



PRODUCTION NOTES

In times of social unrest, political crisis, or important cultural and environmental issues that can be hard to understand, America turns to its most trusted heroes – the men and women who sit behind the big desks in cable news stations across the country to help make sense of the shifting world around them. But what happens when these champions of the truth turn out to be just as flawed and human as everyone else?

Meet Walter Blunt.

A former war hero and distinguished Englishman, Blunt (Patrick Stewart, *X-Men* franchise, *Ted*) was so disillusioned by his experience in the brief, bitter Falklands campaign, that he decided the most effective way to have an impact on the world was through journalism. A man of very strong opinions, he's intent on conquering that bastion of deep influence: American cable news. Stewart says, "Walter Blunt is determined that he will leave the world a better place than it was when he came into it." However, sometimes his personal issues and well-meaning decisions prevent his desire to be respected.

"Blunt Talk" offers a comedic peek into life at a nightly cable news show while taking a deeper look at the complex characters that comprise the newsroom and how they interact as a competitive but loving and hilariously dysfunctional family. Although Walter Blunt may constantly be trying to win over the hearts and minds of the American public by delivering them the truth he thinks they deserve, what is never unwavering, even in the most dire and absurd situations, is his team's admiration, respect, and need to protect their fearless leader.

THE ORIGIN STORY

Patrick Stewart's relationship with Seth MacFarlane ("Family Guy," *Ted*, *A Million Ways to Die in the West*) goes back nearly a decade, through his work voicing the recurring character of Avery Bullock on "American Dad" and occasional appearances on "Family Guy" as well as voiceover work in *Ted* and *Ted 2*. Before the concept of "Blunt Talk" was even conceived, Stewart sat down with MacFarlane the morning after he hosted the 2013 Academy Awards to discuss the possibility of doing a television comedy. "It was in every sense a no-brainer for me, partly because in the last few years I have been exploring the world of comedy more and more [which is] not something that I'm especially known for," says Stewart. "I had been enjoying these new experiences and finding a release in doing humor instead of heavyweight, serious stuff so Seth's invitation was perfect for me at this time."

MacFarlane then began his search for a writer to envision and helm his new project. Insert Jonathan Ames, acclaimed novelist, and creator and showrunner of "Bored to Death." A brief but fortuitous note from his agent confirmed a time to speak with MacFarlane about creating an intelligent and funny cable comedy starring Patrick Stewart.



The evening before Ames and MacFarlane connected, he had been up watching TV. "I was attracted to this fierce blue background of the news program and I imagined Patrick Stewart's head in front of a beautiful eye-candy blue cable news set," he says. He pitched MacFarlane a story of Stewart playing a cable news host, a Brit who comes to America to tell us how to be.

"Blunt Talk" boasts serious comedy credentials, not only with MacFarlane and Ames but executive producers Tristram Shapeero and Stephanie Davis, who also worked on "Bored to Death." Shapeero directed four episodes of "Blunt Talk," and his previous TV credits include serving as executive producer and director on "Community" and directing various episodes of "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," "Children's Hospital," "Brooklyn Nine-Nine," "Happy Endings," "Parks and Recreation," "New Girl," "Workaholics," "Nurse Jackie," and "Veep."

Ames brought Shapeero onboard. "Coming from England, one of the first shows I did here was 'Bored to Death.' Meeting Jonathan and experiencing the extraordinary manner in which he writes was just so great because it's so refreshing."

With the creative team set, they started digging in to the world of Walter Blunt. "It's a very permissive and accepting universe, but that doesn't mean there aren't consequences when you maybe push things too far," says Ames.

Shapeero adds, "'Blunt Talk' is unique because more than any other comedy that I've ever worked on, the characters are so transparent and they wear their hearts on their sleeves and their emotions are very present in all of their interactions with each other."

WHO IS WALTER BLUNT

Patrick Stewart suggested the name Walter Blunt based on the character of the same name in Shakespeare's Henry IV, a play he starred in at London's Barbican Theater earlier in his career. As influential and loyal as his namesake, "Blunt Talk's" Walter also exemplifies the leadership characteristics of his fictional predecessor.

"Walter is not based on any living media or journalistic person," says Stewart. "There stands side-by-side a serious and desperate passion, not only to make the world a better place, but to give hope to his viewers. He is this person whose life is chaotic and confused very often because of an excess of alcohol. In that struggle to maintain a private life, that tension that exists between Walter Blunt socially, privately, domestically and his TV persona, creates this potential for comic tension."

Ames describes Blunt as, "a flawed but caring man. He knows Shakespeare. He knows sports. He tries to help the family around him, which is his staff just as much as his blood family. He's a force of nature, an odd force of nature. Walter has integrity and he can be passionate and fiery and angry and maybe lash out a little, but he will always say he's sorry. He always tries to make amends because he cares for and respects the people around him."

Defining Walter Blunt can be tricky. Ames admits, "Trying to answer who Walter Blunt is would sort of be like trying to answer who I am or who any human being is. He is so many things." A lot of the humor in the series comes from the characters' flaws but its showrunner says that is human nature. "We keep talking about Walter being flawed but I keep saying that's just being human. Who isn't flawed?" asks Ames. "We see Walter in this glass house but maybe we see ourselves there too because we all have problems. We see that he treats the other characters and their problems with compassion, so we feel compassion for him, too."



Dolly Wells ("Doll & Em") who stars as Celia, Blunt's senior producer and head writer, describes Walter as "truthful and honest and tactless and charming and hopeless and vulnerable. He's a sort of perfect hero."

"Blunt Talk" is Patrick Stewart's first television comedy and, according to Ames, Stewart was perfect for this role. "Patrick completely inhabited Walter Blunt. He's entered into him like a hand into a glove and loves being this other human being. He loves the news set. He really feels like he's Walter Blunt in those moments."

Ames continues, "When you get to watch Stewart every day, you feel like you are watching an artist. He's like a violin. He hears everything, notices everything, gives you so many different reactions. He's like a filament that just lights up. He's able to play this man of power because I think he has so much power inside of him. He's magnificent in the role."

"Patrick Stewart doing comedy is long overdue," adds Timm Sharp ("Enlightened") who stars as Jim, Blunt's senior producer and co-head writer. "He treats it just as seriously as he would Shakespeare and I think comedy needs to be treated that way. It has to be grounded in some reality otherwise it is just nuts."

MEET THE NEWSROOM

If Walter Blunt is a father figure then the newsroom team are his dysfunctional and devout relatives. "Early on, I had the feeling that the newsroom is a family," Ames says. "Walter is the father, Rosalie is the mother, Jim and Celia are the older brother and sister, and Martin and Shelly are the younger brother and sister while Harry is the odd uncle and they are in it together. I've said to directors that when the characters move, they should move like a bunch of geese with Walter at the lead."

Academy Award®-nominated actress Jacki Weaver (*Silver Linings Playbook*) stars as Rosalie, Blunt's tough and motherly producer-manager. "The relationship between Walter and Rosalie is a symbiotic one. They are very reliant on each other for a number of things. He depends on her in many ways. I don't think he could do it without her," says Jacki. "But even though she seems to be the strong one, I think she probably needs to have him depend on her."

Ames adds, "Walter and Rosalie have been together professionally for over 20 years. Rosalie is like this fierce bird that looks over him and the show. Walter is her platonic husband."

Celia, played by Dolly Wells, is Blunt's senior producer and co-head writer. Executive producer Tristram Shapeero says Celia is a great character. "She absolutely worships the ground that Walter Blunt walks on. He's been her hero for quite some time and, over the course of the season, we see her desperately trying to please him."

"Celia is a grown-up but she's not grown up," Wells adds. "She's not really sure what she's supposed to be doing or how to be doing it. She loves her job and takes it very seriously but she's like a horse. She gets distracted by things and excited that they might be the things that are going to save her. She's sweet and loyal, but not very confident."

Celia is close with Jim, Blunt's other senior producer and co-head writer played by Timm Sharp. "They respect each other. They've got each other's back but they bicker and quarrel," says Wells. Shapeero adds, "Jim shares Celia's ambition. He wants to be great. He wants Walter's job."

"Walter is like a father figure to Jim but I think that's more from Walter's perspective," says Sharp. "Jim wants to be doing Walter's job, which is weird because Jim is very timid and not the most confident person in the world. He has some delightfully troubled dysfunctions."



Shelly, played by Mary Holland (*"Silicon Valley"*), and Martin, played by Karan Soni (*Safety Not Guaranteed*), round out the newsroom as the senior researchers for "Blunt Talk." "Shelly is overly ambitious," says Holland. "She has a big temper and she can't always control it. She's super paranoid and doesn't quite know who she is yet. She's trying to define herself within this environment. Martin is the bane of Shelly's existence. He drives her crazy because he's a little bit smarter than her and I think that really miffs her."

"Martin's relationship with Shelly is very competitive," says Soni. "He sees her as his biggest threat in the office because they both offer a similar perspective. He has a persecution complex because he is always kind of fighting to get his story out there, or his opinion out there and he's quick to defend whenever he feels like someone is coming after him."

"I think the people that Walter has put around him he is drawn to because they wear their hearts on their sleeves and are very open about who they are, and passionate about what they believe in and care about," adds Stewart. "He likes a certain measure of eccentricity."

Outside of the main bullpen of the newsroom, audiences will be introduced to a deep roster of guest talent that will appear throughout the series including Romany Malco (*Think Like A Man*, *Top Five*) who plays the president of the network, Ed Begley Jr. (*Arrested Development*, "St. Elsewhere") who plays Rosalie's free-spirited husband and Richard Lewis (*Curb Your Enthusiasm*) who recurs as Dr. Weiss, Blunt's appointed therapist.

Additionally, musician and actor Moby, Jason Schwartzman (*The Grand Budapest Hotel*, "Bored to Death"), Elisabeth Shue (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *Chasing Mavericks*), Sharon Lawrence (*Rizzoli & Isles*, "Curb Your Enthusiasm"), Trace Lysette (*Transparent*), Golden Brooks (*Girlfriends*), and Steve Valentine (*Anger Management*) among others make guest star appearances in the series.

"When we have someone like Jason Schwartzman or Richard Lewis just taking off on an idea whether it be physical comedy or improvisation, and it comes so easily as if off their fingertips, we feel so blessed," says Patrick Stewart.

WHERE'S MY MANSERVANT

Harry doesn't have an official role at the newsroom but, as Walter's manservant, he is a critically important member of the extended Blunt family. Played by Adrian Scarborough (*The King's Speech*), Harry is equal parts savior and enabler, and has been devoted to the man he calls "Major" since their time together in the Falklands.

"Harry and Walter's relationship is classic servant/master but there's a sort of slight supernatural quality about Harry's ability to sniff out what the 'Major' wants," says Scarborough. "He knows what needs to be provided and he's often three steps ahead of providing it. He has a genie-like quality in that way."

Ames adds, "Harry is completely devoted to Walter and, in some ways, his purpose in life is to make sure that this man can get out there in front of the American people and deliver the news and truth that can help us as a society and as people. He's also Walter's best friend and drinking buddy."

Although not employed by the "Blunt Talk" nightly cable news program, Harry is still essential to the overall success of the program. "He's a vital part of the newsroom equation," says Scarborough. "He's there to keep order and make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible, particularly when Walter's not there."



Harry's job is anything but typical. More often than not, he's caught up in completing some absurd tasks for his boss, which can range from fighting him with swords and nunchucks, to beating him with cricket bats, to reading to him in bed every night.

"I certainly wasn't anticipating all of the stunts, swordfights, chasing and whipping," says Scarborough. "It's been great fun. My poor stuntman gets so frustrated because he gets called in on a regular basis and ends up sitting around because I want to do my own stunts."

CREATING WALTER BLUNT'S WORLD

"Blunt Talk" is set in the sprawling city of Los Angeles, which was a new challenge for Ames, who is an East coast native. To create this chaotic, absurd, and vulnerable world, the production team knew there were some elements that were essential.

"I took a page from one of my favorite writers, P.G. Woodhouse, who said to try to give pleasure with every sentence," says Ames. "For every element of our production - from costumes to lighting to set design to hopefully the language, to the pacing and the music - we're trying to give pleasure with every frame of the show as best we can."

"Having that as a foundation really helps the characters be nutty and absurd and loony because they are grounded in a very real and beautiful world," he explains.

"We wanted to make it look as cinematic as we possibly could," adds Shapeero. "We took the idea that every single frame we shoot should be contributing something to the storytelling process. We wanted to make people feel like they were watching an indie film at the beginning of it, which blossoms into what the show is."

Emmy®-nominated director of photography Joseph E. Gallagher ("Deadwood"), renowned production designer Julie Walker ("House of Lies"), and Emmy®-Award winning costume designer Chrsi Karvonides ("Big Love"), were part of the team tasked with bringing Walter Blunt's world to life.

"We drew inspiration for our shooting style from Wes Anderson style movies, and we're going for very symmetrical frames," says Gallagher. "Julie Walker designed the sets with that aspect ratio in mind."

Walker's own background proved invaluable for this assignment. "Twenty years ago, I used to work for a news agency which provided me inspiration. I called some people that still worked there and took some behind-the-scenes tours and a lot of research photos."

Inspiration was also found in classic news dramas. "*All the President's Men* was one of the inspirations for the newsroom set," says Gallagher. "We built it to have hard ceilings, which was a distinct choice for us based on the size of it. We wanted to be able to film at a low angle and we decided to forego the lighting grid in favor of fluorescent fixtures."

Although the newsroom is a focal hub of the series, "Blunt Talk" goes beyond UBS studios to explore the personal lives and interests of all their characters. "We built close to 60 sets for the show in the first eight episodes, including building a set within locations we've traveled to," explained Walker.



The costume choices are as deliberate as the set designs. "Patrick Stewart has incredible taste," says Karvonides. "Jonathan Ames has beautiful taste. Together they like this slightly heightened reality and it allows us to have a more unusual color palette than you would see on most TV shows in America and it's been a lot of fun and rewarding working on this series due to that."

Karvonides continues, "Patrick Stewart is not afraid of color and we make unusual color choices and feature British designers that provide a much more tailored cut to the suits of Walter Blunt. Patrick had a huge amount of input on the look and arc of his character and how to show that subtly through his clothing. The comedy comes through his wardrobe over and over again."

The series will also feature allusions to classic cinema. "I love The Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, and Peter Sellers and *The Pink Panther* movies so there might be certain nods to those cinematic influences," explains Ames.

While it may be difficult to define the world of Walter Blunt, Ames says it is easy to capture the spirit of the series: "My goal is to make something that will amuse people, entertain them, give them some distraction at home, give them some relief, make them feel less alone in the world and so we come here with this goal of trying to make something that might help people by making them laugh."

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