

What the Concept Is: A feature-length film based on some of my true-life adventures and setbacks. The working title I’m using is *Propeller Head*. The life and times of a male American antihero (below, “hero”).

Born into a white, middle-class family, the hero is the oldest of three sons. Family in many ways typical – dad raised on a farm, mom inner-city and ethnic. Hero excels at school, is diagnosed as gifted, but family problems creep into his school life. He later starts college, drops out after two years, does a few road trips, finally finishes college. He applies to law school with an eye to becoming a trial lawyer, at a school which emphasizes science and technology law (things like patents, and explaining DNA evidence to juries). Law School Scenes: Montage sequence covers three years – then exit from montage, to scene wherein hero wins the law school’s moot court contest in his final year. He advances to a regional competition (Boston), but his moot court partner has an unreciprocated crush on him and causes a scene at the tournament. Next, we see the hero graduating from law school, but just barely – special procedures are required due to the hero’s indignantly flunking a class taught by a problem professor whom the law school had to fire.

Defining Incident 1: To pay rent while studying for the bar exam, hero takes a part-time job at a private ski academy for wealthy high-schoolers. Long story short, a rival instructor (stuffy, spoiled-brat nephew of a local judge) discovers hero was smoking marijuana (on a school rock climbing trip, in front of very weed-savvy kids on the freestyle ski team), and so informs the authorities. Hero passes the bar exam, but is questioned about the marijuana incident by a committee of bar admission deciders. A week later, hero receives a letter instructing him to not show up at the upcoming swearing-in ceremony for the local bar. [Montage:] The hero engages in extensive legal research. He drafts an appellate brief to the state supreme court, and files it. Along with his brief, he files a motion to correct the error-riddled (over 1,000 errors) in the hearing transcript. [Exit montage:] But a week later, he receives notice – “Motion Denied.” Clearly, the authorities just want him to dry up and blow away. But hero doggedly prepares to argue his appeal. His appellate hearing is later presided over by a chief justice, Brock, who seems sleepy. “Appeal denied.”

Defining Incident 2: Exasperated, the hero packs up his pickup truck and heads to Princeton University where he lives with Albert (a childhood friend / physics genius) and works for an eccentric professor of rocket science. While in Princeton, hero meets a woman from St. Louis and becomes involved. He follows her back to her hometown, works briefly for McDonnell-Douglas Aircraft, and soon lands a job negotiating information technology contracts for Anheuser-Busch (aka “The Giant Beer Company”). Two interesting scenes occur at the beer company. In one, a co-worker discovers a security flaw in a popular web browser; he and hero deal with the nervous vendor (Netscape Corp.) while their bosses are away at a conference. In another, the hero’s boss freaks out and loses his composure after mistakenly thinking that the hero is being questioned by senior executives (on “the ninth floor”) about his (boss’s) job performance. Boss lays low for awhile, then lets hero go as a way to try and save face. Hero departs, is later hired as webmaster at a medical school. As webmaster at the med school, one day hero is cobbling together various “widgets” for the site, one of which is a scrolling news ticker (receives a news feed from media sources and displays it on the website). Suddenly, when testing the news ticker code, one of the first stories he sees crawling across the ticker is a CNN article about his old nemesis, Justice Brock – the same NH judge who’d presided over his bar admission hearing. Brock, it seemed, was being impeached by the NH state legislature for alleged corruption – the first time that had happened to a state supreme court chief justice since 1790.

Defining Incident 3: On a slow work day, hero sends an e-mail to a local FOX News reporter he likes. A few days later he gets a guarded response and in her reply e-mail she asks him if he can acquire a certain university student’s e-mail “to help her out on a news story” (student had allegedly e-mailed a threat to

an NHL hockey player). Hero writes back to explain why that would be improper, but adds that he'd love to take her out for coffee and chat about it. She responds by lowering the boom – she's involved with someone else romantically. Miffed that she tried to suborn him to commit a crime, the hero publicizes the reporter's request that he hack someone's e-mail account for FOX. He posts it on his personal (blog) site, and soon meets an old, disgruntled former FOX affiliate cameraman who'd taken it upon himself to start up the domain name "fox2news.com" but failed to interest his bosses in the newfangled Internet stuff. Hero buys the domain name from him, in a hole-in-the-wall coffee bar, and sets about using it to draw attention to the local FOX reporter's misdeed. For the next two years, hero trades correspondence with FOX's legal department, using his knowledge of trademark law and parody to stymie FOX's efforts to wrest the domain name from him. Eventually FOX hires someone to approach the hero and put a stop to it. One day, hero's landlady warns him that some men had come by looking for him. A few days later he answers a knock on his front door (in "Dogtown"). A large man in a three-piece suit strides forward, accompanied by another "suit" and a uniformed local police officer. The large man moves his hand forward with a business card, but the gesture is more like a fencer thrusting a sword – the card indicates that he's a forensic psychologist attached to some sort of firm that undertakes behavioral assessments. An hour-long interview ensues, during which the policeman looks bored and the psychologist's assistant takes notes. At some point, the hero calls out the field psychologist for trying to intimidate him rather than interview him. Eventually the odd delegation departs, and later the hero voluntarily assigns his rights in the domain name over to FOX (in a document using Crayola crayons in large font). Flash forward: Hero is reading news stories on the Internet. He sees the FOX-hired psychologist's name mentioned in multiple breaking stories about alleged torture of captured enemy combatants by American CIA personnel. Hero continues digging, files a FOIA request with the CIA, and verifies that FOX News had paid one of the CIA's top experts in counterterrorism (SES-level, head of the CIA Behavioral Sciences Directorate, and attached to President GWB's little-known Counterintelligence Field Activities Unit) to "moonlight" for private pay in an ill-conceived attempt to cover up the FOX reporter's clumsy attempt at subornation. Hero's further research reveals that the CIA moonlighter had visited him just a few weeks prior to 9/11, a time when (according to the famous 9/11 Report) "chatter was way up, all summer long" – they couldn't have picked a worse time to lure a CIA expert away from his official duties – but the main takeaway is that FOX Corp. Legal was floating a "he's harassing our lady reporter" lie to cover up reprehensible corporate behavior, ironically (as we later learn) when sexual harassment was allegedly occurring at FOX's own corporate HQ.

Ending (open; here's one possibility): Hero opens letter telling him his medical marijuana license request was approved. He takes a big toke from his high-tech Volcano[®] vaporizer and wistfully posts a news article (from *High Times*) on Facebook. Headline: "[Most Ethics Boards Rule In Favor of Lawyers Smoking Weed](#)". Another possibility: Hero opens e-mail telling him his software invention has been successfully patented.

I should be the one to make this project because: the storyline is based on my true-life experiences and I've shepherded a lot of legal evidence for it (as "backup"). Add'l details available at: jonathanburdick.com

Now is the right time to make this project because: the storyline leverages public interest in three very timely social topics: (1) medical marijuana; (2) sexual harassment, specifically vis-à-vis Newscorp Corp. (FOX News), in a way which dovetails with recent news coverage and film projects (e.g., the Showtime series *The Loudest Voice*, and the film *Bombshell*); and (3) public debate regarding the CIA's use of torture.

The number one thing I need to take this project to the next step is: a dedicated Executive Producer.

A rough estimate of an expected budget: is US \$3 - \$4 million (pro forma estimate) in production costs.