

Stone Hearted: an Essay on the Animated Show *Gargoyles*

How many Disney shows can you name that were unfairly canceled? How many were left to rot away from the view of the audience? How many times should we have to see beloved shows canceled in favor of money? The Disney animated series *Gargoyles* ran from 1994 to 1997 before its untimely cancellation. The show was about a group of gargoyle statues who come to life at night and protect humans, but after being frozen in statue form for one thousand years, they now have to come to terms with the twenty-first century. It was a rich and cleanly animated series which explored many topics that today's television wouldn't even begin to explore for fear of how society would react. Not only were there important messages displayed within the show, there was also a diverse list of fully developed characters that had not been represented before the show began to run. In addition, the show got a five star rating from 160 viewers on Google (“Gargoyles”), which is quite the accomplishment. For these reasons and more, the animated series *Gargoyles* is one of Disney's most underrated masterpieces.

The show itself was incredibly progressive for its time. It starred a detective who was also a female of color. Having the main female character being a, frankly awesome, detective was incredible representation for women of color back in the ‘90s. Her name was Elisa Maza, and despite being a love interest, her qualities were not diminished to just that. She was the voice of humanity, reason, and righteousness within the show, and a wonderfully developed character with a righteous moral compass and a logistical mind. Elisa was truly one of the best well-rounded female characters in Disney history. In season two episode 13, “High Noon,” her gargoyle friends have been captured by the antagonists and were almost killed. She rescues them by defeating the antagonists in hand-to-hand combat, knocking out the antagonist, Demona. She

is proficient in combat but has a moral code, which makes it so she and the gargoyles don't cause any harm to innocent people. Elisa also has a cat, illustrating her kindness to both animals, humans, and anything else. She is truly a wonderful character, and, personally, my favorite.

The antagonists of the show are fully developed and thought out. To be a good villain, one needs to be intelligent, charismatic and uncaring for anything that gets in the way of their pursuit of power. The main antagonist, Demona, a gargoyle, was written with justifications and an incredible storyline to support her actions during the show. Who doesn't love an awesome, self righteous, female antagonist? The male antagonist, Zanatos, has incredibly thought out schemes, and is a fully developed villain. They're likable characters despite their less than humane activities, and that's truly what makes a show enjoyable — characters whom we're not sure to root for. Dan Brown, a best-selling thriller author, says that, “The best villains are unequivocally connected to the hero, and aid in the hero's character development through their inherent opposition towards them,” and that, “every villain needs to have his own morality” (Brown). *Gargoyles* displays that. The antagonists of *Gargoyles* are deeply connected to the protagonists through tragedy and past romances. They're not diminished to villains of the week and have meaningful arcs, sometimes lasting for episodes on end — which makes them some of the best developed animated villains.

Our society these days is incredibly argumentative and ununified. People fight over everything, television or real life. Despite this, *Gargoyles* depicted many serious topics in a way that avoids controversy. In season one, episode eight, “Deadly Force,” Elisa is home making one of the gargoyles, Broadway, and herself dinner while he watches a detective movie. After the film finishes, he gets the idea to find and live out a detective fantasy with the actual detective's gun; Elisa gets shot on accident and has to be taken to the hospital on life support. This episode

warned people of the dangers of the weapon without criminalizing anyone or anything in it. The situation was handled with respect for both parties at fault without leaning into the whole “dangerous weapon must destroy” stereotype. It showed how dangerous situations can arise without any ill intention. It was also a message for children to not play with guns, which was interesting because 1993 was the year that President Clinton signed the Youth Handgun Safety Act, which forbade possession of handguns to people under the age of eighteen. So without directly leaning into stereotypes or politics, the television show handled it without directly incriminating the weapon, nor the citizen.

The amazing animation of the show can be compared to that of *Batman The Animated Series*, *He-Man & Masters of The Universe*, and *X-Men*. There was a specific style that most shows that were animated in the ‘80s and ‘90s abode by, and *Gargoyles* does that stunning style justice. The show was animated by Walt Disney Television Animation, in collaboration with Jade Animation and Talma Productions, who did an incredible job with the show. While there were known to be many errors in the hand-drawn television shows like *Batman: The Animated Series*, such as coloration glitches where the bat symbol would swap its colors, *Gargoyles* doesn’t have many issues. There are vibrant colors that still survive the grainy effects of aging media. And little to no animation errors. The art style is consistent and iconic, while also holding that nostalgic feel of ‘90s media.

The character designs are exceptional, too. The show was developed before the simplistic and easier-to-animate character craze in newer disney shows like *Amphibia*, *Phineas and Ferb*, and *Kim Possible* took over the media. So the antagonists and heroes both have distinctive designs unimagined before. They weren't afraid to make the gargoyles look scary and didn't lean into the male gaze while designing the female characters. The female and male

gargoyle characters were designed to be in their medieval clothes the whole series and there was no unneeded sexualization of the characters like in most television.

The voice acting is immaculate within the show. Where, admittedly, some of the plots might lack, the voice acting sure makes up for it. The voices are full of emotion. There's no doubt that the cast put all of their vocal talent into the show. The cast is loaded, too, consisting of Keith David who voiced in *Coraline*, *The Princess And The Frog*, *Spawn*, and many more; Marina Sirtis, who voiced in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Trek: Generations*, *The Lorax*, and more; Jonathan Frakes, who also was in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *Star Trek: Generations*; Salli Richardson who was in *Eureka*, *A Low Down Dirty Shame*, and *Posse*, and, finally, Tim Curry, who played in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*, and *Scary Movie*. Wildly wonderful voice actors that make the show so memorable.

Now you may be wondering, "If this show is so fantastic, then why haven't I heard of it?" There are many things that didn't gain popularity until years went by. For heaven's sake, Van Gogh's art didn't get popular until after he died. As to why the show didn't gain much attention, the answer is simple: after viewership declined and there was a change in the production schedule, Disney decided to cancel the show and stop any projects surrounding it. Viewership only declined after the original creator, George Weisman, left the show, no longer overseeing any projects. The team that was left got sloppy with advertisements, and hardly released any merchandise, and the stuff that was released was either incredibly expensive or low quality. Consequently, the show was left to be forgotten in the Disney archives. Personally, I think that the show is fantastic and should be properly appreciated by everyone. Disney obviously didn't agree, and decided to be money-hungry heathens and cancel shows with actual plot and character dynamics in favor of cheaply animated money grabbing nonsense.

Television shows should be made to entice the audience, while still delivering a meaningful message; *Gargoyles* did just that and it did it well. Many people have forgotten about the show in general, even those who grew up with it. What about the people who loved this show as a child, how important its representation was for them? The show is truly a piece of art that should not be ignored. Watch the show, don't leave it to rot like a dying dream of the animators who spent four years on the show, yearning for an audience. Or about the people who held onto the show in a time lacking diversity in media? I beg of you, don't let their dreams die.

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