

NETWORK (1976)

written by Paddy Chayefsky
directed by Sidney Lumet
running time: 120 minutes

BASIC SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

PROTAGONIST: Howard Beale

CHARACTERIZATION/MAIN MISBEHAVIOR: Suicidal manic depressive

EXTERNAL GOAL: To keep his job / To bring down the network and institution of television

INTERNAL GOAL: To believe his life have value

MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT: UBS / Diana / Hackett

THEME: Where can you find shelter in world where life isn't as valuable as profit?

CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION: Will Howard bring down UBS or become a pawn to the corporation?

ENDING: Howard is assassinated on live television after preaching Jensen's gospel about the insignificance of the individual.

ARC: Howard goes from a man who feels his life has no value, to a man who preaches the power of the individual, but is manipulated to do what's best for corporate interests and killed.

STORY ENGINES

ACT I

Howard is let go from his job as UBS Evening New anchor. Announcing his departure on the news, Howard threatens to kill himself on live television. He's allowed to go back on the air one last time, but has another episode, claiming "man is full of bullshit," and is fired immediately. When his ratings prove to be a success that no one could have imagined, UBS decides to exploit his mental state and give him his old job back.

ACT II-A

Howard's mental state deteriorates to the point Max (both his friend and head of UBS News) is forced to pull him off the air. When Max is fired, Howard's put back on the air by Diana and Hackett. He has one of his greatest outburst, proclaiming the power of the individual, and his ratings soar.

ACT II-B

With the death of UBS's chairman, Howard insists that television is corruption and lies and the best thing society can do is turn off their televisions immediately. Later, he learns of the upcoming purchase of UBS and CCA (the conglomerate that owns the network) by a Saudi Arabian corporation and begs his viewers to do everything in their power to stop it, putting the survival of the network at risk.

ACT III

Howard is manipulated by the chairman of CCA to tell his audience that individual thought is dead. Soon after, his ratings decline and the UBS top brass have him assassinated on live television.

FULL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

ACT I

1 - OPENING IMAGES: The story opens with V.O. from our narrator over images of the major network news anchors: Walter Cronkite, Howard K. Smith, John Chancellor, and our protagonist, Howard Beale.

NARRATOR

This story is about Howard Beale, who was the network news anchorman on UBS-TV. In his time, Howard Beale had been a mandarin of television, the grand old man of news, with a HUT rating of 16 and a 28 audience share. In 1969, however, he fell to a 22 share, and, by 1972, he was down to a 15 share. In 1973, his wife died, and he was left a childless widower with an 8 rating and a 12 share. He became morose and isolated, began to drink heavily, and, on September 22, 1975, he was fired, effective in two weeks. The news was broken to him by Max Schumacher who was president of the News Division at UBS and an old friend. The two men got properly pissed.

3 - MAX SCHUMACHER and HOWARD BEALE are drunk, closing down a bar. Howard nonchalantly mentions to Max he intends to kill himself. Max dismisses it with sarcastic banter.

Max is desensitized at his friend's cry for help to the point of sarcasm, as to say, they've been there too many times before...

HOWARD

I'm going to kill myself.

MAX

Oh, shit, Howard.

HOWARD

I'm going to blow my brains out right on the air, right in the middle of the seven o'clock news.

MAX

You'll get a hell of a rating, I'll guarantee you that. A fifty share easy.

5 - Howard reviews the upcoming broadcast with the his show's production team. After finishing with his make up, he kicks back a shot of alcohol.

7 - INCITING INCIDENT (Howard): On live TV, Howard announces his retirement and his intention to kill himself on air.

Howard feels his life has no value.

HOWARD

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like, at this moment, to announce that I will be retiring from this program in two weeks' time because of poor ratings. And since this show was the only thing I had going for me in my life, I have decided to kill myself. I'm going to blow my brains out, right on this program, a week from today. So, tune in next Tuesday. That should give the public relations people a week to promote the show. You ought to get a helluva rating out of that. A fifty-share, easy.

8 - Howard's producer, not paying attention to the broadcast, lets it slip by. The crew voices their concerns and Howard is forcibly removed from the set, part of it caught in the broadcast.

10 - **FRANK HACKETT**, management figurehead for **CCA**, the conglomerate than owns **UBS**, removes Howard from the air effective immediately.

10 - INCITING INCIDENT (Max): Hackett insists Howard's antics could affect the network's corporate restructuring at the upcoming stockholders meeting. Hackett's irate at Max's empathy for Howard and threatens his position as head of the news division.

HACKETT

I've got some goddamn surprises for you too, Schumacher!
I've had it up to here with your cruddy division and its annual thirty-three million dollar deficit!

MAX

You keep your hands off my news division, Frank. We're responsible to corporate level, not to you.

HACKETT

We'll goddamn well see about that!

This reminds Max of his mortality. Society tells him that after his career is over, he will soon face his death.

12 - INCITING INCIDENT (Diana): **DIANA CHRISTENSEN** screens footage of a bank robbery by the **Ecumenical Liberation Army** (parody of Patty Hearst and The Symbionese Liberation Army). Diana is fascinated with the footage.

13 - Howard calls Max during the Ecumenical Liberation Army screening and begs for another shot at the news. Max agrees with one caveat: no booze for the day. Howard assures him he won't drink.

15 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (Diana): Diana meets with her team. She wishes to exploit the Ecumenical Liberation Army with their own primetime show.

Diana sees no ethical dilemma producing a show with a known terrorist organization. To her, it's all about ratings and profit.

DIANA

Maybe they'll take movies of themselves kidnapping heiresses, hijacking '747's, bombing bridges, assassinating ambassadors. We'd open each week's segment with that authentic footage, hire a couple of writers to write some story behind that footage, and we've got ourselves a series!

DIANA

I've been telling you people since I took this job six months ago that I want angry shows. I don't want conventional programming on this network. I want counter-culture. I want anti-establishment.

18 - Hackett presents the UBS shareholders the news division's annual deficit and his desire to make the division responsible to management. Max is outraged.

Each division is required to turn a profit, when news divisions are typically, and historically, supported by other means within the network. The news will need showmanship to survive.

19 - Max demands an excuse for being humiliated by Hackett in front of the stockholders from the UBS chairman, **EDWARD RUDDY**. Ruddy refuses to talk about the issue and insists they will cover the issue in the following morning's meeting.

20 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (Howard): Howard gets back on the air and has another episode. He decides to tell the truth.

HOWARD

Yesterday, I announced on this program that I would commit public suicide, admittedly, an act of madness. Well, I'll tell you what happened...I just ran out of bullshit. Well, if there's anybody out there who can look around this demented slaughterhouse of a world we live in and tell me man is noble creature, believe me, that man is full of bullshit...I don't have any bullshit left. I just ran out of it, you see?

20 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (Max): Max lets Howard go on: "If this is how he wants to go out, this is how he goes out."

22 - Ruddy fires Max for permitting Howard's on-air actions. Max criticizes Ruddy for Hackett's sabotage during the stockholders meeting. Ruddy insists that he too felt Hackett's actions were uncalled for and that he would have backed Max's autonomy with the news division.

23 - From her bed, Diana ignores her lover as she watches Howard address the press from the UBS lobby on TV.

Diana's more interested in Howard (i.e., her career) than intimacy.

25 - Diana's assistant reads synopses of possible television shows, but Diana's more interested in Howard Beale.

DIANA

You know, Barbara, the Arabs have decided to jack up the price of oil another percent. The CIA has been caught opening Senator Humphrey's mail. There's a civil war in Angola, another one in Beirut, New York City's still facing default. They finally caught up with Patricia Hearst. And the whole front page of the Daily News is Howard Beale.

28 - TURN / PLOT POINT #1 (Diana): Diana meets with Hackett and begs for Howard's show.

DIANA

I see Howard Beale as a latter-day prophet, a magnificent messianic figure, inveighing against the hypocrisies of our times...And I'm talking about a six dollar cost per thousand show...One show like that could pull this whole network right out of the hole! Now, Frank, its being handed to us on a plate, let's not blow it!

HACKETT

For God's sakes, Diana, we're talking about putting a manifestly irresponsible man on national television.

(beat)

I'll get back to you, Diana.

29 - UBS President, **NELSON CHANEY**, criticizes Hackett for considering "a pornographic network news show." Hackett laughs it off, calling the network a "whorehouse." Obvious that Hackett has power over Chaney.

32 - TURN / PLOT POINT #1 (Howard): As the entire news division say their goodbyes to Max and Howard, they are informed Hackett wants Howard back on the air effective immediately.

HOWARD

And what's wrong with being an angry prophet denouncing the hypocrisies of our times? What do you think, Max?

MAX

Do you want to be an angry prophet denouncing the hypocrisies of our times?

HOWARD

Yeah, I think I'd like to be an angry prophet denouncing the hypocrisies of our times.

MAX

Then grab it! Grab it!

Howard decides to get on the air and combat hypocrisy (truth destroys hypocrisy).

33 - TURN / PLOT POINT #1 (Max): Ruddy gives Max his job back. Ruddy believes Hackett is making a mistake with Howard and CCA will take action to terminate him.

Ruddy needs Max as an ally against Hackett and Max wants his identity back.

ACT II-A

34 - The second act opens with Diana approaching Max in his office, with V.O. from our narrator...

NARRATOR

The initial response to the new Howard Beale was not auspicious. The press was without exception hostile and industry reaction negative. The ratings for the Thursday and Friday show were both 14 and with a 37 share, but Monday's rating dropped two points, clearly suggesting the novelty was wearing off.

37 - Diana claims her psychic told her she'd be involved with a middle-aged man, peaking Max's interest. She also reveals her desire to run Howard's show...

DIANA

I'd like to program it for you, develop it. I wouldn't interfere with the actual news, but T.V. is show business, Max, and even the news has to have a little showmanship.

MAX

And I was hoping you were looking for an emotional involvement with a craggy middle-aged man.

DIANA

I wouldn't rule that out entirely.

40 - Max won't let Diana run the show. Diana insists she'll run the show anyway, with or without him and she approached him as a courtesy. Max brings up the psychic's prediction again and Diana bites...

MAX

Do you have a favorite restaurant?

DIANA

I eat anything.

MAX

Son of a bitch, I get a feeling I'm being made.

DIANA

You are!

MAX

I have warn you I don't do anything on the first date.

DIANA

We'll see.

42 - FIRST TRIAL (Max): Max and Diana have dinner. She tells it like it is: “a middle-aged man reaffirming his middle-aged manhood and a terrified young woman with a father complex.” They begin their affair.

Max trades his values for a woman who wishes to exploit his best friend.

43 - Howard’s awake in bed, answering questions aloud to the voice inside his head.

43 - Max is taking Howard’s angry man show off the air and replacing it with “straight news.”

45 - FIRST TRIAL (Howard): Ignoring Max, Howard gets on the air and tells his audience about the voice that instructed him to preach “the truth.”

47 - FIRST CASUALTY (Howard): Max takes Howard off the air over concern for his mental well-being.

MAX

I think you’re having a breakdown and require treatment.

HOWARD

This is not a psychotic episode, this is a cleansing moment of clarity. I’m imbued, Max. I’m imbued with some special spirit...I feel on the verge of some great, ultimate truth. And you will not take me off the air for now, or any other spaceless time!

48 - Howard faints and Max has him brought to his apartment for the evening.

49 - Howard escapes Max’s apartment in the middle of the night in a manic episode.

50 - FIRST CASUALTY (Max): Howard’s last show was a huge hit. Howard’s disappeared and Hackett demands to know where his whereabouts.

Frank wants Howard for the ratings and Max wants his friend to seek treatment.

MAX

The man is insane. He’s no longer responsible for himself. He needs care and treatment. And all you grave-robbers care about his he’s a hit!

52 - FIRST TRIAL / FIRST CASUALTY (Diana): Due to Ruddy's recent heart attack, Hackett now acts as chairman of UBS and has given Diana Howard's show. With Max's insistence to take Howard off the air, Hackett fires Max.

Diana chooses her career over intimacy.

MAX

Howard Beale may be my best friend. I'll go to court.
I'll put him in a hospital before I let you people
exploit him like a carnival freak.

54 - Howard storms into the UBS building soaking wet, still his pajamas from the night before, rambling incoherent nonsense. He passes security and walks into the studio without incident.

55 - MIDPOINT (Howard): UBS broadcasts Howard's manic rant.

Howard can't hide his anger anymore. His life has meaning. The individual has meaning.

HOWARD

All I know, is first you got to get mad. You've got to say,
"I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore.
I'm a human being, goddammit. My life has value." So, I
want you to get up now. I want you to get out of your chairs
and go to the window. Right now. I want you to go to the
window, open it, and stick your head out and yell. I want you
to yell, "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this
anymore!"

57 - MIDPOINT (Diana): Howard's show is a hit: phones are ringing off the hook; people are screaming in the streets.

With the show's success, this puts Diana in a position of power, setting up her inevitable decline.

58 - MIDPOINT (Max): Watching Howard's broadcast with his family, Max's daughter opens their apartment window and discovers the entire neighborhood screaming, "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

Max's former employer and the woman he loves is exploiting his best friend's mental illness for profit.

ACT II-B

58 - Act Two-B opens with a 747 landing at LAX and aerial shots of the Hollywood, with V.O. from our narrator...

NARRATOR

By mid-October, the Howard Beale show had settled in at a 42 share, more than equaling all other network news shows combined.

59 - Diana meets with a representative from the Ecumenical Liberation Army, **LAUREEN HOBBS**, and her lawyers regarding a new show.

MURPHY

...our client, Ms. Hobbs, wants it up front that the political content of the show has to be entirely in her control.

DIANA

She can have it. I don't give a damn about the political content.

61 - Diana wants Ms. Hobbs to be the contact between UBS and the Ecumenical Liberation Army, as UBS cannot directly communicate with a known terrorist organization.

64 - On his new show, complete with a large stained glass window right out of a church, Howard informs his audience that Edward Ruddy, UBS chairman, has died. He instructs his viewers to shut off the television if they knew what was good for them.

HOWARD

Right now there is a whole generation that didn't know anything that didn't come out of this tube! This tube is the gospel! The ultimate revelation! This tube can make or break presidents, Popes, prime ministers. This tube is the most awesome goddamn force in the whole godless world. And woe is us if it ever falls in the hands of the wrong people. And that's why woe is us that Edward George Ruddy died. Because this company is now in the hands of CCA, the Communications Corporation of America. There's a new Chairman of the Board, a man called Frank Hackett, sitting in Mr. Ruddy's office on the twentieth floor. And when the twelfth largest company in the world controls the most awesome goddamned propaganda force in the whole godless world, who knows what shit will be peddled for truth on this network!

68 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER (Howard): Howard insists that television is corruption and lies and the best thing society can do is turn off their televisions immediately. Ironically, the audience erupts into thunderous applause after Howard passes out.

70 - Max approaches Diana after Ruddy's funeral. Max pontificates on his mortality. Diana speaks of her psychic's prediction of her involvement with Max. Max tells Diana he needs her.

72-75 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER (Max & Diana): A romantic weekend away, where they only speak of business during long walks on the beach, romantic dinner for two, and sex in their hotel room.

Max needs Diana's youthfulness and energy to reaffirm his manhood and Diana has a shot a real love and intimacy.

77 - TURN / PLOT POINT #2 (Max): Max breaks the news of his affair to his wife, Louise. Max insists he's in love with Diana and Louise gives it to him with both barrels.

LOUISE

This is your great winter romance, isn't it? Your last
roar of passion before you sink into your emeritus years.
Is that what's left for me? Is that my share?

79 - Louise insists that Max move out, but tells him she "won't give up" easily.

Louise feels pain and is capable of real love.

81 - In a brilliant moment of satire, UBS attorneys negotiate with the Ecumenical Liberation Army. A corporation negotiates with terrorists.

84 - During a UBS affiliates meeting, Diana's speech celebrates their recent ratings successes with The Howard Beale Show.

85 - During the affiliates meeting, Hackett is summoned to the phone regarding Howard's evening broadcast.

86 - Howard's on the air, spilling details of the upcoming purchase of CCA by the Western World Funding Corporation. Howard insists the WWFC is owned by a Saudi Arabian investment corporation, who will now control the network and its programming.

HOWARD

Listen to me, godammit! The Arabs are simply buying us!
There's only one thing that can stop them: you!

88 - TURN / PLOT POINT #2 (Howard): Howard commands his viewers to stop the WWFC purchase of UBC, much to the dismay of CCA, UBC, and Hackett.

The WWFC will own one of the most powerful propaganda machines in the world and be capable of crushing individual thought and opinion.

90 - TURN / PLOT POINT #2 (Diana): Hackett reveals to Diana, Chaney, and other top brass that the Saudi's hold \$2 billion in CCA loans. If the Saudi money does not come through, CCA is done, along with UBS.

Diana's career is in extreme jeopardy.

ACT III

92 - Hackett escorts Howard in for a meeting with **MR. JENSEN**, Chairman of CCA.

95 - With the theatrics of an evangelical preacher, Jensen dims the lights in the board room and berates Howard for interfering with the international system of currency -- the reason for life on the planet, putting the fear of God into Howard.

MR. JENSEN

You get up on your little twenty-one inch screen, and howl about America and democracy. There is no America. There is no democracy. The world is a college of corporations, inexorably determined by the immutable by-laws of business. The world is a business, Mr. Beale!

98 - Slowly, Jensen builds Howard back up. He claims Howard has been chosen as the messenger of this gospel. Mesmerized, Howard says, "I've seen the face of God!"

99 - POINT OF NO RETURN (Howard): Howard preaches Jensen's gospel to his audience:

HOWARD

What's finished is the idea that this great country is dedicated to the freedom and flourishing of every individual in it. It's the individual that's finished. It's the single, solitary human being who's finished. It's every single one of you out there who's finished. Because this is no longer a nation of independent individuals. This is a nation of some two hundred odd million transistorized, deodorized, whiter-than-white, steel-belted bodies, totally unnecessary as human beings and as replaceable as piston rods.

Howard's manipulated by Jensen's theatrics and slick salesmanship. The world is not about humanity, it's about business.

101 - The narrator informs us Howard's ratings are on the decline:

NARRATOR

It was a perfectly admissible argument that Howard Beale advanced in the days that followed; it was, however, also a very tedious and depressing one. By the end of the first week in June the Howard Beale show had dropped one point in the ratings, and its trend of shares dipped under forty-eight for the first time since last November.

104 - POINT OF NO RETURN (Max): Max expresses his greatest fears to Diana, giving their relationship a shot at real intimacy, not a sexual relationship peppered with business talk.

MAX

And I miss my home, because I'm beginning to get scared shitless. Because all of the sudden it's closer to the end than it is the beginning and death is suddenly a perceptible thing to me, with definable features!

104 - In the midst of Max baring his soul, Diana takes a business call.

Max finally realizes Diana is incapable of love.

105 - Lauren Hobbs demands to Diana Howard be taken off the air, as the Ecumenical Liberation Army show follows his and their ratings are on a steep decline (i.e., no ad revenue).

107 - Diana screens footage of unsuitable replacements for Howard. The decline in ratings will only hurt the network. She suggests to Hackett they fire Howard immediately. Hackett informs Diana that Jensen has taken a special interest in Howard and the show, complicating the matter.

109 - POINT OF NO RETURN (Diana): Diana comes home and packs Max's bags for him. When Max arrives, he finishes packing his bags and puts up no fight, much to her dismay.

Diana packing Max's bags is her last shot at intimacy.

112 - CLIMAX (Max): After Diana begs him to come back, Max leaves her.

Diana personifies all Max hates about television.

MAX

You are television incarnate, Diana, indifferent to suffering, insensitive to joy. All of life is reduced to the common rubble of banality. War, murder, death are all the same to you as bottles of beer. The daily business of life is a corrupt comedy. You even shatter the sensations of time and space into split-seconds and instant replays. You are madness, Diana, virulent madness, and everything you touch dies with you. But, not me. Not as long as I can feel pleasure and pain and love!

115 - Hackett comes back from his meeting with Mr. Jensen and informs Diana and the UBS top brass Jensen demands Howard be left on the air -- destroying the network's profits.

117 - CLIMAX (Diana): Hackett recommends they kill Howard. Diana suggests the Ecumenical Liberation Army assassinate Howard on the air and that they use it, making it “a hell of kick-off show for season.” Hackett and the top brass agree.

Diana now believes profit is more important than human life.

119 - CLIMAX (Howard): Howard is assassinated live on the air.

Howard continued to preach Jensen’s propaganda about the insignificance of human life and was murdered for it.

120 - CLOSING IMAGES: Images of Howard’s assassination over television commercials and news reports of his death.

NARRATOR

This was the story of Howard Beale who was the network news anchorman on UBS-TV, the first known instance of a man being killed because he had lousy ratings.

120 - THE END.

A note from the author:

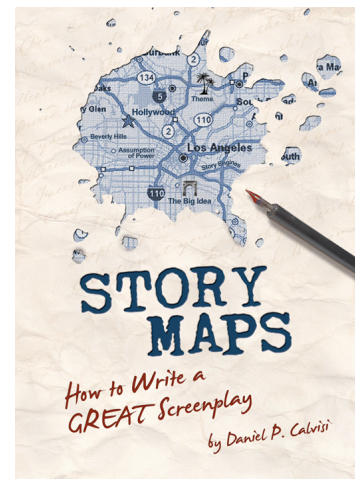
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~Mark Twain