

A SEVERE PRODUCTION

An independent student film that will set the stage for a UCF student's future.

BY KAYLA GAYLE

Henry Severe grew up behind a camera and seated in front of editing software. In fifth grade, he created his first animation and enrolled in a TV production class in the sixth. Throughout middle and high school, Severe created superhero action animations and shot live-action videos which led him to be self-taught in VFX and other editing tools, showcasing his creative and ambitious traits.

It wasn't until Severe's first year at UCF that his interest in narrative filmmaking was piqued as he garnered experience with real cameras through his position as a videographer for the Student Union's marketing team.

Severe received the Taco Bell Foundation's 2021 Taco Bell Live Más Scholarship after pitching his passion for videography. He was invited to a conference in California where he met other scholars, corporate officers and members of the foundation. At the conference, Severe was granted the opportunity to showcase his work and an early draft of his first short film, "DormBnB."

Throughout his filmmaking journey, Severe has been inspired by four Black showrunners: Issa Rae of "Insecure" and "Rap Sh!t," Quinta Brunson of "Abbott Elementary," and Jean Elie and Mike Gauyo of "Send Help." These four successfully created and produced comedy series that depict Black Americans in their everyday lives. To Severe, Rae and Brunson are the epitomes of a modern success story because they were able to transfer their success on the internet into the entertainment industry.

With a similar goal in mind, Severe got started on his own short film, "DormBnB," which he describes as his "passion project."



Photo courtesy of Kayla Gayle

Henry's Favorites

Camera - Sony Alpha 7S III

Editing Software - Adobe Premiere Pro

Movie - "Back to the Future" (1985)

Show - "Everybody Hates Chris"

TV Genre - Sitcom

Disney Channel Original Movie - "High School Musical 2" (2007)

Teen Dystopia Trilogy - "The Hunger Games"

Director - Jordan Peele

Movie Soundtrack - "Black Panther" (2018)

Composer - Daniel Pemberton

Movie Format - IMAX

Script - "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse" (2018)

THE MAKING OF "DORMBNB"

"DormBnB" is a mockumentary following Miles, a freshman played by theater major Billy Banks, as he rents out his dorm to other students after his roommate moves out. Miles has to navigate his new business venture while keeping the university's Housing Administration in the dark. The in-universe documentary is filmed by Miles' friend Mo Baptiste, who is played by Severe, for his film class' final project.

Development

The idea of "DormBnB" emerged during the spring 2022 semester when Severe's roommate left their on-campus dorm for "unknown circumstances." While Severe discussed the situation with his suitemates and other friends, one offhandedly said I wish I could just stay in your dorm...I'm tired of my roommate which the others laughed off as a joke. Unbeknownst to them, an idea was born.

Pre-production

On Feb. 23, Severe began developing his idea by outlining the three-act structure for the sitcom. With Miles' concept and conflicts determined, Severe created a shot list and storyboard illustrating the short film beat-by-beat.

Severe locked himself in the student lounge of his dorm's floor at around 11:30 p.m. on Feb. 25 and followed advice he once heard: Write something for yourself and then everything else will come together and fall into place.

With that and the storyboard in mind, Severe got to work on the first draft of his script. Much like the broad idea of "DormBnB," specific character traits and dialogue were inspired by people and experiences Severe encountered in real life, such as the girlfriend conversation in the third act.



Storyboards and sketches developed for the making of "DormBnB" by Henry Severe

At 4:53 a.m. on Feb. 26, "DormBnB"—UCS: Untitled College Short/Series?" was completed.

With the first draft finalized, Severe reached out to Jaya Wilson to get an actor's perspective on the script. With her input, Wilson became a part of the "DormBnB" crew as the first assistant director.

On March 20, Severe posted casting calls on Instagram and Facebook, as well as relying on word of mouth to find actors.

However, two weeks before the filming date, Severe still had problems with casting; specifically with someone to play his lead, and supporting role. A recommendation by Wilson pushed him to reach out to Banks, who was deemed perfect for the role. The

original actress playing the character of Brianna fell sick just days before filming, so Wilson had to fill her role at the last minute.

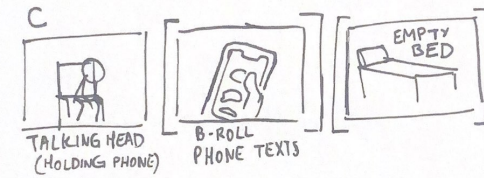
By April 1, the seventh and final draft of "Dorm BnB" was completed and Severe's passion project was ready for production.

Preliminary storyboards and story notes provided by Henry Severe

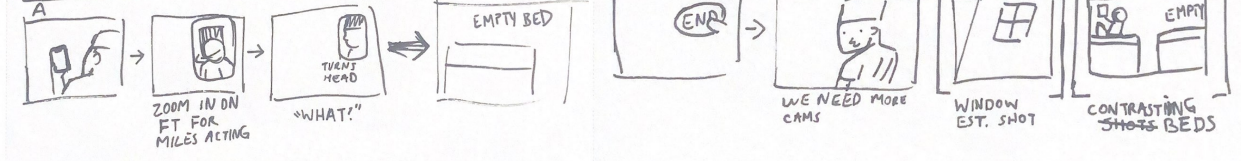
DormBnB Rough Storyboard [] = B-ROLL
 ACT I - one handheld, boommic
 Scene #1



Preliminary storyboards and story notes provided by Henry Severe



Scene #2



Production

With production coming up, Severe had to answer the question, "How to make a short film with an essentially non-existent budget?" His answer: campus resources. Severe rented a Sony camera, a boom mic, and various other equipment from the LibTech desk located in the John C. Hitt Library. He also borrowed gear from a friend. Severe finalized the call sheets, marking April 18 as the first of four days in the "DormBnB" production period. According to Severe, the filming process was "organized chaos."

"One of my favorite things about it was the fact that the script wasn't set in stone, so we were able to be really creative,"

Post-production

On and off throughout the summer, Severe worked on editing "DormBnB" scene by scene; polishing the visuals and audio of one scene and then moving to the next.

Severe shot "DormBnB" flat, allowing him to adjust the contrast, saturation and color of each scene to his liking with Adobe Premiere Pro. He learned color correction as he worked on the film and gained experience through his job at the Student Union. Severe

Morgan Christie, the second assistant camera said. "We all just bounced [ideas] off of each other and made the best shot happen."

For instance, Covey Washington proposed the inclusion of an air fryer into the plot and to have his character, Miles' suitemate Jayden, play the popular game "Fireboy and Watergirl" on his computer, while Joy Hickman put a durag on a teddy bear her character, Ari, holds. Small nudges to Black culture such as that were important to Severe—who also hung a Haitian flag in Miles' suitemate's room.

"Henry had a vision but he was really open to collaboration. He was like, 'I want

also utilized Adobe After Effects for a small VFX shot. While editing, he noticed that when the character "DormBnB Guest 2" was in the doorway, the colors looked "really weird," so he masked and tracked the door to color correct the shot.

When it came to audio mixing, Severe mixed the recording from the camera with the boom mic stating the echo made it sound like "you're really in this place." With

this to be a celebration of our culture and stuff that's not centered around Black trauma," Wilson said.

There were many scenes that the crew finally got on the seventh take, making seven a lucky number for them. But it didn't help that filming was done right before finals week and just two weeks before Severe's designated move-out date, leaving barely any time for possible reshoots.

After each day of shooting, Severe would stay up and create a rough cut of what the crew had just filmed. By the end of the week, he had a first draft of the short film.

the style of the short film being a student mockumentary, it felt best that the audio wasn't completely clear to Severe.

Severe also used Adobe Audition to add a voiceover of Mo's lines a week before the film was set to release because he thought his original delivery wasn't done well.

Promotion and Distribution

With the final edits completed, Severe was ready to promote and post "DormBnB." He deliberately waited until the beginning of the fall semester to release the short film as he knew that would be the best time to reach out to an active audience—when everyone was back on campus.

On Aug. 29, Severe posted the trailer of the short film on his Instagram with an invitation to an early watch party in the caption. The cast, crew and friends of those

involved with the film met at the Student Union on Sept. 2 to watch the film.

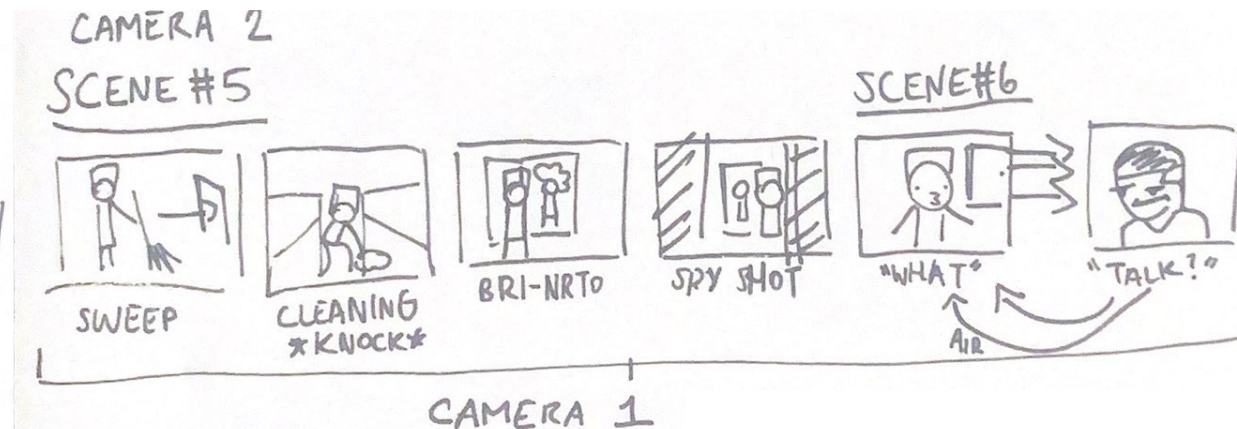
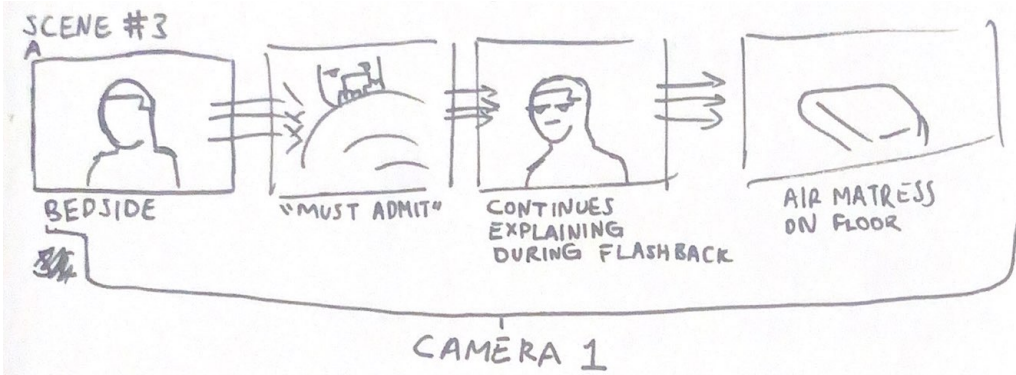
"It was so fun to see our work completely done because Henry was being mean and wouldn't show us anything until the end," Wilson joked. "It's really cool to see a final project that you worked on for a while and then be able to sit down and appreciate all of that hard work that went into something, and just see that people enjoyed it."

"It was very scary. I was shaking. The whole time I was watching, I was analyzing the vibe of the room," Severe said. "But it was nice to finally show it to people."

WHAT'S NEXT

"DormBnB" was a finalist in Bassett House Picture's #ScreenDatNight Short Film Competition led by, Jean Elie. This is one of the many competitions Severe plans on submitting "DormBnB" to, in addition to local and national film festivals.

With Severe's love of mockumentary-style filmmaking, his main goal is to create a trilogy that revolves around Black and brown students of the unnamed fictional university. He is aiming for the sequel to be filmed and released next spring semester.



Preliminary storyboards and story notes provided by Henry Severe
 Scan the QR code to check out "DormBnB" for yourself.

