

REVENGE OF THE WRITERS!

Are TV writers thin-skinned? Well, whether you're an actor, a network executive, or even a member of the general public, don't ever upset one. You, your name, or your TV character may be ridiculed on the small screen in front of millions of viewers.

BACKGROUND

According to Amy Chozick, entertainment columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, "In the movie business, writers hand over a screenplay and creative power to a director. In television, the writer rules. Writers often make the creative and day-to-day managerial decisions. They also possess a little-talked-about power: the written word as a way to settle scores." Here are some examples.

OFFENSE: As a writer on *Cybill*, Chuck Lorre had numerous run-ins with co-star Cybill Shepherd, who often complained about her lines. Later, while serving as executive producer on *Roseanne*, Lorre often clashed with Roseanne Barr over her character, her authority, the direction of the show, and just about everything else.

WRITER'S REVENGE: For a promotional stunt in 2008, two CBS shows, the crime-drama *CSI* and the sitcom *Two and a Half Men*, traded writers. Lorre, who oversaw *Men*, wrote the *CSI* episode, making the murder victim a thinly veiled amalgam of Shepherd and Barr. Before the fictional TV star (played by Katey Sagal) was killed, she yelled at her writer, "Don't argue with me. Just make me funny. And lovable!" Later, her dead body was discovered with a rubber chicken shoved down her throat. Detective Grisson (William Petersen) deadpans, "Dying is easy; comedy is hard."

OFFENSE: As the elegant Lady Marjorie, Rachel Gurney was a fan favorite on *Upstairs, Downstairs*, a British melodrama that ran from 1971 to 1975. Set in the early 20th century, the show followed the lives of the servants (downstairs) and the aristocrats

Hot Springs, NM, changed its name to Truth or Consequences to get the show aired there.

(upstairs) in a London mansion. But Gurney never liked her character and often said so: "I would much rather play one of the servants; they are much nicer people." In 1973 she quit.

WRITERS' REVENGE: "Lady Marjorie" was sent to America...on the *Titanic*.

OFFENSE: For four years, *Entertainment Weekly* critic Ken Tucker blasted the USA Network mystery series *Psych*. He wrote that it was "predictable," "unappealing," and "Monk for morons."

WRITERS' REVENGE: In 2009 *Psych* aired an episode about a deranged serial killer named...Ken Tucker. (The real Ken Tucker was reportedly thrilled to receive such an "honor.")

OFFENSE: Before creating *Mad Men*, Matthew Weiner was a writer on *The Sopranos*. Before that, he wrote for the CBS sitcom *Becker* alongside head writer and producer David Hackel. Judging by a scene at the beginning of *The Sopranos* episode "Chasing It," Weiner didn't particularly enjoy working for Hackel.

WRITER'S REVENGE: In the scene, some teenagers are kicking over headstones in a graveyard. One of the headstones belongs to "David M. Hackel."

OFFENSE: According to David Simon, who in the early 1990s was a police reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, his bosses at the newspaper created a "hellish, futile bureaucracy" that focused more on sensationalism and awards than actual journalism. In 1995 Simon quit his job at the *Sun* after a bitter dispute with managing editor Bill Marimow. Simon found success elsewhere: his books about inner-city life became the basis for NBC's *Homicide: Life on the Street* and HBO's *The Wire*.

WRITER'S REVENGE: In season four of *The Wire*, a new and obnoxious character was introduced: police lieutenant Charles Marimow. He was pompous, bumbling, and cruel, with little regard for the rule of law. How did Bill Marimow respond to the unflattering portrayal? "This is a grudge which now extends more than a decade and is demeaning not to us but to [Simon]. To hold a grudge that long poisons the grudge-holder," he said.

OFFENSE: Early in his career, TV writer David Kohan (*The*

Wonder Years, Will & Grace) wrote jokes for stand-up comedian Elayne Boosler. They didn't get along.

WRITER'S REVENGE: On a 1996 *Boston Common* episode written by Kohan, Leonard (Steve Paymer) is detained at an airport security checkpoint and asks the guard: "You're going to arrest me for telling a stupid joke? Then why don't you arrest Elayne Boosler?"

OFFENSE: In 2005 *CSI* writer Sarah Goldfinger was all set to buy a new house in Los Angeles, but the deal between her and the sellers, a couple named Melinda and Scott Tamkin, soured, and she couldn't buy the house.

WRITER'S REVENGE: In 2008 Goldfinger wrote a *CSI* episode about a realtor couple named...Melinda and Scott Tamkin. Melinda gets murdered; Scott's a perverted drunk. Just before the episode was filmed, *CSI* producers decided to change the last name of the couple to avoid a lawsuit. Too late: A synopsis of the episode had already been posted online. The real-life Tamkins discovered that anyone who Googled their names could find that synopsis, which depicts them "engaged in a reckless lifestyle of sexual bondage, pornography, drunkenness, marital discord, depression, financial straits, and possibly even murder." The couple sued, asking \$6 million for defamation. (The suit is pending.)

* * *

DAMMIT, JIM!

On *Star Trek*, Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy (DeForest Kelley) would get so exasperated when asked to do something out of his comfort zone that he'd grumble, "I'm a doctor, not a _____." It became an enduring TV catchphrase. Here are a few examples:

"I'm a doctor, not a bricklayer."

"I'm a doctor, not an engineer."

"I'm a doctor, not a coal miner."

"I'm a surgeon, not a psychiatrist."

"I'm a doctor, not an escalator."

...on *The Adventures of Superman* was brown and gray.