

VICIOUS



VICIOUS: AN INTRODUCTION

by Liam Parry

CASE FILE: The Seed of an Idea Bears Fruit

Vicious is a Neo-Noir show set in the occult world of Siren City. It follows Charlotte Brimstone and her team of Paranormal P.I.'s as they try to save people that don't know they need saving from things that go bump in the night.

I started writing the pilot out of a deep, abiding love of genre Television. From The Twilight Zone to Star Trek to Buffy the Vampire Slayer to Veronica Mars to Supernatural to Stranger Things, I adore the way genre fiction can tell stories that are firmly rooted in the needs, drives, and emotions of the real world. These worlds populated with ghosts, aliens, vampires, or demons from the depths, are filled with rich, detailed characters, and have the freedom to express things through a heightened lens. They speak to our fear, our lust, or nightmares and our dreams in equal measure. You can get away with plumbing the depths of the evil little thoughts we all might have (while stuck in traffic) in a way that has big, sweeping consequences for the lives of the characters. You can illustrate hope so it's filled with bright, vivid action in a way that we rarely get a chance to see in our day to day. By holding an admittedly exaggerated mirror up to your audience, genre fiction has the potential to make people really look at themselves; to see themselves with a clarity that standard dramatic fare might not.

A funny thing happened when I finished the pilot. I realized I wasn't done playing around in Siren City's world of flickering neon, shadows with human faces, and Charlotte Brimstone's grim determination.

So I wrote an entire season. I stuck to the modern cable model of television and wrote twelve episodes.

Then a few months later I wrote another one. Thirteen episodes this time.

I just couldn't stop myself. The world had grown so compelling, the characters so real and concrete, I felt I had no choice but to continue telling their tales.

This document is a brief explanation of those tales, the world they take place in, and the characters that populate them. You'll find a description of the themes, the aesthetics, character breakdowns, and a brief rundown of all twelve season one episodes.

GHOSTS, THEMES, AND AESTHETICS

THE ENSEMBLE: The first thing I wanted Vicious to be was an ensemble. A true ensemble, that could spend half an episode with one character who might only be in five minutes of the next. I wanted to create the sense that the story could go anywhere; that just when you were comfortable with the format and your expectations were set, they'd be thrown for a loop in the best possible way. Charlotte Brimstone stands tall as the lead. Her name's on the door, after all, and the action flows largely around her. As the story moves along, though, you come to realize that not only are the other characters as important, they're integral to her story. They're responsible for her growth and development and, while she likes to project the image of the lone, trench-coated wolf, she would be nothing without them. A large part of the drama and tension of the show stems from these relationships being tested and questioned as often as possible.

THE WOMEN: The next thing I wanted was a strong female cast. The show dips into an examination of gender in a few key episodes, but mostly I feel it's important to the audience to see a broad, wide representation of women on the screen. None of them are perfect, but they all have strengths that are never questioned because they're women or attributed to their gender. They're accepted in the world of the show as fact. Brimstone is the only one that can do what she does. Claudia sees the world through the lens of newness and excitement because she's new and excited - not because she's a woman that doesn't understand something a man would. Genre television is a great place to make steps forward in how gender roles are perceived.

THE INVESTIGATION: Thematically the show deals with the nature of good and evil. What it means to be human in a world that may seem like an exaggerated nightmare at times, and how we maintain our own humanity in light of that view. How far can people go to prevent bad things from happening before they start doing bad things themselves? There's an "ends justifying means" edge that follows a lot of the decisions Brimstone makes, especially because the average citizen of her world doesn't believe in the things that cause her to make these decisions. Beneath this veneer is the very simple question of how we treat one another. Should we forgo honesty to spare someone pain? Are we capable of seeing someone else with eyes that aren't colored by our own experiences? Is there any one, single way to have someone's best interests at heart? And if so, are we obliged to treat them in that

singular way? The crew of Brimstone Investigations are frequently put in situations where their core beliefs are tested, tried, and pulled like taffy. In big ways and small, their struggle to retain the best of themselves despite the brutality of the world around them is at the core of the show.

THE THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT: The brutality in Siren City stems from evil, both human and supernatural. Most of the supernatural element is rooted in the human - ghosts of twisted men, spells cast by chanting tongues, objects cursed by greedy hands. It's there in a practical sense, more organic than divine. Brimstone can make flames appear in the palm of her hand, but not because of some power from on high. She had to work and study to develop her skills. It's a supernatural world with secrets locked in old books and tattered scrolls. The power the magic affords isn't inherently evil - it's how people in the know choose to use it. The monsters are the same. They're human beings twisted into unrecognizable shapes, sent out in to the world to kill and maim. There is no heaven and hell in Siren City. Only the tools for humanity to use to create eruptions of evil around them.

THE LOOK AND FEEL OF THE THING: The City itself looks like a cross between H.P Lovecraft's Providence, the New York City of sixties and seventies cinema - think The Taking of Pelham One Two Three or Rosemary's Baby - and Victorian London. Fog swirls between the buildings, jagged neon signs cut shadows along the walls, and every clicking high heel echoes loudly in the night. It's a period piece stitched together from different periods.

SEASON ONE: The (sort of) Heroes

Charlotte Brimstone: A wizened 25 or so, Charlotte has dark hair and lucid bright eyes. Her wisdom is part hard-won-bruised-knuckles-and-black-eye legitimate, and part bluster-through-the-fear sham. Having peeked behind the veil of the supernatural at a very young age, Brimstone feels alone in a world that doesn't even know it needs her to protect it from the things that creep under beds and hide in the shadows. Always the smartest person in the room, she'll fight when she has to, but prefers to hoodwink people into thinking there's no way they'll win.

ARC: The center of the show, Brimstone's changes are largely incremental. She hides too much of herself for there to be an overt development. The path she's on is one of becoming the person everyone assumes she already is. Learning to put her trust in others plays a big part in her finding this path, though it's one she won't even know she's on until it might be too late to reach its end unscathed.

Polly: A wide-eyed 30, Polly is a natural blonde who is forced into the world of ghosts and ghouls against her will. Able to go toe-to-toe with Brimstone on an intellectual level, Polly's real asset is her emotional honesty. She rejects dishonesty in all its forms, even when it might be necessary to win the day. All her mind can do is struggle to piece together the evidence that this new world she's a part of is real, and not some horrible nightmare from which she can't awake.

ARC: Polly has to do whatever she can to accept the evil little world around her. Her emotional honesty is tested, twisted, and knocked around with a baseball bat. Preserving the parts of herself that she values most is her challenge. One she's not sure she's up to.

Hogan: A 20 year old going on 80, Hogan carries the burden of being an empath with him at all times. With a single touch he can feel the truth of what other people feel. He can trace an object's history by the emotions it's absorbed from the people that have handled it. The revelation of these gifts was a moment of deep trauma. At the age of 12 he lost control and pushed his parent's emotions back into them, leaving them comatose. Ever since he's wrapped himself head to toe in bandages he draws protective sigils on. They can't dull his sensitivity, however, and his compassion keeps Brimstone from breaking down doors she can easily open with the knob.

ARC: Hogan has to overcome his fear of himself. The bandages he uses do nothing - they're symbols he created to protect himself from having to accept the reality he dreads the most - he's in complete control of his powers at all times. He can learn the truth of how people feel just as easily as he can bend their emotions to his own will.

Claudia Pepper: A figment of the imagination who steps right out of a black & white film, Claudia is a blank slate. As the power of the film she was trapped in fades, and reality presents itself in technicolor bursts all around her, she's eager to experience everything there is to experience. Without the burden of a lifetime of baggage to bog her down, Claudia delights in the fact that she can make any kind of moral, emotional choice she wants. She does what's right because she can, (no writer is forcing her into the confines of his script) not because she thinks she should. While this presents itself as a kind of purity, there's nothing naive about her. She sees and accepts the bad in the world as readily as someone else would accept that the sky is blue.

ARC: The burden of experience, of having a past that's a result of the choices she makes, threatens to press down on her. The one thing about never having made a mistake before, for instance, is that the first one is sure to throw you into a tizzy of doubt and regret. Maintaining the joy and wonder of the world around her is no easy task within the neon alleys and cobblestone streets of Siren City.

Lear: Addicted to magic and the cheap thrills it can bring, Lear is all charm. He fits in as well on the street as he does at a fancy opera or ballet. A rascal with a hefty amount of self preservation, Lear sees the same thing Brimstone does when he looks at Siren City, only his response is one of morbid delight. Halfway through the season he gets turned into - and remains - a woman. And doesn't care.

ARC: Lear might be the most consistent character on the show. He/She gets turned into a woman, falls in love with Claudia, does some magic drugs, throws some punches, and somehow maintains His/Her ability to do it with a smile. He/She accepted who He/She was a long time ago, and even the darkest of times would be hard pressed to change that.

Howard Sullivan: As famous for his writing as he is for his agoraphobia, Sullivan uses his limited magical abilities to prevent himself from aging. Generally put squarely in the role of "research guy," Sullivan occasionally gets dragged from his seclusion - kicking & screaming - into the fray.

ARC: He has to learn to live with his fear. Like all obsessives, he's crafted a world of needs so specific they can never be met. Admitting this to himself will take even more effort than setting a single foot out his front door.

Parker: A young, devoted follower of Brimstone's, Parker heads a vigilante group called the Charlies that has more in common with a fan club than it does with anything useful. He's young, naive, and competent more by accident than by design.

ARC: Like all innocents, Parker's in for a rude awakening when the world really presses down on him. In his case the disillusionment will come from the people he admires most as much as the evil roaming the streets.

SEASON ONE: The (Dyed in the Wool) Villains

Forsythe: A man from Siren City's past, Forsythe fancies himself "the Gentleman's Scoundrel" - when, in fact, he's a depraved, self obsessed maniac. His love for the city of his birth has perverted itself into a genuine contempt and hatred for anyone he decides isn't worthy to live there. His main goal is to wake up the city - literally, magically wake it up - assuming, through the haze of his narcissism, that the city will return his love and put him in charge.

ARC: He'll slam head first into the reality that a big part of his love is really vanity dressed in a fancy suit.

Carson: Brimstone's former partner and current member of the walking dead, Carson tried to live his life like he stepped out of a Raymond Chandler novel. When Brimstone throws him to the wolves and he comes back without a heart he's... less than thrilled.

ARC: Understanding the part he played in his own demise, and if his revenge is worth the cost.

Conceptia: One of the fabulously wealthy coal-mine twins, Conceptia fancies herself quite the mystical maven. Her wealth provides ample opportunity to mess around with expensive talismans and items, but provides her with no real understanding of what's at stake. She plays up a false incestuous relationship with her twin brother to keep people uncomfortable.

ARC: Villain-to-Quasi-Hero. When the shit hits the fan Conceptia finds herself in a position to question whether the games she plays are worth the price.

Butane: Conceptia's twin brother, who takes his cue from her. His incestuous love is real, not social make believe. He finds himself a living, rotting corpse, and doesn't know what to do about it. As his flesh decays it becomes apparent that its a more apt reflection of who he is on the inside. The illusions of his humanity fall away. And hit the ground with every piece of his dead, necrotic flesh.

ARC: He grows into the corruption his sister has managed to keep in check simply by having a stronger personality.

April: A new and vibrant evil created by the brutality of men, April's only drive is to understand why. The way she goes about finding out is with pain and brutality equal to that which created her.

ARC: Remains to be seen.

THE DAY PLAYERS: The Whole Sick Crew

Siren City: Part H.P Lovecraft's Arkham, part 1970's New York Cinema (think the Taking of Pelham One Two Three,) part Victorian London, Siren City had to have been cobbled together by lunatics and madmen. Twisted, evil things have been slinking around since its first brick was laid, but the residents have, for the most part, chosen not to see them. The Siren lives and breathes around them, though, it's jagged skyline like a broken jaw waiting to snap shut.

Dark Arthur: A stage magician who craves real power, Dark Arthur is in the game to win it for himself. Both sides - Heroes & Villains - find a use for him along the way, and he couldn't be happier about it.

Story: A new friend of Hogan's, Story is mostly unaware of the nefarious evil that stalks through her city, though she's not phased by it when it gets exposed.

The Street: A sentient Street that's terrified of the city waking up, The Street is like a loyal dog. It provides protection for Brimstone Investigations.

Hopley, Webb, & The Charlies: Parker's group of clueless neighborhood-watch goons. Lacking both Parker's enthusiasm and street smarts, The Charlies do very little but get under foot.

Otto: A mean thug, depraved as they come. He really hates Lear.

Dodds: A ghost who takes quite a shine to Polly. He's more annoying than The Charlie's.

The Baba Yaga: The witch of legend, The Yaga lives on a house on stilts out in the sea. She'll provide information - for a price.

Herbert & Harriet: Two ghosts that Brimstone uses to drum up business when things are slow at the agency. Former actors.

The Golem: A potent, legendary object of power, The Golem is an empty shell that contains whatever someone pours into it. Good, evil, indifference.

VICIOUS SEASON ONE EPISODES

1. Pilot - Charlotte Brimstone, Paranormal P.I, gets hired to investigate a haunted house. Along with her partner Carson, her empath Hogan, her Guy-Friday Lear, and the new girl in the office, Polly, Brimstone creeps through the murky neon alleys of Siren City. In an attempt to rid the streets of some spooky-ass evil she has to face the ever present question - is she just making things worse?

2. Bad Moon Rising - While Brimstone and Hogan run down leads on a possible werewolf gnawing its way through town, Polly must come to grips with the new evil on the street and the part she played in putting it there.

3. There's a Ghost in My House - When people go missing in a grand old movie theater, Brimstone and crew have to look to a black & white world to get to the bottom of the strange goings on. Sullivan takes a trip through his past.

4. Why Are People Grudgeful? - An old flame of Brimstone's has his faith truly tested when Forsythe and Carson use him to get at something Brimstone wants kept secret. Claudia learns about beer. Along the way we catch a glimpse of how Brimstone met her crew.

5. Love Can Tame the Wild - A malevolent make-up man who steals people's faces arrives in Siren City, intent on collecting a trophy from the daughter of one of the wealthiest families in town. Claudia confronts her creator. Lear gets a genital surprise.

6. Better Version of Me - Investigating a nasty death at the Overlook Lodge, Brimstone and Parker get trapped in a room with a grisly spirit. Hogan and Polly pay a visit to the Baba Yaga. Before the night is out, a terrible price will be paid.

VICIOUS SEASON ONE EPISODES

7. Sometime's Good Guys Don't Wear White - A dangerous vigilante mob tears through the underbelly of Siren City, looking for its own kind of justice. Conceptia makes a new friend in the Baba Yaga while Brimstone and crew struggle with their grief.

8. Pow Pow Pow - It's Halloween in Siren City, and a rogue Street tries to protect some of its favorite residents from the rising danger of Forsythe and his dastardly deeds. Brimstone and Polly try to scare up a case while Hogan goes his own kind of nuts.

9. Terrible Angels - As a result of a truly harrowing crime committed by a group of Beta-Male twerps, a terrible new evil is born. A face from Polly's past hires Brimstone Investigations. Lear struggles to make sense of her situation.

10. April - April leaves a trail of brutality through Siren City that Brimstone isn't sure she can stop. She turns to Dark Arthur for assistance. An unholy alliance is born.

11. Practice Makes Perfect - Brimstone finds herself tied to a chair, being pumped for information by faces from her past. Polly, Hogan, and The Street mount a daring rescue. Forsythe's plan becomes clear.

12. Bang Bang - Brimstone and crew race to stop Forsythe from waking up Siren City. Everyone steels themselves for the final confrontation at Siren Tower. Not everyone makes it out alive.