Aaron Morris

Film Connection

Television Pilots Analysi

It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia - “Charlie has Cancer”

Originally set in the sprawl of Los Angeles, only to be later adapted to the busy cityscape of south Philly, this pilot centers around three idiots named Charlie, Dennis and Mac. Since I could not find the full pilot online but most of the episode was adapted into the fourth episode of the official show, I shall use it instead. It begins with Dennis stopping by Charlie’s place to borrow a basketball (originally sugar) when Charlie confesses that he may have cancer and that he wishes to keep the matter private. Unable to initially cope with said information, Dennis hastily exits the apartment and, against Charlie’s wishes, tells the rest of their group anyway. As a means to console their friend, Dennis and Mac hatch up a scheme to get Charlie laid. In the search for a worthy female candidate, Mac falls in love a transexual and goes out with her. Dennis, on the other hand. recalls Charlie’s fondness for a certain waitress and, after having slept with her, pays her $250 to have sex with Charlie. The waitress agrees and goes on a date with Charlie just as Mac goes on a date with the transexual. Ultimately, things go awry. When Dennis confronts Charlie, he is informed both that Charlie does not actually have cancer and the waitress did not sleep with him. Conversely, Charlie is told that Dennis spilled the beans to their friends and had paid top dollar for Charlie’s happiness. All the while, Mac, about to meet up with his new girlfriend, accidentally punches her in the face and runs away from some angry bystanders. The episode ends with Dennis and Mac $250 robbed and Mac with a black eye. And, there’s a small subplot about their friend the bartender trying to get her personal acting friend a job, which ultimately is insignificant. All in all, nothing new is learned and things return to business as usual.

The only question remains is what cannot be said about this show? It’s raunchy, unapologetic and farcical. The characters are rather two dimensional, mere cut-outs of basic lazy and moronic stereotypes. The driving force behind the main characters’ actions is getting laid, whether it be for themselves or for a friend. The plot hinges on a hair-brained plan evidently created by Charlie himself, knowing that his friend Dennis would be the perfect sucker to his misery. The jokes are very unconventional and mildly controversial. It’s a formula for disaster that works for one reason only: they don’t take themselves seriously. Everything that occurs can either be brushed off or openly discussed without shame or fear or judgement. For crying out loud, this show involves people making fun of a guy for trying to be progressive in his relationship choices and involves a lot of women punching in a time where the world was becoming more politically correct and cognisant of domestic violence (even if the violence on the show is rather silly and meaningless). This out of left field approach and non-conformist view on comedy makes the unorthodox more familiar and relatable, since it exists in the realm of “what if” rather than real life. The subject matter, as ridiculous as it seems, is enjoyable to watch just for the sake of seeing where it goes. While I cannot personally relate to owning a bar, faking cancer to get laid or going out with a tranny, I can relate to being trapped in a dumb plan and trying to make the best of it, or helping friends out secretly.

While the show may not be my cup of tea as far is humor is concerned, nor the story that of my life, it’s a surprisingly pleasant watch as an escape from reality. The characters don’t question the unusual and frankly outlandish scenarios are placed in, and nor should the viewers. What I can take from this is how movies and television give both the creators and viewers freedom from reality. In this case, one can take a topic as done-to-death as relationships and dating and give it an atypical twist, or place more emphasis on minor details such as $250 rather than more important things like jobs the characters seem to keep skirting. What I am thinking for “Business Associates” is letting the characters be less bound to the societal norms and expectations I had to deal with in high school and allow them more freedom to goof around and cause chaos. At the end of the day, they won’t suffer as serious consequences, and if they do, they’ll just be out of it in an episode to two. The sky's the limit, really, so why bother focus too much on making the show realistic? That is to say, I still will base it in reality, but fun is normally an abstraction of the absurd, a taste of what could be or what people want, and if relishing in the inane and senseless provides a worthy antithesis to the mundane nature of ordinary life, then that is something I shall do.

On a more technical note, the pilot was evidently shot on camcorders and in total cost around $85-$300 to make, which covered the tapes. Given the actors were just some friends who desperately needed acting jobs, their chances of getting on air seemed rather slim. However, they managed to win over producers and studio executives with their honesty, effort and creativity. That alone may prove that staying true to one’s ideas and visions may help a show see fruition rather than try to pander to an audience or a generalized audience.

Breaking Bad - “Pilot”

The life of family man and chemistry teacher Walter White is turned upside down when he is told he has incurable lung cancer and has only a couple years to live. It all starts when White notices he keeps having a persistent dry cough that doesn’t seem to subside. Eventually, this dry cough ends up leaving him unconscious and sent to the hospital for an examination. There, he finds out that he has cancer. Not wanting to worry his family, he withholds this information and goes about his daily routine. However, it isn’t long until he realizes that he has been wasting his life being a pushover and underachiever and he sets out to find a new venue to both make money to support his family after his passing and to leave his mark in history. He quits his second job a car wash, lashing out at his boss and sets out to discover how much he can make making and selling drugs. He takes up an offer from his brother in law Hank for a ride along as the DEA perform a drug bust. There, he notices Jesse Pinkman, a former student of his, escape the cops and return home. Walter follows him and blackmails him into helping him with selling drugs. Walter, having years of chemistry experience, believes he could create quality crystal meth and that Jesse could then sell it. Walter steals some supplies from the High school, rents an RV and takes it into the countryside to get cooking. All seems to be going well until Jesse invites two potential buyers over to the site, who turn out to want Jesse dead, believing he was the snitch that ruined their previous operation. As a show of cooperation, Walter convinces them that he shall show them his secret recipe but instead uses phosphorous gas as a means to knock them out as they suffocate in the locked RV. With Jesse injured and the two thugs potentially dead, Walter attempts to drive off with a gas mask on but crashes into a ditch. Believing that the sirens he hears in the distance are coming for him, he takes Jesse’s video camera, leaves a final message for his family, grabs a pistol and waits for the cops. However, this all becomes unnecessary as the sirens turn out to be firefighters responding to a wild fire created by one of the thugs earlier. The episode ends with Walter off the hook and contemplating his life choices.

For a pilot episode, *Breaking Bad* takes out all the stops. It focuses a great deal of time on character development for Walter and Jesse, showing their daily lives, the perils they face and how they react to different people. Walter is shown being a caring father to his disabled son, a quiet husband to his forceful wife, a pushover for his boss at the car wash and a shy guy around other more macho and outgoing men like Hank. Jesse is shown having a strained and broken relationship with fellow drug businessmen and his family, expanded upon in later episodes. They both embody the struggles and desires of ordinary people looking for completion and a little excitement. Rather than being high octane or completely nutted out, they are worrisome and relatable, both caring for friends, family and their futures. Walter wants to make sure his family is set when he is gone and Jesse wants no part in it given how poorly his last stint went. Additionally, the show also develops all the little problems in Walter’s life to help the audience feel sympathy for him, such as him having to eat veggie bacon and the public humiliation he faces when one of his students photographs him as he is washing a car. The show also takes advantage of being a pilot rather than a regular episode by showing copious amounts of violence and killing, plenty of drugs, a fair amount of swearing and some female nudity. All in all, the pilot episodes does not disappoint, providing both a dramatic and intense thrill as well as a relatable ambition from a down to earth chemistry teacher.

There are plenty aspects of Vince Gilligan’s pilot that would make for a great viewing experience of *Business Associates.* To start, it is taking it slow. Plenty of action and plot development takes place over the span of an hour, so the show slow roles all of it. The audience sees as much family dinners and time at school as the actual cooking of meth. Something comparable for my pilot would be showing the droll of school, the pestilence of family interactions and the growing desire to be more adventurous before actually jumping into all the cool things to come. That isn’t to say that it starts off weak, however. *Breaking Bad* begins with a clip from the end of the episode where Walter at his weakest, a foreshadowing of what is to come, before throwing the audience back in time, to when life was just business as usual. Perhaps in my pilot I can show my characters at their weakest or when it seems “shit hit the fan”, perhaps when they get in trouble or are about to, and jump back to the start in order to set up the tone of excitement and mischief. Otherwise, this pilot also gives me the idea to be a little more assertive and honest with the type of humour I would like to convey. Since pilots don’t have to conform to FCC regulations, I can include swearing and raunchiness, and test out what sort of jokes, scenarios and interactions among characters would be most entertaining and least bothersome to the viewers. I by no means want to compromise my artistic integrity to the sake of forcing a spot on TV, but people do generally have their limits and I am no position to push the envelope.

The Inbetweeners - “First Day”

Due to the financial strain of his parents divorce, British high school student Will must now attend public education and survive his first day of bullying and fitting in. Attempting to distance himself from the other new kids and a less desirable crowd, Will tries to make friends with anyone that seems cool. Although mostly unsuccessful, his luck takes a turn when the principal forces another student named Simon to be his guide and to befriend him since they share the same classes. Simon also has a tough time at school in that neither he nor his friends are considered cool but cannot be classified by any easy tag like nerd, jock, etc. Having to associate with this new posh, well dressed, briefcase toting and rather ubiquitous student isn’t helping that problem, so he tries to keep Will away whenever possible. As the day drudges on, Will stress gets the better of him and he make his way to the restroom. While he takes a dump, he overhears Simon and his friends Jay, a charismatic jerk who lies about his many sexual encounters, and Neil, a lovable idiot who panders to both Simon and Jay’s crap. However, they are soon interrupted by the school bully Donovan who realizes Will is in one of the stalls and with his cronie, takes pictures of him on the toilet and sends them around the school. What would be the worst day of Will’s life then turns to Simon, who is greeted by his crush Carli in the common room. Jay inquires why he doesn’t just walk with her to her classes and finds out it’s because Simon has a boner and loudly announces the fact in front of everyone. Taking advantage of this opportunity to make a friend, Will offers Simon a chance to escape. As the school day comes to an end, Will’s mother embarrassingly picks him up from school, giving Jay the opportunity to comment on how “fit” she is (British for hot). Before he leaves though, the friends invite him to the annual first day of term pub gathering later that evening. So later that night, the friends head out to the pub to find it oddly empty. Jay uses a fake ID to get himself a pint but can’t get drinks for the rest of his friends. Will uses a convoluted loophole in the law to get him and his friends some cider and a meal by getting a stranger to order it. In return, Will offers to pay for the man’s drinks. Only a few minutes in do they realize they are at the wrong pub and leave. Arriving at the right pub, the gang tries having fun. Will attempts to buy some drinks without ID again but finally loses it. In a fit of rage, he points out everyone at the bar is underage and gets the gathering disbanded. Donovan then threatens to kill Will for ruining the event when Will’s mother drives by to pick him up. The episode ends with Simon considering becoming friends with Will.

This show is hilarious. It is comprised of tongue in cheek British humour as well as immature sex jokes, horrible insults, gay bashing, “your mum” jokes, underage drinking and a lot of swearing. The interactions between characters is mostly callous and mean spirited but in a funny way. The show doesn’t take itself seriously but gives the audience reasons to care about the protagonist Will and his mates. It does succumb to some of the stereotypical bullying examples like taking pictures to embarrass a student or name calling in the hallway, but it doesn’t make it the focus or the main plot of the episode. Ultimately, it is about Will making friends and in the end he does. They may not be the best human beings, Jay the least of which and most prone to insulting him and most likely to get him in trouble. However, they’re willing to hang out with him even after the shitshow of a first day.

There are many positive aspects here I could use for “Business Associates”. When it comes to teen based humor and drama, there is plenty. Sex and drinking are the hot topics most spoken about and every group of teens are in a clique of some sort. While it may not have been my high school experience, I know it was for many, so I have plenty of filler and meaningful content that can become plot elements and plot devices. Additionally, the show also sets up good antagonists. The principle, Mr. Gilbert, is a condescending prick who belittles the students and turns a blind eye to bullying and mischief. Donovan is the basic bully, being both tall in size and menacing in nature. I personally never had any bullying experiences, outside of 9th grade gym, but I couldn’t imagine somebody out to do the protagonists harm wouldn’t make for decent conflict. Adults always do, whether it be parents holding their kids back from doing questionable activities or general authority like police and teachers keeping them in line. I think the best aspect of the show, however, and what I think I could really benefit from, is the playful banter between characters. As teenagers, they aren’t preoccupied with serious life business. As a tv show, they aren’t bound to a narrative with a defined beginning and end. Everything they talk about is relatable teen issues and desires, which as a teen myself, I can get behind. If I can funnel the on screen chemistry they have together, then perhaps “Business Associates” might have a chance. Even though I want to make a television drama rather than a comedy, which this pilot is, I definitely could use the witty and remorseless onslaught of social commentary in order to make a better show. In the end, I’ve come back to this show for a helping of the second season not because I am watching caricatures but because I feel like I am watching real people.

[At this point, I think my summaries are a little excessive. If it’s all the same, I shall shorten them to the basics and focus on the analysis portion.]

Freaks and Geeks - Pilot

In an effort of youthful rebellion and to create her own identity as an individual, Lindsay Weir stops filling the role of traditional academic nerd and starts standing up for herself and others, breaking rules and hanging out with new friends.

The Breakfast Club

Ferris Bueller's Day Off

South Park

Six Feet Under

The Wire

Mad Men

Girls