorrow, when a gun-free Angus will test the limits of free speech, by driving a replica of the General Lee from Detroit, to the South Side of Chicago. I'm Buck Brockmeyer.

SHERRIE

And I'm Sherrie McIntyre. Remember, you can't change the truth, but it can change you. Goodnight.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

Skip and David take off headsets, exchange looks of relief.

Sherrie enters, excited. Skip congratulates her.

SHERRIE (CONT'D)

How'd I do?

DAVID

You were a natural.

SHERRIE

Guess I had a good teacher.

David grins, sheepish, as Buck enters.

BUCK

I've just had word the committee's made a decision.

DAVID

Already? We still have a day left--

Skip's cell phone BUZZES. He looks at it, worried.

SKIP

It's them.

The room goes silent. Skip answers, nods, then hangs up.

BUCK

Well?

SKIP

We got the debate! The fieldwork put us over the edge.

The room erupts in applause. David hi-fives Skip.

DAVID

I think this means we're a real news network.

David pats Buck on the back. They share a nod of gratitude.

Buck holds up his flask, cheers. He starts to take a swig, but thinks better of it, drops the flask in a wastebin. Then joins the team in celebration.

INT. WRITERS ROOM - RNN NETWORK - DAY

David sits at the table with all the Writers, as Skip walks by with Leslie, Regina, and Angus.

DAVID

Well, look who's back. Let's give our newly-minted journalists some appreciation.

David leads them in a round of applause. Leslie takes a seat.

DAVID (CONT'D)

OK, so what do we have for Leslie this week?

WRITER #1

Continuing with her report on inequality, we've got a two-part segment on increasing the minimum wage. To put a face on it, she found a single mom working two jobs, who still can't afford rent.

LESLIE

Her name's Lydia, and she's part of our cleaning crew. Can you imagine?

DAVID

Good. And for Regina?

WRITER #2

We've got a panel of parents separated from their kids at the border, who've yet to be reunited. In fact, the government doesn't even know where they are. We'll be following them as they try to track them down over the coming weeks.

DAVID

Great. Let's don't stop until they do. What about the morning show?

WRITER #3

We've lined up several moms who've lost sons to police violence.

WRITER #4

And a retired cop who successfully reformed his department. He managed to cut in-custody deaths by half.

DAVID

All right. Good job everyone.

Meeting's over. David makes notes as everyone leaves.

DAVID (CONT'D)

And Leslie... Nice work.

David smiles, heartfelt, never more proud of a student. Leslie pauses in the doorway, touched, finally feeling appreciated.

LESLIE

Thanks.

DAVID

You know, I may be changing my opinion of you after all.

LESLIE

Oh, is that a *fact*?

She matches his smile with good humor. He chuckles and nods.

DAVID

Yeah, I think it is.

Leslie exits as Skip enters.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Hey, any word from upstairs?

SKIP

No, Mr. Putz has been out all week, at some secret Koch retreat-- I mean, he's at a "brand building seminar." He's due back anytime.

DAVID

I'm sure we'll know when he is. Hopefully, *after* tonight's debate.

Skip musters a nervous smile.

INT. CEO FLOOR - RNN NETWORK - NIGHT

Sherrie sits at her desk as Larry approaches, a travel bag still on his shoulder.

LARRY

Is Ms. Mollok in? I was just on my way up, and thought I'd swing by.

SHERRIE

Sorry, she's been out all week.

LARRY

Well, there were no phones allowed on the retreat, so I wanted to see if I missed anything.

Sherrie looks uncomfortable, knowing exactly what he missed.

SHERRIE

Um, no, nothing to report.

Larry goes to leave, but is distracted by the bank of TVs in Odessa's office. He drops his bag in shock, stumbles through her open door. Playing across all monitors is David's handiwork. Outraged, Larry EXPLODES.

Worried, Sherrie calls Skip, but it goes to voicemail.

INT. RNN STUDIO - NIGHT

On stage for the debate are the GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES, before a crowd of 150. Buck sits at a moderating desk, while Skip and David stand off to the side. Music swells and wanes.

BUCK

Welcome back to the New York race for governor. I'm your moderator, Buck Brockmeyer.

Polite APPLAUSE from the audience.

BUCK (CONT'D)

First up is Mr. Howie Huey, the Libertarian tea party candidate. Mr. Huey, you've been called racist, sexist, and homophobic for your controversial remarks. Do you care to clarify?

HOWIE HUEY is 50s, overweight, with a country drawl.

HOWIE HUEY

Let me be clear. I have no problem with homosexuality. I just don't care much for homosexuals.

Buck waits for him to expand. He doesn't.

BUCK

Next up is Mr. Lester Wedbetter, a member of the Skyscrapers are Too Damn High Party. He seeks to overhaul New York's zoning laws.

LESTER WEDBETTER is 60s, African American, a cross between Herman Cain and Jimmy McMillan.

LESTER WEDBETTER

The skyscrapers are too. Damn. High. And that's my final answer.

BUCK

According to your proposal, you would prohibit construction of all buildings over four stories tall. Can you elaborate on this?

LESTER WEDBETTER

I'm not sure if I agree, or not disagree, but I'm telling you, they are too damn high. It's conspiracy by the unorthodox Jews to confuse us with the vertigo.

BUCK

Er, former Madam Mona Lee Yang is running on an anti-prohibition platform to decriminalize gambling, drugs, and prostitution.

MONA LEE YANG is 40s, a beautiful Asian American and former brothel owner in the tradition of Kristin Davis.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Ms. Yang--

MONA LEE YANG

Madam, please.

BUCK

Madam, you are the only candidate with a rather, shall we say, colorful past. Why are you seeking the governorship?

MONA LEE YANG

Yes, I used to own a brothel. And yes, it was linked to the downfall of many prominent New York politicians, and one member of the royal family. But that's why I'm qualified. Because the real whores in this town ARE the politicians. And I know a thing or two about whores. Only I have the skill set to deal with them. Ask any male in this room, and he'll tell you, my service is impeccable, on time, and the facilities clean. ALWAYS.

Buck blushes. David and Skip exchange bemused looks as--

LARRY (O.S.)

Where the fuck is he!? Bishop!?

An irate Larry storms over to David, attracting attention.

DAVID

(muttering)

We're in the middle of a debate.

LARRY

What the hell do you think you're doing!?

DAVID

Well, if I'm not mistaken, I've made you "outraged." You should watch getting all riled up, Putz. It doesn't help with the, you know.

David gestures to the pit stains and tries to return to the debate. Larry grows angrier, and grabs him by the arm.

LARRY

You have a lot of fucking nerve, Bishop. D'you know I had over two hundred irate calls waiting for me? Now Wayne LaPierre's up my ass like a hemorrhoid and the Brady Campaign wants a statement. You've managed to anger every damn sponsor, all the Board, and most of the viewers!

DAVID

So what you're saying is, I've increased engagement? And done so by staying true to our branding?

LARRY

You know damn well what I mean! You were supposed to keep the audience angry at the usual scapegoats! Not give them new ones! Especially not those that subsidize this network. What's next, 24-hour coverage of a fucking glacier melting, to rally anger over global warming?

DAVID

If by "global warming," you mean "more warm summer days," then yes, we have a 7-day segment starting Sunday.

LARRY

The hell you do! You know how many shareholders own stock in oil and gas!?

The audience now pays more attention to them than the debate. Buck notices, uncomfortable, and forces a commercial.

BUCK

We'll be right back with more of the New York gubernatorial debate after these messages.

Buck heads toward David, Skip, and a snarling Larry.

LARRY

You are finished here, Bishop! I want you gone by end of day.

(to Skip)

And you too, you fucking runt. I don't know what they were thinking bringing real newsmen into Reel News. A fucking disaster!

Buck intervenes, composed as always.

BUCK

Mr. Putz, is it? I'm sorry, but David Bishop is the only thing keeping this network out of the gutter. If it weren't for him, there would be no debate tonight. There'd be no REAL news. If he goes, I'm afraid I do too.

Buck takes off his earpiece, resolute.

DAVID

Buck, you don't have to do this.
Really, it's fine.

LARRY

Fine with me too! No one knows who
the fuck you are anyway! They can't
stay awake long enough to find out!

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

Back in ten.

DAVID

Buck, we're in the middle of the
debate-- You can't-- I can't be the
reason you lose your career, not
again.

BUCK

My loyalty is to the truth. And to
you, for fighting for it. Consider
it... a token of forgiveness.

Touched, David watches Buck unhook his mic. Leslie rushes up.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

Three, two...

LESLIE

What's going on? They're waiting--

BUCK

Leslie, the debate is all yours.

Buck hands a confused Leslie his mic. A STAFFER ushers her to
the moderator desk. She puts it on and takes a seat, thrown.

LARRY (O.S.)

This isn't over--

LESLIE

Uh, welcome back? I'm Leslie Lyn
Glenn. Um, next up is Mr. Willie
Pickett, a decorated war vet who's
run for public office more than two
dozen times, but has yet to hold
office. Some might say you're a
long shot. What makes you think
this time will be different?

WILLIE PICKETT, 70s, seems surprised to hear his name.

WILLIE PICKETT

Look, I've never been a politician.
My maw and paw weren't politicians.
I've never slept with a politician.
Or a madam. Or a gay.

HOWIE HUEY

Why you looking at me?

WILLIE PICKETT

But I'm passionate about saving the
state of government.

LESLIE

You mean the state of New York.

Willie looks confused. The crowd is too, as they keep hearing
Larry and David argue.

DAVID (O.S.)

Yeah? Well before I got here, you
had a 10% accuracy rate. Did any of
your market research tell you that?

Leslie tries to focus.

LESLIE

Mr. Bedwetter--

LESTER WEDBETTER

Wedbetter.

LESLIE

Mr. Wedbetter, this question's from
the audience. What makes you think
you could do a better job balancing
the budget than Governor Todd?

LESTER WEDBETTER

I don't know nothing about whores.
But as a kung fu expat, I refuse to
say anything untoward about anyone
up here. Because our children can't
go there. But, I might add, if the
governor continues to raise taxes,
business will leave this city
quicker than Howie Huey at a gay
bar on a Friday night.

HOWIE HUEY

Says the man who the New Yorker
called, "surprisingly tolerable."

LESTER WEDBETTER

Thank you for noticing.

LESLIE

Uh, Mr. Huey, you've said that your platform differs from the standard tea party ticket. In what way?

WILLIE PICKETT

I'm not into tea parties, myself. More of a coffee drinker.

LESLIE

No, I said "ticket," not Pickett. The question was for Mr. Huey.

WILLIE PICKETT

Oh.

Willie gets up and ambles around the stage, as the crowd's attention is once again drawn to Larry and David arguing.

DAVID (O.S.)

You know, Putz, I can tell you're not quite thinking straight. You know how I can tell? Because I heard somewhere that emotion activates the brain 3,000 times faster than logic.

Leslie struggles to refocus.

LESLIE

Mr. Huey?

HOWIE HUEY

I'd like to quote a great American poet, who said, "Some have no fear. They follow their hearts. That is what sets them apart, and makes them Pokemon Masters."

LESLIE

Um, the next question is for Mr. Pickett. Where is Mr. Pickett?

His seat is empty. Pickett goes through a side door.

MONA LEE YANG

I think he went to find a bathroom?

LESTER WEDBETTER

When you gotta go, you gotta go.

LESLIE

That's not a bathroom. That's a broom closet-- Uh, we'll be right back after this break.

WILLIE PICKETT (O.S.)

I can't find the flusher.

Leslie yanks off her earpiece, hurries to a Staffer.

LESLIE

See to Mr. Picket. Oh, and you better find Lydia.

Leslie rushes to David, Larry, and Buck, still arguing. They now attract the attention of Regina, Daphne, Angus, and J.P.

LARRY

You think you're pretty fucking clever, don't you, Bishop?

DAVID

Because I upset your hate-for-profit business model? Or because we turned this bedpan of bullshit into something resembling news?

LESLIE

Would someone please tell me what the heck is going on!? I can hear you on set! *Everyone can!*

Leslie gestures to the audience, all eyes on them.

DAVID

Skip and I have been fired. And by the looks of it, Buck too.

LESLIE

What? Sorry, no, I don't think so.

LARRY

Excuse me?

LESLIE

Mr. Brockmeyer has elevated my profile. And as the highest rated anchor on this network, I have to put my foot down. If Buck, David and the intern go, then I do too.

SKIP/DAVID

Not an intern./Wait what now?

LESLIE

As much as it pains me to admit it, David. You've helped me become a better journalist.

DAVID

You mean, become a journalist.

LESLIE

Just today, I got a call from my alma mater, and they asked me to speak at summer graduation! And this time, they weren't kidding! That never would've happened if it wasn't for you. And, get this, in the blogosphere, some people say there's talk of an Emmy nomination for my inequality piece! And by "some people," I don't mean me!

DAVID/BUCK

Seriously?/You're kidding.

LESLIE

This network has never been nominated for an award, except maybe a Razzie. But now, I could be competing alongside a journalistic heavyweight like Comedy Central!?

J.P.

Actually, we've all changed a little since you came aboard.

DAPHNE

It's true. The other day on the street, when a child handed me a Black Lives Matter button, I didn't slap it out of her hand.

REGINA

Well that explains a lot. I wondered why last night at the airport, when I ordered a drink, the bartender didn't throw it in my face.

DAVID

I guess there's a first time for everything.

SKIP

Mr. O'Malley? Anything you'd like to add, sir?

Angus seems strangely reserved, almost humbled.

ANGUS

Well, my kids no longer deny my existence. Just this week, my oldest son filled out his college application. And where it says Father, he didn't check Deceased.

Daphne and J.P. marvel at this news.

DAVID

Angus, you seem very... subdued. You feeling alright there?

SKIP

(quietly, to David)

Um, a few weeks back, I swapped out his opioids for anti-psychotics. I think they finally kicked in.

DAVID

We should probably circle back to this later.

Regina gives David a hard shake.

REGINA

Like it or not, this man's had a positive effect on this newsroom. Hell, we've even started calling it a newsroom. Will wonders never cease?

J.P.

We're all with David, Mr. Putz.

Even Gwyneth and Cassidy second the motion. David is genuinely touched, and still in shock.

DAVID

I-- I don't know what to say.

LARRY

Well I say--

LARRY/ODESSA

You're all fired/You fired.

Odessa strolls in. Sherrie tries to keep up.

ODESSA

(off David's look)

No you.

(MORE)

ODESSA (CONT'D)
(pointing to Larry)
You.

LARRY
What!?

ODESSA
You call me all time. Ms. Mollok,
Coke brother unhappy. Ms. Mollok,
Coke lobbyist need air time. Ms.
Mollok, Coke need chemical spill
coverup. I no want to be bothered.
I no even drink Coke.

LARRY
Maybe I should speak to Mr. Mollok.

ODESSA
Daddy Mollok dead. I inherit
company. I choose guy with no pit
stain, yes? They no bother me.

SKIP
Um, me or Mr. Bishop?

ODESSA
Yes. You run company.
(pointing to Larry)
Me no want talk to you. No bother
with business. Me too wealthy for
work. I go now, Barbados.
(to David and Skip)
I hire you to clean mess. You clean
mess. You host goober tutorial
debate. Now, maybe award? You keep
clean, no need talk. I sail away
from water closet.

SHERRIE
Does this mean you'll no longer
need an assistant?

SKIP
Don't worry, we've found a spot for
you on the morning show.

SHERRIE
Really!?

SKIP
The least we could do, after you
helped save this sinking ship.

Skip goes to hi-five Sherrie, but his hand meets Odessa's as she goes to slap him. Odessa eyes him with newfound respect.

ODESSA

No sink ship. Keep straight, maybe
you ride Boss Hogg.

Odessa lowers her shades and winks, then strolls out. Skip's unsure if that was meant to be a flirt. Her dog yelps.

DAVID

Sorry, Putz. I guess the linguist
"doth communicate too much."

Larry swears, and storms off. David shows his appreciation to the team, smiles and congrats all around.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Now that's a narrative I can live
with.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

Back in ten.

LESLIE

Now, if that's settled, we have a
debate to finish.

BUCK

My dear, it's all yours.

LESLIE

Don't be silly. There's room out
there for both of us.

Leslie loops an arm around Buck's, leads him back to the set.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

Besides, these people are *crazy*...

Leslie makes a funny face, Buck grins. Skip pulls David aside.

SKIP

How's that for a legacy? Not so
cynical now, huh?

DAVID

I couldn't have done it without
you, pal. Thanks, for everything.

SKIP

So, about that thesis credit...?

David snickers and walks with Skip back to the debate.

INT. PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON - BANQUET HALL - DAY

Buck sits at a table next to David, Skip, Sherrie and Leslie, seated across from Daphne, J.P. and Regina, all well dressed.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And now, I'd like to welcome up an old friend, and two-time Peabody award-winner, who you know as The Most Distinguished Name in News. The legendary Mr. Buck Brockmeyer.

The room APPLAUDS. Buck walks to the podium, proud to have reclaimed his title.

BUCK

Thank you very much. It's an honor to be here. I've been a member of the Press Club for nearly 40 years, and I've seen many good journalists come and go. But it gives me great pleasure to welcome our newest and most promising member. My colleague, friend, and now Emmy nominee, Ms. Leslie Lyn Glenn.

The room APPLAUDS. Leslie walks to the podium. David beams, still in awe at the transformation. Skip and Sherrie smile.

LESLIE

You know, I never set out to be a newsperson. For the longest time, I just played a newsperson on TV. But this last year, I've learned a lot about network news from some of the best in the business. We, in the media, have the power to educate, inform and influence. But that power can also be used to mislead and manipulate. That's why we must hold ourselves to a higher standard. So I'm proposing our own Fairness Doctrine. Why wait for the FCC, when we journalists can create our own code of conduct. And insist on our own standard of ethics.

David leads the room in STANDING APPLAUSE. Pull out to--

INT. CEO OFFICE - UBS NETWORK - DAY

Tight on a computer monitor, which shows handheld footage of Leslie speaking at the Press Club luncheon.

Larry watches the video from his chair, in front of a large picture window right out of Mad Men. He talks on the phone.

LARRY

No, Charles, no need to worry about that feeble attempt at "fairness." Soon, Ms. Glenn will no longer be credible. In fact, I have people working on it as we speak. Here at UBS, we're no longer in the business of covering the news. We now CREATE it for industrialists like yourself.

Larry plays the video.

LESLIE (ON MONITOR)

You know, I set out to play a newsperson on TV...to mislead and manipulate. That's...our code of conduct.

LARRY

We can push whatever agenda you need. Devote wall-to-wall coverage. Until it becomes public opinion...

Larry looks to a wall of TV monitors, all covering his controversy. One shows Leslie's doctored video. Another, a UBS ANCHOR outraged over it. On another, a group of PROTESTORS gather outside RNN, demanding her resignation.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Now that, my friend, is how you make the news.

Larry smiles at his handiwork.

ON A TV MONITOR

The RNN protest gathers steam, becomes unruly, violent.

LARRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

As they say, "Facts are merely what enough people believe, and truth lies only in how fervently they believe it."

The camera filming the protest gets knocked to the ground. As the screen shatters, we freeze frame.

TITLE OVER: BREAKING NEWS

FADE OUT.