

Have you ever had a favorite show cancelled after one or two seasons? Are you still dying for any kind of closure? If so, you are not alone. I'm still holding a grudge against Netflix for canceling *This Society*. And while COVID's outbreak in 2020 was a major factor in its cancellation, it's clear that streaming platforms in this contemporary age of television have a habit of ending shows before their narratives or storyworlds get any time to flourish. Some examples include *The Wilds*, *The Society*, *First Kill*, *Archive 81*, *The O.A.*, *A League of One's Own*, *Warrior Nun*, *Blockbuster*, *The Baby-Sitters Club*, *Fate*, *The Wings Saga*, *The Flight Attendant*, *Julian The Phantoms*, *Paper Girls*, *Pretty Smart*, and *1899*. And so on. You get the point. And all of those are just shows cancelled in the last year and a half.

Modern television platforms are clearly afraid to invest in the new and niche shows and as a result their storyworlds suffer. Viewers are left with an incomplete world and their incomplete endings and little payoff. It's like every show has suddenly become the final season of *Lost*. After all, iconic rich story worlds found in shows like *Game of Thrones* only exist because the series had the time and the space to become a hit. In fact, most first seasons of most famous television shows do not provide viewers with all the answers so early in its run. And this leads me to my question. How do external corporations affect the internal storyworlds? How has the way that we build stories in television changed? Has it changed for the better, for worse? In this world of streaming, there appears to be this constant threat of destruction that did not exist as intently or largely as it did in the past.

In this podcast, I want to explore how TV storyworlds are impacted by capitalist practices and the way that viewers are neglected. After many classes discussing how storyworlds form, I wanted to approach the topic from the opposite way. What leads to an incomplete storyworld? How can we fix this growing problem in our media industries? and why does closure pay off and commitment matter when it comes to long form narratives and serialization and finally what happened to those teenagers in that TV show *The Society* I really need to know. I need to know and I really really hope that you understand the feeling that I'm feeling and that TV shows are getting cut off too soon and are not giving us the answers that we deserve.

So I've decided to focus on the 2019 Netflix original *The Society* for two reasons. One, its premise, mysteries, and character arcs were really intriguing, and I believe that it had the potential to become a massive hit over time with a little bit of promotion and patience. Two, I'm so sad that it got canceled, and I love talking about it. I'd recommend it if you can stomach never getting answers to your burning questions.

The society's premise is exactly as it sounds. The entire series is and was going to be dedicated to creating a new society in which the main characters must navigate politics, leadership, discipline, the hunger, and social relationships. It's been described as a modern version of *Lord of the Flies*, where a group of teenagers wake up one morning to discover their town of West Ham has been surrounded in deadly forest, isolating them from their world. All adults, young kids, elderly people, they all have vanished, leaving the teens to fend for themselves. And there are a variety of characters, but it mainly follows a girl named Allie and her sister Cassandra, as well as their friends and future political rivals.

Many mysteries are introduced right away. Even in the first few episodes, there's questions like, where has everybody gone? Is this isolated town a new parallel world? Have they traveled in time? And there is a new strange smell that's plagued their town pre-isolation. What's happened to it? Why is that gone? Is that the cause of the isolation? And most importantly, the show asks,

what is going to happen to these characters? How are they going to go about forming this new society? And what I like most about this show is how immersive it is: it's rich and complex, despite its singular season. This is why I find its cancellation so devastating and frustrating. Its potential was wasted, and the world feels forever lost on us. And while I don't wish to spoil the ending, I think it's important to also talk about how it resolves some of these mysteries, or how it doesn't resolve it and instead only provides us with more questions.

Eventually we do learn that in fact there's a chance these teenagers could be in a parallel world or at least another place in time. They discover that their constellations are not like any of the constellations that they saw when they were on earth. And so the only possible explanation is that either they've moved places or moved it forward or backwards in time. These questions that have come to us through a couple answers are not any more conclusive than what we would hope for. The show leaves us with more questions than answers when it ends. And at the very end, the very last episode, there is this scene where their parents are shown to be mourning the loss of their children. There seems to be two versions of the same town, one with teenagers and one without.

And what's important here is how this show was clearly written with more seasons in mind. Its creator, Chris Kreisler, stated it was meant to have at least five seasons to complete this story. It's designed as a long-form, slow-burn narrative, but the writers are barred from sharing the full scope of their story world because of production companies like Netflix.

But why? Well, money of course. After researching this cancellation phenomenon, I learned that the Netflix or Amazon Prime companies are more likely to prioritize making many first or second season shows rather than spending money on shows like *The Society* or *The Wilds* gets the full runtime that it deserves. Clearly external factors like corporations and their desires, their budgets, are really big factors in how a creator's world unfolds, or in this case, doesn't unfold.

But what can we do? How can viewers fight such large companies and those corporations who get make the final cancellation decisions. Well, there's a few things. First, creators can take matters into their own hands. If copyright allows, they can turn to other networks or platforms and ask them to take on new seasons. For example, this happened with Netflix's *One Day at a Time*, a rebooted sitcom, which eventually was cancelled from Netflix after season three, but after a lot of fighting by fans got picked up for a fourth season at Pop TV. And of course other mediums work as well. It doesn't just have to be a new show or a new season in the television format. Kaiser, for example, has expressed a desire to write *The Society* into a comic form and he wishes to explore the show's first and second season in a different medium. While nothing is official just yet, this turn towards transmedia as a way to keep the storyworld alive and provide viewers some sense of closure is really effective.

And finally, as we know, fan projects and fan culture are really powerful. Creative projects like fan fiction are also always an option. It's free to make anywhere online and by anyone. Yet, like with comic books or authors' tweets, this is far less satisfying for TV viewers, especially if they are already invested in the television medium. It can be cathartic in one way, but also, unfortunately, it can be disappointing in a lot of other ways.

But why is this important? I think that's the real question. Why is commitment to our TV shows important? Why is it good to have full developed storyworlds that we can fall into? Why is it important to see the lack of trust with our media industries? I think it's fair to say that industries have never been without the desire to make money. But I really think that streaming services

have really fallen down this rabbit hole where they prefer quantity over quality. And if we don't have quality, what's the point of even making television shows? If the content that we're consuming is always unsatisfying, if it's incomplete and non-immersive for those reasons, what's the point of even making storyworlds in the first place? I believe the storyworlds are important because it allows us for a place to go that is not our own world. It allows us to think about things like our own societies and the way that our politics and relationships unfold. We can explore those things in a safe way but also in a way that's compelling. For a show like *The Society*, the entire premise is about exploring sort of the human condition.

And I feel like storyworlds as a concept is just, is a very human thing to do. We've been telling stories for decades and centuries. And I really think that full, complete stories, narratives, television shows are things that we should strive to protect. And I think that we should strive to make sure that our stories are stories that get to be told.