



STORY DEPARTMENT **COVERAGE**

TITLE: THE MIRACULOUSLY ASTOUNDING BARNSTORM BILLY

AUTHOR: Michael King (CLIENT)

GENRE: Drama / Adventure

TYPE/DRAFT/PAGES: Screenplay/ First Draft / 115 pages

VIA:

STUDIO/NETWORK: N/A

PRODUCTION COMPANY: N/A

SUBMITTED FOR: General Consideration

PRODUCER: N/A

DIRECTOR: N/A

TALENT: N/A

PROJECT STATUS: N/A

COVERAGE REQUESTED BY:

READER: Ross Richie

CONCEPT: Two kids team up with a WWI pilot to find their father. Along the way, they learn the pilot isn't the hero they thought he was, as their father tries to take down a mobster. The kids, the pilot, the father, and the mobsters converge - the bad guys are taken out and the kids reunited with dad.

Script: Strong Consider
Writer: Strong Consider

THE MIRACULOUSLY ASTOUNDING BARNSTORM BILLY - Screenplay by King

SUMMARY: ROY writes a letter to his kids, who never get it. Roy's sons, Walter (9) and CHARLEY (5), live in his farm with their aunt CLARISSA. When they go into town and Charley longs to watch the adventures of the Miraculously Astounding Barnstorm Billy, Walter notices Clarissa drop a letter, which is from Roy. Stealing it for his own, he reads it, finding out that his father has been writing them for years and sending money. Charley finds the tin Clarissa keeps the cash - For her own - and the stash of letters. The kids light out to find BARNSTORM BILLY, their hero, and ask him to help them find their father. Billy's disinterested until he discovers that the kids have cash. He helps them into his plans and flies off. Meanwhile, the loquacious SHIFTY leads a band of thugs including CRUSHER, a hulk, CLUMP, a moron, and the mousy STINK, who intend to find Billy and take him in for the money he owes.

They intercept Billy and the boys when they land to get gasoline. The kids take refuge in a barn and find a motorcycle there, driving to freedom. They hop a train to elude Shifty and company. Billy reveals that he's gambled away his cash and owes the men his plane as collateral (and more). When they stop, they take refuge with one of Billy's friends. Billy himself steals the kid's tin of money, and heads out to pay off his debts. But he feels awful, and comes back. He is familiar with the address from the letters, and can get the kids there... SERIES OF FLASHBACKS: Roy arrives in the big city, desperate to take any job to show up his farm back home. He goes to work for GUIDO, a shady type. Meanwhile, KIMBERLY ANN, his wife, gets sick and dies back home. Roy has no idea she's died as Clarissa arrives to take care of the boys. THE PRESENT: Billy's car breaks down, and Walter fixes it with a cooked egg trick his mother taught him. They land at a whorehouse, where Billy sees some old friends. Walter confronts Billy over the women's professions - he knows what's going on - and Billy stands up for himself. He's doing his best. Meanwhile, Roy goes to McMULLEN, the local police chief, spilling the beans on Guido's organized crime syndicate. McMullen stays inert about most of it, until he hears that rare fish, his hobby, are endangered. Guido turns out to be Shifty and company's boss. He orders Shifty to find Roy and shut him up. When Billy drives to Roy's and drops the kids off, Shifty catches them. Billy arrives and rescues the kids, knocking out Clump and becoming more of the hero they always thought he was.

Roy, meanwhile, is accosted by Shifty and Crusher. He knocks Shifty out, and Crusher tells him that the kids are kidnapped. Impersonating Shifty, he heads out, while Guido follows him, thinking he's Shifty. They arrive as Billy and the kids are leaving. A chase ensues; Billy drives to the police department, and Guido and company are arrested and shut down. Roy and his boys are tearfully reunited, but it excludes Billy. The kids thank Billy and pay him, and he buys a new plane...

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

WALTER: Male/9, a smart kid, put in charge of taking care of Charley by his father, which he takes very seriously. Perceptive and serious, grieving over the death of his mother and desperate to find his father.

CHARLEY: Male/5, Spunky, fiery five year old who refuses to cry. No stranger to adversity, he keeps it all bottled up and refuses to give up.

BILLY: Male/20s-30s, Handsome, a poster hero from WWI as a biplane pilot, every inch a hero. Saw action in WWI, and it broke him - now he's gambled all his cash away, and visits prostitutes. A guy with a darker edge that the kids infuse with a new enthusiasm.

ROY: Male/30s+, The kids' dad. Warm-hearted father who struggles to go to the city and make enough money to save his farm and his family. Everything heroic that Billy is not.

SHIFTY: Male/30s+, Cartoony lackey, lead thug for Guido who often speaks above his vocabulary level. Thinks he's smart.

GUIDO: Male/30s+, Italian-Jewish gangster, a self-made man. Blustery an over-the-top.

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COMMENTS: A spirited and warm-hearted adventure story about two lovable kids teaming up with an old fashioned barnstorming pilot to find their father, the Miraculously Astounding Barnstorming Billy harkens back to the pulpy adventure serials that spawned Indiana Jones, but keeps its tale more urban and heart warming in the process.

Writer King's style is open and inviting. The skill used to weave the narratives is self-evident. Strong work. Particularly charming are the two lovable scamps Walter and Charley - Charley the stern little kid who refuses to cry, and Walter the perceptive 9 year old who calls it like he sees it. The kids are given strong personalities that stay away from the Cliche. Story has a strong through-line, and uses flashbacks well to flesh out the characterizations. Plotting is solid and makes no real mistakes. Tone in particular is an asset, and is well-delineated here.

The biggest problems here is the script is called, The Miraculously Astounding Barnstorm Billy, but Billy seems to be anything but the center of the tale. Walter and Charley, and their quest to find dad Roy, is the heart of the matter, especially at the end Billy feels like an adjunct. This is correctable though. If Roy were less of everything that a father should be (i.e., self-sacrificing, warm and caring, and in the end unafraid of danger) and a bit more human, Billy would feel more enthralling. As it is, Roy is everything Billy is not - he steals his thunder. At the end, we cheer for Roy and his kid's reunion, but feel little for Billy, because he's no longer the center of the script. An easy way to give him a sub-plot and a pay-off at the end would be to win back the trust of a woman he lost - she finds him the hero she needs now, and accepts him back in...

Story also seems dangerously emotional at certain parts. Bad guys like Shifty are broadly comic gangster types (bungling crooks, almost straight out of something like Home Alone) and when combined with the sad-eyed flashbacks to Roy's dead wife, begin to give everything a very sentimental tone. Added to this is the scenes where Walter confronts Billy over his moral shortcomings. Story becomes so much of a family film that it begins to lose some of its adventure edge. As a whole, it feels like this script has most of its tale right, but just needs more Indiana Jones to keep the tempo up, and not too schmaltzy.

Other than these two notes, the script doesn't really have any other shortcomings (really!), with structure and pacing being particular strengths.

In consideration for casting, key lead Billy is a romantic action hero in the old daring pilot mode, but has made compromises and has a slightly seedy side that would make him contemplate stealing from the kids. - Alec Baldwin, or a George Clooney feel like they might fit. Brendan Fraser feels a bit young, but would be appropriate for the lantern-jawed hero feel and an off-beat selection would be Jeff Goldblum.

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