

= Chapter 1 (House of Cards) =

" Chapter 1 " (sometimes " Episode 101 ") is the pilot episode of the American political thriller drama television series House of Cards and is the first episode of the first season . It premiered on February 1 , 2013 , when it was released along with the rest of the first season on the American streaming service Netflix . This episode became the first web television webisode to earn Primetime Emmy Awards and nominations . " Chapter 1 " was written by series developer Beau Willimon and directed by executive producer David Fincher . The episode also earned 3 other Emmy nominations as well as WGA : Episodic Drama and DGA ? Drama Series nominations .

Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) is an ambitious Democratic congressman and the House Majority Whip . Underwood helped ensure the election of President Garrett Walker (Michel Gill) , who promised to appoint Underwood as Secretary of State . However , before Walker is sworn in , Chief of Staff Linda Vasquez (Sakina Jaffrey) announces that the president will not honor the agreement and will instead nominate Senator Michael Kern . Furious at Walker 's betrayal , Underwood and his wife Claire (Robin Wright) , an environmental activist , make a pact to destroy Kern . When Zoe Barnes (Kate Mara) makes her resources available , she becomes one of their pawns .

The episode was well received by most television critics . They praised the production values of the series as well as the performances of the lead actors .

= = Plot = =

South Carolina Congressman Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) , the Democratic Majority Whip , leaves his house in Washington , D.C. after hearing his neighbors ? dog get hit by a car . As he comforts the mortally @-@ wounded dog , he looks into the camera and says ? Moments like this require someone who will act , who will do the unpleasant thing , the necessary thing , ? before calmly proceeding to strangle it . This introduces both his habit of breaking the fourth wall to narrate , and his cold and vicious nature . Frank and his wife , Claire (Robin Wright) , go on to attend a New Year ? s Eve party in honor of the new President @-@ elect , Garrett Walker (Michel Gill) , a fellow Democrat and winner of the 2012 election . Frank confesses to the viewer that he does not like Walker , but saw his political potential early on and ingratiated himself to him , putting himself in line to be nominated as Walker ? s Secretary of State after 22 years in Congress .

Frank meets with Walker 's Chief of Staff , Linda Vasquez (Sakina Jaffrey) , whom Frank recommended for the job . She reveals that she and Walker have decided to rescind their promise to nominate him as Secretary of State because they want him to remain in Congress and use his political expertise to get the President @-@ elect ? s education reform agenda passed . Frank is initially incensed , but when Linda asks if he will continue to be an ally to the future President he says that he will . Linda reveals that Senator Michael Kern (Kevin Kilner) has been chosen for the position instead . Despite his statement to the contrary , Frank feels personally betrayed and , with Claire ? s encouragement , begins to formulate a plot for revenge , which he shares with his Chief of Staff , Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly) . Mrs. Underwood , meanwhile , is forced to downsize the non @-@ profit organization she manages , the Clean Water Initiative , which had been promised a large donation upon her husband ? s confirmation as Secretary , without which the organization is forced to substantially curtail its budget .

On a whim , Zoe Barnes (Kate Mara) , a young reporter for the Washington Herald who is stuck covering trivial ? human interest ? stories , pays a late @-@ night visit to Frank at his home . She offers to be Frank ? s undercover mouthpiece in the press in exchange for the elevated profile that she would gain from breaking substantive stories . Meanwhile , Peter Russo (Corey Stoll) , a young , inexperienced congressman from Philadelphia , is arrested for drunk driving . Stamper finds out about the arrest and immediately contacts the D.C. police commissioner , offering Underwood ? s support for his mayoral campaign in exchange for releasing Russo and completely covering up the incident . Russo is picked up from jail by his secretary and romantic partner , Christina Gallagher (Kristen Connolly) . He lies to her , telling her that he was alone when he was arrested when , in fact

, there was a prostitute in the car (Rachel Brosnahan) .

Frank meets with Congressman Donald Blythe (Reed Birney) , a committed progressive liberal who has long pushed for education reform , with whom the Walker administration wants to work on a bill . Frank dismisses his proposal as too ambitious and asks him to rewrite it . Frank secretly passes a copy of Blythe ' s proposal to Zoe . He then meets with Senator Catherine Durant (Jayne Atkinson) and suggests that she ought to consider seeking the nomination for Secretary of State . He also privately confronts Congressman Russo about his arrest and checkered history of substance abuse and soliciting prostitutes , and demands Russo ' s loyalty in exchange for making the incident disappear .

Zoe takes the draft of the education bill to the Herald ' s political editor , Lucas Goodwin (Sebastian Arcelus) , and its chief editor , Tom Hammerschmidt (Boris McGiver) , who gives her the lead on the story over the more experienced chief political correspondent Janine Skorsky (Constance Zimmer) . The episode ends the morning after Walker ' s inauguration , with Frank visiting his favorite restaurant , Freddy ' s BBQ Joint , for breakfast . On the front page of the Washington Herald is Zoe ' s story about Blythe ' s ' far left ' education plan .

= = Production = =

The episode was directed by David Fincher and was written by Beau Willimon , who has served as an aide to Charles Schumer , Howard Dean and Hillary Clinton . Independent studio Media Rights Capital purchased the rights to House of Cards , with the intent on creating a series . Netflix agreed to contribute an undisclosed fixed fee to production costs in March 2011 . As he was completing his work on The Curious Case of Benjamin Button , Fincher was introduced to the original miniseries by his agent and sought to develop a series with Eric Roth . House of Cards was pitched to several cable networks , including HBO , AMC and Showtime . Netflix , interested in launching their own original programming , outbid the networks , picking the series up for 26 episodes , totaling two seasons . Netflix was the only bidder that was interested in purchasing the rights without seeing a completed pilot . Thus , the show was not forced into manipulating story arcs introduced in the pilot to create artificial cliffhangers .

= = = Casting = = =

Fincher stated that every main cast member was their first choice . In the first read through , he said " I want everybody here to know that you represent our first choice ' each actor here represents our first choice for these characters . So do not fuck this up . " Spacey , whose last regular television role was in the series Wiseguy , responded positively to the script . He then played Richard III , which Fincher said was " great training " . Spacey supported the decision to release all of the episodes at once , believing that this type of release pattern will be increasingly common with television shows . He said , " When I ask my friends what they did with their weekend , they say , ' Oh , I stayed in and watched three seasons of Breaking Bad ' or it 's two seasons of Game of Thrones " . He was officially cast on March 18 , 2011 . Robin Wright was approached by Fincher to star in the series when they worked together in The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo . She was cast as Claire Underwood in June 2011 . Kate Mara was cast as Zoe Barnes in early February 2012 . Mara 's sister , Rooney Mara , worked with Fincher in The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo , and when Kate Mara read the part of Zoe , she " fell in love with the character " and asked her sister to " put in a word for me with Fincher " . The next month , she got a call for an audition .

= = = Cast = = =

In order billed in the episode opening credits :

= = = Filming = = =

While Netflix had ventured into original programming by greenlighting foreign shows that were new to United States audiences with shows such as *Lilyhammer* , *House of Cards* represented the first show made for Netflix . Filming for the first season began in January 2012 in Harford County , Maryland .

" Chapter 1 " sets the tone for the environs of the series . According to David Carr the political environs have such " marbleness " that it belies the clandestine nature of political activities , including those of Underwood who says he is there to " clear the pipes and keep the sludge moving " . The fictional newspaper , *The Washington Herald* , is set with " brutal " lighting and drab furniture , in part because it was filmed at the real life *Baltimore Sun* offices . Carr uses several pejorative adjectives to describe Barnes ' apartment including sad , grubby , dirty , dreary and humble but note that this implies that the digital revolution is dominated by people " on laptops who have no furniture " . Similarly , Underwood and his associates are nattily clad , Barnes shows a lack of fashion recognition .

= = = Release = = =

The episode was broadcast online by Netflix on February 1 , 2013 as part of the simultaneous release of all 13 episodes of season 1 of the series . The debut date was a weekend when there was little competition on television other than Super Bowl XLVII and a new episode of *Downton Abbey* on PBS . Netflix broadcast " Chapter 1 " and " Chapter 2 " to critics several days in advance of the release .

= = Reception = =

= = = Reviews = = =

The episode received positive reviews from critics . Elements of the opening scene were lauded . Matt Roush of *TV Guide* praised Spacey 's self introduction as a Machiavellian politician in which he says " I have no patience for useless things . " *Boston Globe* 's Matthew Gilbert noted that " the first two episodes were expertly directed by David Fincher " and Spacey 's harmonious cadence such as those used in the first scene of this episode " makes even his character 's mercy killing of an injured dog ? which he does by hand ? seem a little less brutal . " Not only is Underwood described as Machiavellian , one critic from *The New York Times* notes that his belief in the omnipresence of dirt expressed as " Nobody ? s a Boy Scout , not even a Boy Scout " harkens back to Willie Stark in *All the King 's Men* who said " There 's always something " .

Time television critic James Poniewozik , notes that by the end of the first episode Frank establishes that his metaphor of choice is meat because both literally and figuratively it is his preference . He may begin a day with a celebratory rack of ribs , because " I ? m feelin ? hungry today ! " , but also he describes life with meat metaphors : he describes the White House Chief of Staff with grudging admiration : " She ? s as tough as a two @-@ dollar steak . " ; he plans to destroy an enemy the way " you devour a whale . One bite at a time . " ; and he endures a tedious weekly meeting with House leaders , he tells us , by " [imagining] their lightly salted faces frying in a skillet . " Poniewozik notes that all of this comes from a character whose name , Underwood is a reference to the hallmark deviled ham of the William Underwood Company .

Roush also notes that the first two weeks show how Claire " runs a charity with a brutally iron fist " . While Frank is Machiavellian , Claire presents a woman urging on her husband 's assertion of power in the image of Lady Macbeth . Hank Stuever of *The Washington Post* describes her as an ice @-@ queen wife . She encourages his vices while noting her disapproval of his weakness saying " My husband doesn ? t apologize ... even to me . " Nancy deWolf Smith of *The Wall Street Journal* describes what she sees of their relationship in the first two episodes as pivotal to the show 's success : " Benign though they may seem ? and their harmless air is what makes the Underwoods so effective as political plotters ? this is a power couple with the same malignant chemistry as pairs

of serial killers , where each needs the other in order to become lethal " .

Gilbert also notes that Mara 's surprising naivete is a welcome respite against a backdrop of a " terminally jaded " cast . As the show begins , aspiring journalist Zoe Barnes is desperate to rise from covering the " Fairfax County Council " beat to covering " ' what 's behind the veil ' of power in the Capitol hallways . " Alessandra Stanley of The New York Times notes that by the end of the first episode , Mara 's Barnes is among the cadre of Frank 's accomplices . After she pleads for a relationship with him by promising to earn his trust and not " ask any questions " , Frank uses her fiendishly . However , Ashley Parker of The New York Times considers her unfathomably aggressive and too overt , transactional and sexual . Parker points out that Barnes ' statement " I protect your identity , I print what you tell me , and I 'll never ask any questions " almost discredits itself .

The Washington Post 's Stuever has many complaints about the show including the fact that it is about Washington , DC , but filmed in Baltimore . He also complains about its entrance into the television landscape littered with " more fictitious administrations than anyone can keep track of " . He says that perspective will affect your perception of the show . Those not already inundated with " Type A personalities inside the Beltway " in their daily lives may be drawn to the show . However , it is not likely a show that will serve well those who spend a lot of time with the issues that the show deals with . After viewing the first two episodes , Stuever also finds fault with the use of breaking the fourth wall , describing it as " the show 's unwise narrative trope " . The Wall Street Journal 's Smith defends the fourth wall as an " artifice that generally works well here to loosen our bearings " .

Ryan McGee of The A.V. Club notes Russo seems to employ vices without restraint , which is a respite from the other exacting characters in the episode and a makes him a sort of metaphor for the show . McGee also notes that the episode includes " establishing shots within Zoe 's apartment that offer up almost everything you need to know about her current position in life " .

= = = Accolades = = =

On July 18 , 2013 , House of Cards (along with Netflix 's other web series ' Arrested Development and Hemlock Grove) earned the first Primetime Emmy Award nominations for original online only web television for the 65th Primetime Emmy Awards in 2013 . Among House of Cards ' nine nominations , " Chapter 1 " received four nominations for the 65th Primetime Emmy Awards and 65th Primetime Creative Arts Emmy Awards becoming the first webisode (online @-@ only episode) of a television series to receive a major Primetime Emmy Award nomination : Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series for David Fincher . This episode also received several Creative Arts Emmy Award nominations , including Outstanding Cinematography for a Single @-@ Camera Series , Outstanding Single @-@ Camera Picture Editing for a Drama Series , and Outstanding Music Composition for a Series (Original Dramatic) . Although the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series is not a category that formally recognizes an episode , Spacey submitted " Chapter 1 " for consideration due to his nomination .

On September 15 , at the Creative Arts Emmy Award presentation , " Chapter 1 " and Eigil Bryld earned the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Cinematography for a Single @-@ Camera Series , making " Chapter 1 " the first ever Emmy @-@ awarded webisode . Then on September 22 , David Fincher won Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series for directing the pilot episode " Chapter 1 " , bringing the series to a total of three wins and marking the first ever win for a webisode at the Primetime Emmy award ceremony . None of the Emmy awards were considered to be in major categories , however .