

FLAWS

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BRATTLEBORO — In the dog days of summer, collaborators Miles Anton and Jonah Bingham were working. When the pair met me at The Works in Brattleboro earlier this month to discuss their TV show, “FLAWS,” Miles had his computer with him, and in the course of our conversation, Jonah offhandedly reported that he’d written most of the script for an upcoming project already. Miles looked surprised, and with a new glimmer of focus in his eye, he took an aside with Jonah. “Can we look that over, then?” Jonah nodded. Later, before I’d packed up my notebook to leave, they were huddled over Jonah’s phone, scrolling through script pages.

You may say they’re your average TV-making, screenplay-writing artists, passionately collaborating in a coffee shop on a weekday morning. But what might set them apart from your vision of a typical pair of screenwriters is that as of this week, they’re high school freshmen. They made “FLAWS” as middle schoolers, and it wasn’t even Miles’ first TV pilot. He and his sister co-created a detective-themed TV pilot called D.O.V.E.R. (Department of Verification and Observation of Enigmatic Recordings), set in the Anton siblings’ hometown of Dover, when Miles was in sixth grade.

“FLAWS,” which Miles and Jonah made with their friends Sam Freitas-Eagan and Nolan Holmes, came together over the course of the past school year, when they were all in eighth grade. Miles and Sam had been bouncing the idea off one another for a while, and after their English teacher asked them to write something about middle school, Sam suggested they take it from concept to script. “He said if you

can write a script in a week, I’ll approve it,” says Miles. They did it, and so, “FLAWS” was born.

The script was about 20 pages, went through several drafts, and was a collaboration among the foursome. “Then finally, we decided it was time to make it,” says Jonah.

Production began in mid-May and lasted about a month. Unlike a typical film shoot where a crew works for 10 to 12 hours uninterrupted, the group made their show by shooting each day during a designated school period, which gave them 30 to 40 minutes a day to shoot. “A lot of times we had to give up our lunch period, too,” says Jonah, “because 30 to 40 minutes is not enough time to set up and shoot.”

Miles edited a scene or two at a time while shooting was ongoing, and then spent about a month on a final edit. The result is a 17-minute pilot episode in which Miles (a character played by Miles) tries to get the attention of a girl he likes, and Sam (a character played by Sam) insists that if he’d just wear Sam’s magic sweater, Miles would have better luck. Peppered throughout is the incidental comedy that crops up as the lives of middle schoolers unfold, set to backdrops of school hallways, science labs, gymnasiums, and basement parties.

Miles says Sam really does have a sweater that may or may not have magical properties (according to Miles and Jonah, Sam insists he gets more attention from everyone when he wears it). Asked whether the rest of the story was based on the friends’ own experiences, Jonah says, “Some of it. Well, I mean, at least the part about Miles always liking a girl.”

Miles looks bashful at first, but then he cracks a smile. With a laugh and a shrug he says, “I mean, he’s not wrong.”

As artists, the team is facing some unique obstacles. Time and resources notwithstanding, Miles notes feeling challenged that the bar is set low for student films. He says that sometimes the group feels like they’re being talked down to, and it’s hard to tell who genuinely likes their work and who’s either delivering false praise or is too dazzled by their age to really look past it. Jonah agrees.

“The most helpful people have been the ones that have told us we have room for improvement,” says Jonah. He and Miles both say they have plenty of room for growth and that their pilot isn’t perfect. Shooting in short increments mixed with having only one boom mic to work with resulted in inconsistent sound. Plus, they say, they cut some comedy bits that in retrospect, they wish they’d kept in.

“It could have been that much better or stronger,” says Miles.

Their self-awareness is admirable, but their level of focus is to be lauded, as are their accomplishments — both logistical and creative — regardless of their age. And as those who frequently watch independently-produced content know, when there’s something special there, technical blips melt away. Watching “FLAWS,” which feels funny at times and self-referential and wise at others, it’s easy to catch oneself laughing, or to feel drawn to the show’s authentic characters, particularly in mockumentary-style interview segments. In other words, viewers won’t necessarily pay attention to the quality of the sound, because they’ll be too busy listening to what’s being said. A lot of which is entertaining, honest, and worthwhile.

Talking to Jonah and Miles, it’s clear that the team behind the show, who met as students at Brattleboro Area Middle School, comprises friends who truly enjoy one another’s company. Their friendship seems built on a strong foundation of mutual respect. Jonah says he’d like to continue to do this type of work, but only if it means collaborating with Miles, who he thinks is a great writer. And Miles compliments Jonah, saying he gives his all to every task he’s given and noting his ability to volley between creative and technical abilities. The pair reflect on the strengths of their co-creators, too, saying that Nolan is a calming force with a keen ability to transform budding disagreements into productive conversations, and Sam is honest, energetic, straightforward in his opinions, and intentional in his work.

Miles says he’d like to pursue writing in college, but for now — after all, he still has four years of high school ahead of him — he’s focusing on his next project: “Midnight Talk with Miles Anton.” The new

show is also a collaboration with Jonah, and the pair already have four interviews filmed, each one impressive in its own right. So far they’ve talked to Richard Freeman, a cryptozoologist; Donovan Phillips, who Miles says is the third-best knife cutter in the country; Vermont politician Matt Dunne; and California politician Stephen Jaffe, who plans to challenge Nancy Pelosi in the primary.

Miles and Jonah say the new show will be a blend of comedy and interview. They plan to release all eight episodes of it online on April 2, 2018.

As for “FLAWS,” it will be playing at ITVFest in Manchester in a few weeks, as part of the festival’s student program. And both Miles and Jonah hope to make more episodes, if they can get the proper equipment and funding. “I don’t want to do it if we can’t do it really well,” says Jonah.

Miles agrees and says he feels like the pilot needs to be well received in order for them to do more. “But I am really excited to explore those characters more,” he says.

Until then, the pilot episode of “FLAWS” can be found on YouTube or on its website, milesanton123.wixsite.com/flawstvshow.