

## AN INTERVIEW WITH HEATH CORSON

By Neal Havener



Richie Keen, Jackson Rathbone (“Twilight” series, “Aim High”) and Heath Corson at the WGAs

Photo by Jamie Latta

Award-winning writer/producer Heath Corson is on a roll. “Knock on wood,” he adds.

Although his critically acclaimed digital series “Aim High” (co-written with Richie Keen) just won a WGA Award (for outstanding achievement in writing for new media), *and* he’s writing a live-action pilot for Cartoon Network, *and* a feature for Warner Brothers, *and* developing an action/comedy for Fox Television, *and* has another dozen projects brewing at any given time, well ... perhaps his Midwest background keeps him from getting too cocky.

Corson, a Chicago native, sat down with us at NAPTE 2012, in Miami Beach, where “Aim High” garnered yet more praise, including a Digital Luminary Award (which honors innovation in the ongoing content revolution).

Q: So, after graduating from Northwestern, you went straight to Hollywood to “make it big”?

A: “No, I was in Chicago for about eight years, working in theater, as a writer-producer, a director, I did a bunch of theater for years and years and years, and sort of honed my craft there, and then I ended up selling something *from* Chicago, which was an adaptation of a stage show that I did.

“It turned out that the people who owned the rights to that show - to that character - flew people in to see the show, loved it, and were like ‘We’d like you to pay you to write the cartoon for it’ and I was like ‘That’s amazing! Great!’ So then I did that, and they run it every year on Cartoon Network. So that’s really cool. It’s called ‘Scary Godmother’s Halloween Spooktacular.’

“That was the thing that made me go, ‘Well, maybe I’ll try it in Los Angeles, maybe I’ll see what I can do.’ So I moved to Los Angeles, now, I think nine years ago ... and I thought ‘Omigosh, everyone’s gonna to be super excited that I’m here.’ But, they don’t care, I mean, that’s the thing, just nobody gave a shit -- and then the movers stole my stuff - the mover stole my stuff from cross country.

“I found myself in an apartment in Studio City, with a desk, a bed that I bought, a laptop computer, and nothing else. So, because it was so pitiful I used to go this

coffee shop every day and just sit there and work because I was like 'What am I gonna do?,' like, 'This is embarrassing.'"

Q: And then?

A: "And then I ended up selling a screenplay with a guy that I met at the coffee shop! So I wrote it, and he was like, 'Well, I used to be a development executive, we could sell this' and I was like 'No.' He took me to a place and he's like 'Tell him what it's about' and I pitched it to the guy, and literally I had maybe 25 pages written, and the guy goes 'Yeah, we could raise, like a half million dollars, and make this.' And this is 2003, mind you, when you could still do that.

"And so they bought it, and the guy goes, 'When is it gonna be ready?' and my partner goes, 'Oh, you'll have it in a week.' So I had a week to finish writing a screenplay, and deliver it. Then it took six months, basically, to put everything together, and it was horrible. Like, the financier came to town, and like took over, and they fired the director and they got a new director, and the director re-wrote me, and it was crazy. The thing literally shut down on the third day of shooting.

"So that was my 'Welcome to Hollywood.' That was my grad school in Hollywood. Very interesting. *Ve-ry* interesting."

Q: What happened after that?

"I did a short film with a buddy of mine, who wanted to direct, and the two of us wrote it together, and he (Richie Keen) directed it. It was called "Hooked", it went to the HBO Aspen Comedy Festival, did really well there. We ended up getting some blind script deals off of that, for television, and since then it's been really good. And that was the guy who I wrote 'Aim High' with -- we were friends in college."

"We had written some sketches together for the big show at Northwestern, called 'Waa-Mu.' He moved out to L.A., I stayed in Chicago, and then like eight, nine years passed. When I moved out to L.A., we sort of hooked back up and started talking. For like four months we wrote the short together, and we just had the greatest time writing together again.

“That led to the blind script deal, and a pilot for Fox, and so then we just kept doing stuff together, and it was great. It was just sort of a natural, organic partnership that we both really enjoyed.”



Corson and Keen at the WGA Awards (photo by Jamie Latta)

“We both grew up in Chicago, Richie from the suburbs, and I’m from the city, so we have a similar sort of background, a similar sort of history, but we also like pretty radically different things. Richie loves, you know, he’s a student of like teen drama. I’m a genre guy, I love the spy stuff, I love the superhero stuff, and when we bring our sensibilities together it’s really fun.”

Q: How does writing with a partner work? What’s the process?

A: “We do a pretty elaborate outline even for pitches, and then we outline even more when we’re moving forward. Because typically you have an outline step, which means that whoever bought your piece needs to OK your outline, so that’s the first thing.

“When we’re working on something, we sit down every single day pretty much – usually not the weekends unless we’re in crunch time – but we’ll sit down every day for at *least* an hour and a half, sometimes two hours at a time, longer if we’re writing. And if we’re outlining, we just brainstorm, we bring ideas to the table, we tell a lot of personal stories, trying to get to the emotional core of what we’re dealing with.

“Like, I’ll go, ‘You know, one of my greatest fears growing up in Middle School was that my parents would forget to come pick me up from school, and one day it happened. I was out at 4:30, and my Mom wasn’t there, and she didn’t come to pick me up until 6:30, and nobody was around, and it was dark, and I was sitting there, and I was so mad at her and I wouldn’t talk.’

“And we were looking for a moment between a mother and daughter character, and I was like, ‘What if we have that moment in their history? What if we see that?’ And the next moment that we were trying to get to is a revenge moment, where the daughter says ‘I’m gonna do something like that to you now.’ And now the Mother’s standing there, waiting for the daughter, and she realizes ‘Oh, she’s not coming because of what I did.’

“We tell each other a lot of stories, we know our histories, we end up sort of going down every single possible road in order to find the right one, or the good one, or the best one -- and then that sort of falls into the outline.

“But when we write, we end up doing ‘two bodies, one keyboard’, which is really the worst possible way you could do it. It really is. It’s horrible, like it takes forever. But that’s the way we do it.”

Q: Do you outline based on, like, “Rising Action, Midpoint, Climax” – that kind of thing?

A: “No. Well, like, we’ll track the plot and character arcs. So, we’ll say, ‘We need a three-beater to start the story line.’ Like, in the boyfriend storyline (on a current project), we know that we want him to ask her to homecoming, so the first beat has gotta be ‘He doesn’t like her’, the second beat has gotta be ‘What is it that she does that catches his attention?’ and the third beat is ‘Why does he finally ask her to homecoming?’

“So, we know we need these beats, we know that like, ‘OK, well, if we’ve got a three-beater to get to that, it would be nice to put one in Episode One, Two and Three.’ And then we work to find those, and then that gets laid into the plot. We go, ‘Alright, well she’s investigating in Episode Two, how do we have him catch her eye? Oh, you know, it’d be fun, what if during study hall she literally climbs out the window, and he sees her working outside in the alley, like on her Blackberry, and he’s like ‘Who the hell *is* this girl?’ and now all of a sudden the girl who he’s never noticed is really attractive to him.

“So, that’s where we start. We go, ‘What’s the most interesting version of her catching his eye, and what can she be doing that she doesn’t know she’s catching his eye?’ So, it’s that kind of stuff.

“We say, ‘Alright, we’re setting up this beat. What’s the most interesting *place* to do it, what’s the most interesting *way* to do it, how does it fit for our characters, how does it fit in their history, and if you’ve got ‘girl who no-one ever noticed, who all of a sudden, the most popular guy in school is going to notice,’ what’s a fun way to do that?’”

Q: Have you partnered with writers other than Richie Keen?

A: “Yes. I’m writing an animated movie for Warner Brothers with my buddy Austin Winsburg (“Gossip Girl”, “Jake in Progress” etc.), and that’s completely different. Austin likes to work over food, so we tend to like, eat lunch and then, you know, whatever we don’t get done in lunch, we have to go sit in somebody’s living room, and just talk and brainstorm and try to get to the bottom of stuff.”

Q: What are the advantages of working with a partner?

A: “The greatest thing about working with a partner is there’s always someone to talk to, there’s always someone to bounce an idea off of, and that’s great. So often when you’re writing by yourself it can feel like you’re in a void -- you have no idea if it’s good, you have no idea if it’s bad, like it becomes really hard.

“But you’ve got to do it a lot, that’s the thing, and some days it’s hard, and some days it’s not there, and you just gotta push through that ... We sit down, when we’re working, pretty much every single day, and I would say you’ve gotta do that. You’ve gotta sit down and be with that person *every single day* and that’s a challenge.

“Richie and I spent so much time with each other that he would go, ‘I should ask you what kind of haircut you think I should get – because you spend more time looking at it than I do.’”

Q: Do you ever argue about where to take a story?

A: “We disagree about stuff all the time, it’s just negotiating. It’s, ‘Well, can we get to this?’, or he’ll go, ‘No, I don’t think we need that,’ and then he’ll explain why we don’t. Or he’ll go like, typically, ‘Gimme an example where that works,’ you know, ‘Well, what movie have you seen where that has happened?’ and I go, ‘Well, I was thinking it’s a lot like ‘Thelma and Louise’ and he goes, ‘Oh, OK, now I get what you’re doing.’

“Or he’ll go, ‘No, it’s like ‘Back to the Future’ where we’re doing this, and you think it’s this, and then we loop back around and we see it in another context.’

“It becomes like anything, I mean, it’s a marriage, it really is a marriage, it becomes about compromise. It’s like you gotta be real clear about communication. You gotta say ‘Here’s why I really like this’ -- it’s not just like, ‘I’m right, you’re wrong’ – it’s gotta be, ‘This is why I think this is a good idea, and it’s because I like this, this and this. And even if we don’t do this exact thing, is there a way to get to this feeling, or this moment, or this emotion?’ And he’ll go ‘I see what you mean, I totally get it.’ Or he’ll go, ‘You know what, I disagree.’

“I pitched a moment at the end of this piece that we’re working on right now, where the characters, we think they’ve grown and grown and grown, and then at the end we see that one character has a *major* slideback, and basically betrays the other character, and that sat badly with Richie. He was like, ‘I don’t that we should do that. I don’t like it.’

“He was like, ‘I don’t think it’s good for the ending,’ ‘cause we were looking for a cliffhanger and I was arguing, ‘Oh no, it’s a great cliffhanger because we’re going ‘Oh my God, how could she do that?’ You know, she totally screwed her.’ And he’s like, ‘No.’

“So we’re still at that moment. We got to the point where we’re like, ‘You know what, we need to come back to that, because we just aren’t seeing eye-to-eye, and we’ll either come up with something better, or go one way or the other.’”

Q: Do you have a rule about not objecting to something unless you have a better idea?

A: “No, sometimes we’ll just obsess about the one idea, and dissect it to death. And say ‘Here’s why I like it’ and he’ll say, ‘Here’s why I don’t like it’ and it’s not necessarily about pitching a better idea, it’s just ‘Here’s why this one doesn’t ring true to me’ – I mean, in the end, it really is a marriage.

“Any sort of partnership, creatively, is a marriage, you’ve got to fight for what you believe in, but also realize that there’s another creative person who cares just as much as you do, fighting for what they believe in.

“And there are some fights that aren’t worth dying for – you know what I mean? There are some fights that you gotta go, ‘You know what, you obviously care about this more than I do, and this isn’t a big deal to me, so let’s try it that way, the way that you’re saying.’ So there’s always that. You know, pick your battles I would say. In a creative partnership, pick your battles.”

Q: So, for the aspiring writers out there -- Do they need to get an agent right away?

A: “I would say, if you are someone who is pursuing the business somehow in L.A., it is not worth your time to chase an agent. That is not something you should be doing. Representation will come out of the woodwork when you need them.

“The thing you need to be doing off the bat is do the work, because they will come when the work is done. You don’t need someone right now, because you don’t have any work. You don’t have any way for them to make any money off of you -- right?

“Consider that agencies, managers, take ten percent of what it is you make -- because they do ten percent of the work. Ninety percent of your career is on you. And that has never stopped being true for me. I feel that I am totally, fully responsible for my own career -- at all times.

“Now, there are some times when you need an agent, sometimes when you need a manager, sometimes when you need a lawyer, but I gotta say, you just move through the world as you’re going to move through the world. To *wait* for people means you’re waiting for someone to do ten percent of your work and I don’t think you need to do that.”

Q: So, you can get in to pitch without an agent or manager?

A: “Yes. It *is* do-able. You know what, with good material, good material - people will always find it, so when you have good material, you give it to everybody, you know? But it takes a while to make it, it takes a while to do it, it

takes a while to get it right. So keep doing it, you know, keep making it, keep doing stuff.

“And eventually you get to the point where you can give it to people, and you give it to everybody -- once you feel good about it. Like, that’s the thing. I always tell people – ‘I’m gonna assume that you’re very talented – because I don’t know any different. I’m gonna assume that you’re talented, I’m gonna assume that you know what you’re doing.’ Once you have good material, give it to everybody and eventually it will get in the hands of the right people. That’s the only way to do it, you know? And then eventually you’ll find somebody.

“But, yeah, you can pitch stuff. You can find people that’ll hear stuff, you can find people that you can send stuff to, you know, friends of friends – people that, you know -- ask everybody if they’ll read your stuff.”

Q: And what about taking notes from these people?

A: “There’s a sensibility that like, at first, when you’re first starting out, you’ll go ‘They don’t know what they’re talking about.’ But, if you hear the same note from a number of people – is there something there?

“When someone gives you a note that means that they are invested in their opinion, and there is something about it that didn’t land for them. Now if it’s a taste thing, that’s a taste thing – there’s no getting around a taste thing. If there is a disconnect in the story or in the character or in the flow somehow, that is something that is worth looking at.

“Now, you’re never gonna please all the people all the time – but, you can certainly make sure that you are landing things that didn’t land, and if someone didn’t like a character that you expected them to like, there’s a problem in the machinations of that character.

“Or, if they weren’t happy with the way it ended, there’s a problem with how you laid out the plot, and how you told the story, you know what I mean? So I’m not saying every note is valid, I’m saying that every note has something behind it that you might wanna look at.”

Q: Do you think you should think in terms of marketability before embarking on a project?

A: “Well, yes and no. I mean, you go where your love is, you know. Something that has passion behind it is always better than something that’s been planned out to get sold somewhere – you know what I mean?”

“Like no-one ever says ‘Oh, this is gonna be a great script to sell and make a *ton* of money and everyone’s gonna love it,’ it’s like it’s gotta come from ‘This a great script because *I* think it’s a great script.’ ... So, I would encourage you to continue to do that, you know, make the stuff that you *love* ... and that (marketability) will follow, you know?”

Q: What do you think about screenwriting books that suggest specific things need to happen on a specific page – that there is a screenwriting formula?

A: “I would say those road maps are for a commercial film. If you wanna be doing an independent movie that is not subscribing to a Hollywood structure, you can do whatever you want - because no one goes into an independent film expecting the same kind of experience. If you want something to be treated as if it’s a commercial screenplay, then yes, those are watermarks that really should be met.

“There are ways to do that, and play in that sandbox, that break all structures of convention -- but still do that. If you look at writers like, just to pull a name out of the air – Charlie Kaufman and ‘Adaptation’ – fantastic - a screenplay that mocks the screenplay structure, even as it gives you exactly what the screenplay structure is -- in a very smart way.

“So, there are ways to do it, but I would tell you, if that’s the path you’re taking, then ‘Yes.’ If you wanna raise a million dollars and make your own movie and make it do whatever it wants it to be, then ‘No’, you can have a hundred pages of someone staring at their belly, you know?”

Q: What about a formula for a TV series?

A: “Well, here’s the thing – Every medium is at the mercy of its own limitations. For instance, what I mean by that is television, one hour of television, has a five

act structure because they needed somewhere to put the commercial breaks – there’s no other reason, *really*, it’s not like people go ‘No, one hour really needs to be driven by five-act structure,’ like ‘We love five-act structure’ – That’s not the truth.

“The truth is ‘Every eight minutes we need to have a commercial break, so you only get five eight minutes in this time, and that’s it - period.’ So, you need to tell that story in those five acts, that’s basically it.

“That is not the case with digital – You can do whatever you want with digital - if people will watch it, you know? ‘Aim High’ took four years to make, so over that course of time, it went from, at one point, the show was going to be fourteen 5-minute episodes. Eventually it became six 11-to-15-minute episodes, because we were like, ‘Well, we can now push the bleeding edge of that’ and then, when we released it, people were saying ‘Why is it only fifteen minutes, we want more.’

“So, it’s very interesting, I don’t think there is a hard-and-fast rule anymore, nobody’s saying ‘It can only be this and that’s it.’ I think you can do whatever you want. You’re not under the same limitations as broadcast television, because you don’t need to take a break every eight minutes, and I think that media that does do that, just out of the reflex, going like ‘Well, we’re television, so we take a break every eight minutes’ you sort of go – ‘Well wait. Why is that? Why are you doing that? You’re just doing it because you think you’re supposed to be doing it, but the truth is you could do whatever you wanted with it.’

“If there were people who would watch, you know, an hour’s worth of content, once, straight, all the way through, then do that, if it’s interesting and compelling and they love it. Why not?”

Q: What’s the difference between working in the broadcast vs. the digital realm?

A: “Listen, there’s only two reasons to be in digital, and that’s either to make money, or for the creative freedom -- and there’s really *no* money, so for me, it’s the creative freedom to be able to do stuff that gets around the networks, and the studios, and the production companies, because they’re not watching as hard as they would with television.

“You know, my partner Richie and I, when we did ‘Aim High’ -- we spec’ed ‘Aim High’-- we wrote it as a script because we thought ‘We are *never* going to be better at doing something like ‘Modern Family’ than Steve Levitan, so they’re always going to go to those guys first.

“Why don’t we create something that isn’t any of that, that breaks the rules, that is what WE like to tell, and instead of trying to figure out what these guys want , and you know, like ‘We’ll make another show like ‘Modern Family’ so when you rip that off we’re your guys’, it’s like instead of doing that, why don’t we make something that they didn’t *know* they wanted, that breaks the mold, that’s so noisy, that people go, ‘Holy Shit, what is this?’

“Like, literally, we wrote this script with the intention of having people read it go ‘We can’t put this on TV, but did you read it?!’ I mean, this is a high school hit man for the U.S. government. The whole idea is that the kid, like, is shooting people, like ‘What the fuck?!’

“And that is exactly what happened. Television was like, anyone who wanted to do a spy show wasn’t gonna do a teenage show, and anyone who wanted to do a teenage show didn’t wanna do a spy show, and the fact that it landed in digital was because of the writer’s strike.

“So the writer’s strike hit, and the only people who could buy were digital, because they weren’t covered under the parameters, so it landed there. A friend of mine who was at Warner Brothers read it, and was like ‘This is great - who’s doing anything with it?’ and *nobody* wanted it. And we were like ‘Let’s do something.’

“So it ended up at (Warner Brothers) digital, and then they hooked us up with McG’s company, Wonderland, and things started moving from there, and even then – one of my favorite quotes in the world is, I heard Matthew Weiner speak a while ago, and he goes ‘I wrote the script for ‘Madmen’ and BOOM (snaps his fingers), seven years later we were on the air.’ So, to steal that -- ‘We literally wrote the script for ‘Aim High’ and BOOM (snaps his fingers), four years later it was on the web.’ I mean, that’s just a reality.

“But, what’s interesting about digital is that you have the same access to the audience that I have, and just because I did something with Warner Brothers doesn’t make it any better, or more interesting. It just means that they have more money to put behind it, or market it, but if you made something that was as equally compelling or interesting, threw it on YouTube, you could get an audience as well. You know, through social media, through Twitter, through Facebook, you could drive that to people if it was amazing, if it was equally as good, so that’s the sort of democratization of the medium that I think is really interesting.”

Q: What are you working on now?

A: “I’m writing a pilot for Cartoon Network, which I’m really excited about, which is live action actors and CGI environments, and it’s ‘Breakfast Club’ meets ‘Lost in Space’ so that’s really exciting. And that’s called ‘Spaced Out.’ I’m doing a movie for Warner Brothers, which is really exciting, and Richie and I sold another digital project, and that’s really fun, so that’ll be probably a 90-to-110 minute project which is, uh, think ‘Gilmore Girls’ meets ‘Midnight Run’—so it’s a mother-daughter bounty hunter team. And I’m doing an action-comedy for Fox, Fox TV Studios - that I just sold, so we’ll see what happens with that. Life is good right now. Yeah, things are good. Knock wood.”

Q: So, were these projects written on spec?

A: “I don’t think any of these were written. I have a treatment that I pitch off of, which is about four to six pages, and it lays out the world of the show, lays out the characters, lays out, like a pitch on the first pilot episode and that’s basically it.

“So, when I have pitch meetings, I go in and I walk ‘em through the show, and the best thing that can happen is that they – well, not the best - but they buy a script off that pitch, and then when the script comes in, they say if they want to put any money behind it to make a pilot, and if the pilot does well, they might greenlight it to series, and so that’s sort of the way it works.”

Q: How many projects do you work on simultaneously?

“I find that you have to have at least like a dozen projects all going at the same time in order to sell one of them. And it takes a while, so if you’re going to make any money, you have to have a lot of them sort of all churning at the same time in order for something to land.”

Q: If they like the pitch, how long will you have to write the script -- what’s a realistic turn-around time to finish it?

A: “Well, it sort of depends on me. Also, the deal usually takes anywhere from two to six months to close? So even when they buy it, it never is very fast. So I just had a project – the Cartoon Network – took easily five months to close. And then we had their meeting, and then I said I could get them a script in probably like two and a half weeks, first draft, and it’s looking like it’ll probably be three.

“But you can pretty much dictate what it is you need. You could say like ‘I need a month’ and they’ll go ‘OK, great.’ If you go like, ‘Oh I need five months’ they’ll be like, ‘No.’”

Q: Do you have any pitching advice? Is it OK to read from a script?

A: “I don’t have a problem with that – now, I stay off the page, which means I’m familiar enough with the material, but I do hold it, I do keep it, I do carry it into the room. My advice is they want you to do *great* – so whatever you need to do *great* – bring that in with you. And if that means, like, ‘Oh I get nervous if I memorize the whole thing’ – *don’t do that*. You know, ‘Oh I have to –’ you know, whatever it is – *do that thing*, so that it’s great.

“I know writers who bring in their pages and stay on the page and read it, and that’s a real flat way to do it, like if you can’t perform it, or talk about it, without it being written out, then do that. I know some people who just do bullet points.

“Here’s my biggest piece of advice for pitches – whatever your show is, or movie, or whatever it is – your pitch should be. Meaning, if it’s a comedy, the pitch better be funny. If it’s a drama, it better be dramatic, you better find a dramatic way to tell it, you better have dramatic moments, there better be ‘Oh shit’ moments, where the audience is like ‘Oh no, what’s gonna happen?’

“If you don’t have those things, they will *never* trust you to write a script. If you’re not funny, and the pitch isn’t funny, and it’s supposed to be a comedy, they’re *never* gonna give you money to write a script.”

Q: What do you think about using props, costumes – that sort of thing?

A: “I don’t think you need to that. Listen, when I pitch with Richie, we write dialogue. We play out characters. Like I’ll do one voice, he’ll do another voice, we’ll do sample dialogue in a scene. I used to be an actor, I do not do it any more, and it hasn’t been for like ten years.

“But, we’ll like act out stuff, you know, and that’s really fun. So, you know, you just do what works for you. That’s what I can say for a pitch meeting. Also, keep it under, at most twenty minutes, fifteen is a great way to shoot. Leave ‘em with questions, leave ‘em wanting to know more, leave ‘em, like, with ideas. And if they ask you something that you don’t know, don’t be afraid to go ‘I don’t know, we can figure that out in series.’”

Q: Are there screenwriting books you recommend?

A: “I love Christopher Vogler books about the writer’s journey, which are basically screenwriting with the hero’s journey. That is something that is extremely influential to me. I was a big fan of the Bill Moyer’s look at ‘The Hero’s Journey’ and ‘Hero with a Thousand Faces’ and basically all of those things, the Joseph Campbell stuff. So then to have a screenwriting book that basically lays out the Campbell arc by page numbers was amazing, it was perfect.

“There was another book that I loved called ‘Conversations with my Agent’ by Rob Long. I read that one when I was younger, and I *really* liked that, it was very interesting insight into the business.

“There was also a book I read called ‘Created By’, which was about show creators, that I always thought was very interesting, because you realize that there is no one certain way to do it, nobody does it the same way. And that’s certainly interesting too. So, those three I would say are great.”

Q: Do you think aspiring writers should move to L.A.?

A: “Should they move to L.A.? Let me say this – if you want to do digital, you don’t have to move to L.A. If you want to be in the television or film industry, you need to go to Los Angeles, because I would say, sadly enough, forty percent of what I do is writing. Most of what I do is meeting people, talking to people, going to meetings.

“You go and meet with someone, for the first time, even if you love that idea, and you think it’s a fucking rock star of an idea, you’re not gonna sell that idea. The possibility of you selling that idea is very, very slim. What you are doing is auditioning to come back in.

“The next time you get in front of that person might be six months, might be nine months, might be twelve months. But, you get to come back in and pitch something else. Your ability to sell that idea might be a little bit more. And when you come back around, it might be three months, it might be six months, it might be nine months, and let’s say it’s nine months, and now it *might be a little bit better* that you get to sell that idea.

“So it is a *huge* process, I would say that my personal cycle, I would say it takes three years for something to finally sell. So you’ve gotta want it, you’ve gotta *be* there, you’ve gotta actually – I don’t think you could sell something flying out to L.A. and spending a month pitching something and then leaving. That’s my experience. People might be able to do it. There’s you know, people break every rule. That’s not the way that I can do things.

“You know, I found that it’s about pounding the pavement, making connections, learning who the players are, meeting people, getting to be friends with people, having them read stuff that they like, having you go in and talk to them. Even if they like you, and they’re hot on you, and they’re like ‘Omigod we wanna do something’ and you go ‘Here’s my idea’, and they go -- ‘Yeah, not that one!’ ... and you go, ‘OK.’

“That’s just the way it works. So, yes, I think you need to be in L.A. if that’s what you wanna do.

“I didn’t want to do it for a long time, I wanted to do theater, so I didn’t have to be there. And when I finally did, I was like – you know, us Midwest guys, it’s like ‘I dunno, can I really make it on the national stage? I’m just a Midwest guy.’

“It took me a *lot* to get over that. It took me a lot to finally go, ‘Oh, I’m good at what I do. Oh, that’s right, I can, I can do this’ and get that esteem to go ‘Why not me? My stuff’s as good as anybody else – Why not me?’

“You know, it’s not easy for us Midwesterners, you know, we don’t wanna rock the boat, we don’t wanna push ourselves, if they find out about me, that’s great – and it took a lot to go ‘No no, wait, let me step up and be that guy.’ “

Q: Any final words?

A: “Is this helpful at all? This is one man’s opinion, like, I don’t pretend to know anything.”