

**TITLE:** LOW BUDGET

**CREATED BY:** Mike Rembis

**FORMAT:** One Hour [serialized] TV | Dark Comedy, Drama

**LOGLINE:** *When novice filmmakers accidentally kill their director and hide his death, his dark web employer forces them to edit snuff videos until he returns.*

**COMPS:** Barry, Big Little Lies, Breaking Bad, Cruel Summer, Fargo

**WHY THIS STORY NOW:** Shines a bright scary light on dark web activity, those drawn into it, even unintentionally, and how it connects to the world we know.

### **MAIN CAST**

**DAMIAN LANE (25):** An actor yearning for stardom who knows he is far from it. A dynamic chameleon with a flair for improv who sometimes dons an alias just for kicks.

**STEPHEN CARPENTER (25):** A camera and sound man who likes everyone to get along, so winds up mediating many heated discussions.

**ERIN FALTRACO (20):** An actor with high school chops, Erin is fearless and tough, sort of a loner, but loyal to those she associates with.

**ANTHONY DUBOSE (20):** An actor who likes classic films, Anthony internally compares the world around him to movie scenes. Like Erin and Stephen, he goes with the flow of what is happening and is easily swayed into poor decisions.

### **THE PILOT**

Equipment fails on a low budget film set in Florida. **DAMIAN LANE** laments his career, telling his actress cousin, **MARIEL (23)** that he is done with unpaid work. Damian looks up into the sky wishing for “something different.” Mariel says he should hang out with his old buddy, her husband, **MIKE (25)**. That will cheer him up.

**CHRISTIAN LIGHT (25)** disguises his voice and dons a mask to meet online with **FREDERICK (35)** and **MOHAMMED (30)**, who hide their identities through backlighting. Frederick and Mohammed complain that Christian is rude for wearing a mask and warn him to finish several edits for **BIG MOMMA** or face the consequences.

**STEPHEN CARPENTER** finishes work on a film shoot in a nice studio. He heads home to his father, **RAY (60)**, and tells him how happy he is to finally be working paid gigs. Stephen talks about tomorrow's project, a film with **ERIN FALTRACO** and **ANTHONY DUBOSE**, directed by Christian Light. The low budget gangster flick does not pay much, but at least Christian respects his small cast and crew enough to pay them, says Stephen. He also thinks that Erin, Anthony, and Christian are great actors. They are not.

Stephen, Erin, and Anthony (**THE TRIO**) meet with Christian in his home to review their latest scene, using the same computer Christian used when speaking with Frederick and Mohammed. They congratulate each other on a job well done, even though lines were missed and Christian likes doing everything in one quick take. The next morning Christian, Stephen, Anthony, and Erin meet in the woods to film. Christian's character is set to be murdered by Anthony, and Christian gives Anthony notes on how the scene should unfold. When Stephen films the scene though, Anthony accidentally strangles Christian to death. They almost call 911 for help, but the voice of reason is outvoted, as it always is with these three. Poor decisions are their thing.

After heated debate, the Trio decides that they cannot leave Christian's body in the woods. They drag the corpse back to the cars and retreat to Christian's home. At Christian's home they park his SUV in the connecting garage and shut the door. The frazzled trio debates how to dispose of Christian's body and decide they need additional help. Stephen and Anthony hastily create an online cast call for talent in the hopes of finding an actor they can manipulate into helping them. Erin protests, but they do it anyway, and audition reels start pouring in. Damian responds to the cast call, as it is a paying gig.

Elsewhere, Frederick and Mohammed have a video call with **JUDE (40)** to report that they have not heard from Christian. Jude despises their hiding in shadow when he does nothing to hide his face, calling them rude. He agrees to check on Christian.

Meanwhile, Stephen, Erin, and Anthony peruse the audition reels. They are enthralled with Damian's portrayal of Mr. Wolf from Pulp Fiction and are convinced he is the one they need, so they invite him to audition.

Before his audition Damian catches up with Mike at a coffee shop for a quick card game. He listens to Mike's plan on how to rob marijuana dispensaries through the post office where he works. Damian laughs and tells him he should be a screenwriter, but Mike says he is serious: to pull it off, all he needs are three idiots to use as patsies.

While waiting for Damian to arrive, Anthony, Erin, and Stephen simultaneously re-watch the footage of the scenes involving Christian's death and see a person in the background of the scene. This terrifies them. Back in the woods, Christian's lost shoe sits in the middle of a trail. Someone picks it up.

### **THE SEASON**

Damian acts out the Mr. Wolf scene for his audition and they take him to Christian's body. Realizing the body is real, Damian runs, but hits his head and is knocked out. When he awakes, he is held captive by the trio. Anthony suggests killing him, but everyone vetoes that, especially Damian, who promises to help them get rid of Christian's body in return for a favor from each of them, plus a single non-retaliatory bitchslap to each of them, that may occur without warning. They agree to his terms and Damian becomes their alpha.

They bury Christian on a beach. A storm rolls in and washes Christian out to sea. The same storm knocks out power to the area for two days. Jude searches for Christian. The FBI conducts a search for the suspects uploading snuff videos to the dark web. The power outage helps to narrow their search when the site goes down. Christian's body floats at sea.

To escape the power outage and take a break, Damian heads out of town. His car breaks down and he gets help from the **WAIT-WATCHERS**, a band of survivalists who mistake him for radical gubernatorial candidate **GROVER JAMES JACKSON**, known to his constituents as *The Real Florida Man*. They enlist his help in smuggling guns.

The Trio discovers Christian's dark web activity. Erin and Anthony try to distance themselves from any connections to Christian, but Stephen takes over Christian's online presence and bank account to keep him alive and insists on editing the film they were producing, which later gains recognition from a local film festival.

### **THE SERIES**

Anthony and Stephen are discovered by the **DARK WEB CONSPIRATORS** and are forced to work for **BIG MOMMA, (60)**, who turns out to be Anthony's grandmother. Damian and Mike persuade Erin to recruit Anthony and Stephen to perform the marijuana dispensary heist caper. Damian then persuades Mariel to pose as a prostitute to get picked up by the snuff movie guys so that he can expose them and save Stephen and Anthony. Eventually, the FBI moves in to investigate and find Christian. But he appears to be on the run through Stephen's online efforts to maintain that presence. Damian and the Trio eventually get caught up in trying to cover their tracks and all wind up on different paths leading away from each other.

## THE BREAKDOWN

**LOW BUDGET** is a sixty episode dramatic comedy with a series arc encompassing only six weeks.

In present day Florida, we focus a keen eye on novice filmmakers, dark web criminals, doomsday survivalists, and the manipulative traits of nearly everyone involved. We witness a transformative journey where honest people become criminals. While some rise to the level of monster, others turn into heroes.

It is a disturbing slice of the world where mystery, horror, and entertainment collide in a functioning model of alternative entertainment not suitable for children that makes you laugh through the fright.

Low Budget turns the tables on serial drama where situations resolve in a single show. The first thirteen one-hour episodes take five days to unfold. This is the long game, with twists and turns and compounding problems, where simple answers are lost to the peripheral, and anything can happen.

## THE MYTHOS

The Dark Web is not unknown, but is rarely seen. Not many people would believe that what happens there actually does. Dismissiveness, due to sheer unbelievability, drives the narrative into merely cautionary tales. But they are true.

Drugs. Guns. Murder for hire. Prostitution. It is all there. All that and more. You never know who is really involved or what they are into. Until they show you.

## THE STORY

The Florida low budget filmmaking scene is typical. Aspiring actors and auteurs struggle to create watch-worthy work. Mid-20's actor **DAMIAN LANE** laments at the unprofessionalism he runs into on every set. Looking up into the starry night sky he wishes, "Just give me something."

Meanwhile, across town, cameraman **STEPHEN CARPENTER** finds success in a narrative fiction about high school drug dealers. Stephen considers the lead actors, **ERIN FALTRACO** and **ANTHONY DUBOSE**, to be quite entertaining, and producer-director **CHRISTIAN LIGHT** to be straightforward and fair. Stephen considers them all to have exceptional talent. They do not.

But Christian pays for everything, including lunch, so Stephen shoots the film and everyone gets along. Until they film Christian's character getting killed. It is in the

script, but Anthony and Erin put extra force into the strangulation scene and kill him for real. Stephen gets it all on film.

In an absolute frenzy, not knowing what to do, and not calling 911, their poor decisions escalate as the day unfolds. They drag Christian's body to Christian's house, hide him in his garage, and decide to run a casting call to find an actor who will help them dispose of a body without knowing they are actually helping to dispose of a "real, live, dead body." Damian Lane answers that call.

Once coaxed into viewing the body, Damian realizes that it is real, and the Trio are killers. They confess to the accident. In a rush to escape, Damian stumbles, hits his head, and passes out. Revived a few minutes later, Damian attempts another escape. The Trio apprehend him and tie him to a chair. Anthony suggests killing Damian, but Damian rationalizes with them, and agrees to assist them in hiding Christian's body.

The power shifts from the Trio to Damian as they untie him. Damian knows he can manipulate them and becomes the alpha of the group. In disposing of Christian and poring through his computer and life, they stumble upon Christian's connection to the dark web.

They discover that Christian's job is to edit red room videos of people being tortured and killed. With Christian not answering calls, the **DARK WEB CONSPIRATORS** he reports to, come looking for him. To protect themselves, Stephen and Anthony are forced into film editing of real crimes and must take on Christian's job, or be killed.

Meanwhile, an **FBI CYBER CRIMES UNIT** investigating the red rooms finds the connection that may break the case wide open - the film editor: Christian Light. But Christian is missing.

Pursued by the FBI and the Dark Web Conspirators, the gang gets way more adventure than they expect. Gun running. Heists. Car chases. Break-ins. Kidnaps. UFOs. And Damian finally gets something different, plenty of chances to act.

Be careful what you wish for.

## STRUCTURE

The series arc of Low Budget will utilize classical five act structure. All characters' storylines will intertwine and affect each other character, leading to an absolute resolution in the end.

**ACT ONE (episodes 1 - 10)** will start with the accidental death of **CHRISTIAN LIGHT** and introducing **DAMIAN LANE** to the **TRIO (Stephen, Erin, and Anthony)** who forcefully enlist his help in hiding the body. Damian is bound to a chair and appeals for release with his tale of being an **ALIEN** abductee, and how he hates being tied up. Stephen buys his story that Erin and Anthony dismiss as a ruse. Upon release, Damian becomes the alpha of the group. In searching for answers about Christian, the Trio discover his work on the dark web, editing torture videos. **FREDERICK** and **MOHAMMED** (in Spain), unable to reach Christian, seek help from their Florida associate **JUDE**, because they must upload films for **BIG MOMMA**. Christian is buried in a shallow grave on a sandy beach. The Trio and Damian agree to keep their secret. A storm knocks out power to the region and Christian's body is washed out to sea. The blackout stalls an FBI investigation of whoever (Christian) is posting torture videos, and cuts off communication between the Dark Web Conspirators. Frederick and Mohammed, who have been holding a man they kidnapped, release him because they are unable to communicate with Christian. Christian was also the one who administered the secure connection between torturers and kidnappers. Without Christian, or at least what is on his computer, the scheme fails.

**ACT TWO (episodes 11 - 40)** is when power is restored to the region. Stephen dives into Christian's computer to learn all he can about him, steals his identity, and takes control of his bank account online. He erases everything and saves it to a hard drive that he hides. Stephen also begins editing the film they made before his death and enters it into a local film festival. When Damian's car breaks down, he gets assistance from the survivalist group, the **WAIT-WATCHERS**, who mistake him for a politician. To repay them, Damian agrees to smuggle guns to Tampa for them, on the condition of a favor when Damian calls. Damian then tells his friend (**COUSIN-IN-LAW** and postal worker) **MIKE** that the Trio are the right people to pull off Mike's postal truck heist (to steal cash from a cannabis shop) without knowing they are pulling a real heist. They will think they are making a film. The FBI closes in on Christian to arrest him, but finds only the Trio. They are interrogated and released. The FBI leaves town with no evidence, thinking that Christian gave them the slip. The Trio tell Damian about the FBI. They all confirm that nobody will talk about Christian, further cementing their bond. Jude and **TWO COHORTS** then come calling for Christian, taking Stephen and Anthony into custody and torturing them for information on Christian's whereabouts, warning them that they must talk or face Big Momma. They refuse to

talk and Big Momma is revealed to be Anthony's own grandmother **ABUELA**, who takes minimal pity, forcing them to edit red room videos. Damian and Mike sell Erin on the idea of the postal heist film. Erin agrees to get Anthony and Stephen to cooperate. Anthony and Stephen tell Damian and Erin about their predicament with the Dark Web Conspirators and Abuela. The group grows closer, and Damian is conflicted about setting them up for the postal heist. They hatch a plan to get the Dark Web Conspirators busted by the FBI by planting Mike's wife, budding actress **MARIEL LANE** (Damian's cousin) as a sadistic prostitute who wants to torture somebody. She is double crossed by Jude and the Cohorts and set up to be tortured herself. Damian calls in his favor from the Wait-Watchers to rescue Mariel.

**ACT THREE (episodes 41 - 50)** begins with Mariel's rescue by the Wait-Watchers, that sprawls into a melee; a gun battle that includes the FBI and the Dark Web Conspirators, due to a tip called in by the Trio and vague information about the whereabouts of Christian Light. The Cohorts are killed in the rescue operation, the Wait-Watchers get away clean, and the FBI now has more questions than answers. Mariel gets involved with the Trio and the postal heist, knowing that the Trio are the fall guys, Mike and Damian play supporting roles from a distance. To Damian's relief, the heist is a success, and his cousin Mariel and the Trio are safe. They now have \$160,000 in cash. It is decided that Damian will maintain the cash until the investigation cools down. Christian's body is found floating at sea, and dragged in by commercial fishermen. His body is identified by dental records and the FBI resumes their investigation. **SPECIAL AGENT LANA HUBER** follows her hunch about Stephen and puts surveillance on him. With the red rooms shut down, Abuela scolds Jude and brings Frederick and Mohammed to Florida to clean up his mess. Jude focuses on killing Anthony before distancing himself from Abuela. He finds Anthony and Erin. They run from him and a chase ensues, temporarily losing him, they tell Damian and Stephen about the pursuit. Knowing that he will not stop, they goad him into a trap. Anthony kills Jude to save Erin. While Stephen is being watched by the FBI, they spot Damian with him, and decide to pick up both of them for interrogation about Christian Light. As they are about to close in, Damian and Stephen disappear in a flash of light. They are abducted by **ALIENS**. It is revealed that Damian's abduction story was true. They have been abducting him for years and he has a relationship with them. While Stephen is in suspended animation, Damian discovers that the Aliens goal of abduction is recreationally catching and releasing people like tagged fish and accruing *points* (which are worthless) for doing so. Damian makes a deal with the Aliens to grant them *Earth Points*; in return for a favor. The FBI then investigates the execution of Jude, who they were also looking for, which leads them to arrest Abuela. Once they have Abuela, her family ties lead them back to Anthony.

**ACT FOUR (episodes 51 - 55)** reveals Stephen experiencing missing time. Damian tells him of their alien abduction. Frederick and Mohammed still do not know that Christian is dead, but they know that Abuela has been busted. If they can get Christian's computer, they can get the "keys" to the dark web that link the torture customers to the red rooms, and take over the business. They search for Christian, find Stephen, learn the truth, and negotiate with him to get the rooms back online, saying they will pay handsomely. Stephen tells them he needs to clear anything with his boss (Damian) first or nothing happens. Abuela's arrest makes the headlines and Anthony is a wanted fugitive. He and Erin are in the wind.

**ACT FIVE (episodes 56 - 60)** follows Frederick, Mohammed, Stephen, and Damian as they get the red rooms back online. Damian and Stephen are conflicted about it, but Damian has secret plans to destroy the red rooms once, and for all. Erin and Anthony are on the run, lay low, and travel by night as the FBI pursues them. They steal a boat and head toward the Bahamas. Damian uses a device he was given by the Aliens to summon them. The Aliens respond and capture Frederick, Mohammed, Stephen, and Damian. In the transfer to the Alien's ship, Mohammed is accidentally killed. Frederick is severely freaked out and scared and Damian orders him to get off the dark web and stop doing illegal things or he will end up like Mohammed. Frederick agrees. Stephen is sent home, Frederick is taken back to Spain, and Damian flies off with the Aliens. After a few days, Mike and Mariel steal the money from Damian's apartment and get on a plane for the Bahamas. The plane crashes right in front of the boat being sailed by Anthony and Erin. In the flotsam of the crash, bags of money bubble to the surface. They grab the bags, presumably living happily ever after. Stephen wins an award for his low budget film.

#### **~~TITLE AND STONE~~ STYLE AND TONE**

Low Budget is a comedy.

The story is driven by funny rapid-fire banter in extremely dangerous situations. There will be a constant sense of urgency; to run, to hide, to deceive, and misdirect. All of this while characters attempt to carry on with their daily lives, like family obligations, going to work, and other chores that get in the way of trying to navigate lawmen and bad guys while filming yourself committing a crime when you think you are only making a movie.

As ridiculous and absurd as the situations are, they will always be played with a serious edge, not looking for laughs, but getting them nonetheless.



The visual style will be like a stage play. A single camera, not shaky or handheld, will record long scenes with few cuts. We will not break the fourth wall or tell jokes for filler. Every line of dialogue serves a larger purpose that informs with backstory, characters' depth of emotion, and exposé.

The story is told in real time. Having only ten main characters will make the story easy to follow. Each one's arc will show a butterfly effect that impacts another character's journey. There will be only one flashback: a single episode dedicated to the origin story of how Abuela became Big Momma.

### **SCORE**

Original music will be haunting and follow the example of Peter and the Wolf by Sergei Prokofiev. Each character will be represented by an instrument. The music will inform us as to who the focus of every tense moment and chase sequence is. Popular songs, as when a radio plays in the background, will be used sparingly, and chosen to match the tone of the scene.

### **GENRE**

Drama.

At its core Low Budget is pure drama. Predicaments are life and death. Comedy flourishes as the natural by-product of the characters as they deal with extraordinarily tense and stressful situations.

Most characters understand the gravity of what they are involved in while others are clearly clueless. This dynamic plays to the audience in rooting for our protagonists at all times.

### **CHARACTERS**

#### **THE AUTEURS**

**DAMIAN LANE (25)** Handsome. Confident. Manipulative. An actor yearning for stardom who knows he is far from it. He is a dynamic chameleon with a flair for improv who sometimes dons an alias just for kicks. He can read people and play to their strengths and weaknesses to get his way. He is not prone to heroism, nor is he the bad guy. Damian is drawn to challenging roles and weird situations. He is level-headed and forward thinking, yet thrives when he gets a strange vibe, appearing extremely cool in high stress situations.

**STEPHEN CARPENTER (25)** Tall. Easy-going. Negotiable. Stephen likes everyone to get along, so he ends up mediating heated discussions, of which there are many. He wilts and fumbles when things get tense, nearly folding when the chips are down, but like Erin, loyal to a fault. He has a quiet side that leans into secrecy, so his poker face is solid.

**ERIN FALTRACO (20)** Pretty. Determined. Superstitious. An actor with high school chops, Erin is fearless and tough, sort of a loner, but loyal to those she associates with. She and Anthony know each other from high school but did not hang together there. They met afterwards on the low budget acting circuit and are not besties by any means. Stephen describes them as “frenemies.” She gets extremely focused under pressure and displays an icy cold temper when challenged.

**ANTHONY DUBOSE (20)** Sloppy. Impulsive. A follower. An actor who likes classic films, Anthony internally compares the world around him to movie scenes. Like Erin and Stephen, he goes with the flow of what is happening and is easily swayed into poor decisions. He acts fast, not thinking his actions through, sometimes needing to be talked out of things. He is bullheaded, and sticks to his decisions, no matter how dumb they are.

### **THE DARK WEB CONSPIRATORS**

**CHRISTIAN LIGHT (25)** is also an Auteur. He is the writer/producer/director/star of the low budget film that gets him killed, due to his own poor direction and miscommunication. To the other Auteurs, he seemed like a good guy, but in death, they discover his true hidden persona - that Christian edits torture and murder videos for a group of criminals who post them on the dark web. Christian’s computer holds the keys to the entire operation. He was not only a film editor, but also the go-between for the film producers, the customers (voyeurs), and the money launderers. His disappearance is the catalyst for the collision of worlds between the Auteurs and the Dark Web Conspirators.

**FREDERICK (35)** Tough. Edgy. Frederick is a kidnapper who finds victims to be tortured and killed. He films and uploads raw video to Christian for editing, then transfers it to the dark web. He is German, based in an undisclosed location in Europe, which may be Spain, France, or the United Kingdom. He does not torture or kill, but hosts the red rooms for customers (who pay to torture and kill).

**MOHAMMED (30)** Submissive. Works for Frederick. Also German. In addition to assisting Frederick in kidnaps and video captures, he helps clean the red rooms after the bodies are disposed of. *Bodies are taken away by a cleaning service.* He sometimes

mimics Frederick's harsh demeanor, but is more apt to step back and watch things unfold. He is a voyeur at heart, who fantasizes about killing, but would not.

**JUDE (40)** Florida man. Cheerful. Dangerous. Handles the money for the red rooms. He converts bitcoin into cash and launders it through legal marijuana dispensaries throughout Tampa Bay. Outwardly jovial, he is an enforcer for Big Momma, keeping her crew in order, making sure that all funds are accounted for. He also operates the local red room that Mariel is taken to.

**BIG MOMMA (ABUELA) (60's)** Small. Bossy. Anthony's grandmother. Abuela adopted the family business (based in Spain) in the 1980's when her brothers were killed by a rival gang. When she learned what happened, she put a hit on those responsible. She ordered they be tortured before being killed and required video as proof. Thus, the red rooms began. Once she found she could sell the snuff films, she organized it into a lucrative business. Her family has no clue about the red rooms. They only know of the small tomato farm in Spain that she successfully runs from her home in St. Petersburg.

#### **THE FBI**

**SPECIAL AGENT LANA HUBER (35)** Makes the Christian Light connection to the dark web red rooms.

**SPECIAL AGENT CRAIG LAVINE (40)** Partners with Lana when they travel to Tampa Bay to find Christian Light.

#### **FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

MARIEL LANE (DAMIAN'S COUSIN)

RAY (STEPHEN'S DAD)

MIKE (MARIEL'S HUSBAND)

DONNA (JUDE'S WIFE)

DOLLY (ERIN'S MOM)

ANTHONY'S FAMILY

DAMIAN'S PARENTS

#### **FRANCHISE POTENTIAL**

"LOW BUDGET" is more than the title of the show. Throughout the series, the phrase will be uttered at opportune moments by various characters to stress either disdain for something, as an insult, a derogatory comment, or in jest of a foul situation. It may be used just once or twice a season, but will become a catchphrase of daily life that encapsulates an authentic relatable feeling. Such as if a rental car or hotel room is improperly cleaned, or service is bad, if your job is not what you want it to be, or when

a person is rude or unkempt; any of these things may be simply described as “Low Budget” and we will know exactly what you mean. The term “Low Budget” will become instantly identifiable and weave itself into the fabric of real life. We will use this as a marketing tool for the show and sell stuff like T-shirts.

### CLARIFYING THE DEFINITION OF “LOW BUDGET”

Let us be clear: “LOW BUDGET” is not a term that is meant to denigrate the poor, indigent, or homeless. Making light of misfortune is cruel, and this is not our intent. We will not direct this insult towards those who have no budget, but instead, at those who do, or should.

### EXAMPLES

- A fellow shows up for his grandmother’s funeral wearing a tuxedo with flip flops. “Dude! That is low budget!”
- A traveler brings a big plastic shopping bag onto an airplane instead of using traditional luggage. “So low budget.”
- Your gourmet continental breakfast turns out to be a small bag of Cheetos, a Diet Sprite, and two Oreo cookies, and they are not even double-stuffed! “Super low budget!”

