

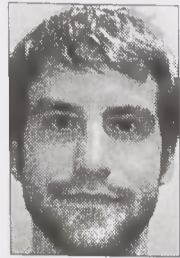
Editorials

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Writers' strike leaves viewers with static

By Aaron Dahlstrom
Assistant News Editor



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I hope everybody TiVo'ed last week's "The Office" and "Desperate Housewives" because they may be the last you get to see for a while.

The Writers Guild of America, those crafty people who keep the jokes on Stephen Colbert's cue cards, went on strike Nov. 5, bringing several popular television shows to a halt. The writers claim they are not getting a big enough chunk from DVD sales and shows watched via the Internet.

The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) said those mediums don't make enough money, with the streaming of shows on the Internet a promotional tool not covered in the WGA contract.

DVD sales rose \$300 million in 2006, according to Digital Entertainment Group. This number makes it possible to give a dollar to nearly every person in America, and easily to the 12,000 some writers affected by the strike.

Claiming the Internet content is a promotional tool does not change the fact that people still wrote it. They deserve compensation.

It makes sense to say three-minute clips serve as a way to market a show and get people watching, but when a whole episode appears online, complete with commercials, banner ads and pop-ups, something changes.

The Internet makes it possible for millions more viewers to watch these television shows and movies, including people in other countries who may not have access to traditional American broadcasting channels. The producers make money off these viewers. Why not the writers?

The WGA doesn't do this kind of thing often. The last time a strike happened was back in 1988, long before DVDs existed and everyone had the Internet on their cell phone. Since then, new technology changed the entertainment industry, and the WGA wants a share.

But that doesn't seem to be happening any time soon. With no end to the feud in sight, what does this mean for the television and movie industries?

The last time it lasted five months and cost the industry \$500 million, according to MSNBC. A strike today could cost billions.

And neither side seems concerned how their actions are affecting the rest of the industry. When TV shows shut down,

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actors can't work. With them go a whole slew of make-up artists, hairdressers, caterers, editors and sound technicians, all without work.

What will the American public do without its primetime fix of TV?

The good news is most Americans will simply turn off the television. A MSNBC survey found 45 percent of participants willing to walk away from TV while the strike affects their favorite shows, followed by 42 percent who will just pop in the same shows they already own on DVD.

The scary part is the last 13 percent, who said they will watch whatever the networks decide to show, which is not a comforting thought. I am not filled with pride about the intellectual state of our country.

The WGA is one of the few unions with the power to cripple an industry. Even though they work behind the scenes, writers make entertainment what it needs to be: entertaining.

Although some tune in to shows because of the funny or poignant performances, the writers deserve credit. They pump the sex into "Grey's Anatomy" and keep Steve Carell politically incorrect in "The Office."

While actors get the credit, writers do the work, and the actors know it.

As the WGA lines up in protest outside television studios, many

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actors are falling in line right beside them.

It makes sense; a victory for writers means better leverage for the rest of Hollywood when the Screen Actors Guild and Directors Guild of America go to the negotiating table next year.

But the AMPTP does not seem too concerned with negotiations. In a last ditch effort to avoid a strike, the WGA agreed dropping its demands for a greater portion of DVD sales. But AMPTP did not budge from its position regarding Internet content.

The Hollywood producers need to understand they are biting the hand that feeds them. By refusing to negotiate, they not only anger their talent, but they destroy their audience.

The American public is an impatient crowd. They are not going to wait five months to know what happens on the next episode of "Lost."

Televisions get turned off, and both writers and producers come back to a market worse off than before.

Unfortunately for the writers and others out of work, the strike comes at the worst time of the year. Many of these individuals must now go into the holiday season without paychecks, furthering the impact the strike has on the economy.

Technology drives this industry. Just as the VCR made it possible to bring the movies into the living room, the Internet makes it possible to take entertainment anywhere in the world.

But people are not going to entertain us for free. If the AMPTP does not want to pay up, there is no incentive for writers to turn out quality programming, and we get left with static on every station.

Pay up, AMPTP, so the writers can get on with their lives and viewers can continue escaping from theirs.

Misguided drug policy is the real Boogeyman

By Laura Eshelman
Contributing Writer



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One of the most successful aspects of the show South Park is its ability to make poignant observations by satirizing peoples' over-reaction to controversial issues.

In one episode, one of the boys meets a hobo claiming to be his future self, who has thrown away his life to drugs.

The boy later discovers that the man is actually a paid actor, who his parents hired through an anti-drug organization to scare him straight.

They later admit they felt it was an easier route to let him believe frightening hearsay than sitting down and discussing the reality of the possible consequences of drug use.

Ignorance of facts about controlled substances can be just as dangerous as certain drugs themselves. Generations raised on the mentality of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program learn at an early age to equate marijuana with crack-cocaine and gang violence.

D.A.R.E.'s ultimate intent is to convince children that drugs, and everyone who uses them, are bad and mere contact with drugs will probably lead to tragedy.

This is a lot easier for 10-year-olds to believe, but with age and personal experience, many grow confused as the accuracy of these assumptions become blurry.

Some may hold fast to D.A.R.E.'s philosophy and shield themselves from anything and anyone they associate with drugs. Others may take the opposite path and rebel by doing everything the D.A.R.E. program instructed them not to do.

The program is analogous to a parenting style known as "authoritarian" discipline, versus "authoritative" discipline. Authoritative parents explain to their children that eating a cookie before dinner will spoil their appetite, whereas the authoritarian parent will simply deny the cookie "because I said so."

Research shows children of authoritative parents tend to exhibit overall responsible behavior and decision-making skills, whereas the latter children often either completely avoid any kind of risks or rebel by taking too many of them. The result of anti-drug campaigns is similar. Young adults are tube-fed too much conflicting information and propaganda to know which choices they make will yield what end.

Marijuana may remain the dark prince of drugs for more sheltered people because of its notoriety as the gateway drug to hell, but for many people who spend time in a college dormitory, it is easier to accept that the most heinous consequences (apart from a police

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Criminalizing pot makes about as much sense as criminalizing kudzu, but what about the harder stuff?

Here is where it becomes harder to separate fact from fiction. The anti-drug lobby has already proved itself untrustworthy, but it's not necessarily wise to rely on a peer who vouches for an unfamiliar drug, either.

Substances which grow from the earth notwithstanding, there are about as many recreational chemical combinations out there as a full trick-or-treat sack on Halloween night, and just as many myths and half-truths for each one.

Propaganda often fails to take into account instances of correlation-causation in drug statistics. About 10 years ago, public service

announcements sparked a panic about the Ecstasy pandemic sweeping through the country and the young people dropping dead like flies. Frequently, the ads used an isolated example of fatality as a testimonial.

They failed to mention any numerical data, which shows not only are such deaths relatively rare, but also mainly occur due to pre-existing health problems, dehydration, mixing the drug with other chemicals, or taking impure pills cut with potentially lethal drugs.

It would stand to reason that exposing such facts to the public would probably deter more people from trying the drug, or at least consider it more carefully. Instead, the PSAs created a faceless boogeyman, and of course, the most dangerous enemy is an unknown one.

This example is just one instance of how detrimental misrepresentations of drugs can be. Neglecting to distinguish between the possible dangers of different substances also poses problems.

According to the Controlled Substances Act of 1970, a tab of LSD and a hit of heroin both meet the criteria for drugs which carry the most severe penalties.

Research has proven time and time again that LSD poses no risk for addiction or overdose, whereas thousands die with needles in their arms every year.

Nevertheless, one who is uninformed and lumps such two powerful, yet otherwise unlike drugs together could easily fall into a dicey trap of perceptions.

That is, if someone is told that taking acid will surely cause him to jump from a building and it proves false, what basis is there to trust experimenting with heroin will cause addiction?

At the same time, we don't hear as much noise from the Drug Enforcement Agency or the Office of National Drug Control Policy about the looming threat of prescription drugs, many of which are not too far from heroin as far as addictiveness and potency go, but as long as a legitimate pharmaceutical company makes and markets them, it's peachy keen.

There are many steps that might ameliorate problems regarding drugs, including safe regulation and more rehabilitation options.

However, the first and easiest route would be for anti-drug advocates of all kinds to lighten up and present people with honest statistics and scientific facts instead of appealing to one's worst nightmares.

Like a child with a cookie, temptations among those curious to try drugs may persist, but when presented with truly compelling rationales against it, they will be more likely to put it aside for healthier interests.

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The Blue Banner is a designated public forum and welcomes letters to the editor and articles, considering them on a basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be e-mailed to banner@unca.edu and limited to 300 words. They should be signed with the writer's name, followed by the year in school, major or other relationship to UNC Asheville. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles submitted are subject to editing.

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