

Firefly: Season One And Serenity Were Just The Prelude

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I will always remember the first time I paused while flicking through channels and heard “boy, this planet really smells!” I was immediately hooked. And I spent the following long dark years before *Serenity* a fervent evangelist. That we even got our Big Damn Movie shocks me to this day and I want to make clear that I am more than content to sit back, wrap up my fandom with a little bow, put it on a shelf, and only ever trot it out when someone makes the mistake of asking the wrong question at a party. We got our ending—such as it is—and I have no illusions that our wildly successful cast will ever disentangle themselves from their various contracts in time to film anything other than *Firefly: The Geriatrics*.

However.

That doesn’t mean it isn’t fun to consider the possibilities and the recent successful Kickstarter campaign for a *Veronica Mars* movie certainly set off quite a lot of chatter. What surprised me the most though were those who felt the story was finished and that any continuation would have to resort to the dark magic of prequeling, retconning or rebooting. That’s patently ludicrous and I feel it warrants a moment’s response. (Also—in a slightly more self-serving vein—the years have taught me that nothing revitalizes one’s writing like tapping into some geek righteousness. Spend months crafting a very compassionately nuanced and analytical exploration of objectification and pornography, get ten reads; feverishly slobber off some drelk on *Star Wars*, get ten thousand a day. And while I don’t have any illusions about the odds of striking readership gold again, that kind of piece always breaks my writer’s perfectionism and boy could I use a hand there again.)

Honestly I see *Serenity* as the perfect launching point for a really solid series and/or sequels. Here’s how *Firefly* continues in my head:

Remember that in all likelihood Mal and the crew are not famous. The whole point of Wikileaks was to keep B Manning’s name out of the papers and it’s very much not in the nature of *Serenity*’s crew to stick their heads up further than absolutely required. All the rest of the ‘verse knows is that a bit of video and possibly some boring records got leaked. Of course Mal’s name is finally very much on the government’s radar but there’s some reticence towards generating another big splashy scene hunting the crew down. A Pentagon Papers scandal like *Miranda* generates the kind of turbulence that changes *which* corrupt and privileged politicians/businessmen are holding the reins of political power, but it hardly shoves the majority of those responsible or

connected to those responsible into the wastebin. Key members of parliament are going to remain, more or less, *key members of parliament*. Thus there's incentive for the best repositioned factions of those in power to keep a walking potential after-tremor of the scandal like Malcolm, River and company alive and in play. It's not in anyone's interest to make Miranda into a truly tumultuous affair, no one wants *systemic* change after all, but once the news cycles have petered it out into background static, softly kicking the hornets nest again to re-malign one's competitors becomes a *survivable* tactic. Insofar as those with the most amount of power post-Miranda ever consider Mal and the crew, they like that they have a piece in play that could get Miranda mildly back into the news.

But of course this is a two-sided coin. While the upper echelons of the police/military aren't going to go on a land-burning and sea-boiling crusade for our Big Damn Heroes, there's lots and lots of space and motivation for other hammers to come swinging at them. Those with—for whatever byzantine reason due to the most current web of politics at any moment—a stake in *not* having Miranda come up will very much like to see Serenity snuffed out in a silent explosion out on the ass-end of the 'verse. As will any remnants of those with direct responsibility for Miranda carrying an itchy personal grudge at the notion of letting a flea get away after a bite. And of course River will remain—if not grow—both dangerous and valuable.

If Mal was unable to get underscrupulous jobs *before* because of his chaotic conscience and attention grabbing antics, now things are surely only peachy.

This is the real linchpin on which Serenity instantly transforms from a crescendo and coda to the opening salvo in our little old firefly's real journey. Whereas before the crew were junior-grade lumpenproles, in constant danger of being crushed by a stray step but capable of eking out an honestly dishonest living begging for warm bowls of crime-filled gruel and saluting passing cops with their best pearly-white smiles, now they're actual outlaws.

If Firefly was ever in any chance of returning as a series the first season or two after Serenity would be a tense affair of survival and piracy. Every relationship or period of sedentary safety would have an all-too-pressing expiration date and they'd have to be far more proactive about heists... and a little less discriminatory. Sure the sense of soft familial love would be strengthened by Simon and Kaylee, but the tension of "me and mine" versus common humanity with strangers would be again be a salient running theme, and tensions of ends-and-means would surely heighten as the crew turns more and more to piracy.

But! Things are not quite so glum for our occasionally-intrepid mercenaries. There are alternatives to slowly filling the fleshy shoes of the Reavers, although perhaps even less palpable. In my mind Mal and the crew eventually find the kind of sponsors of hired-guns undaunted by the powers-that-be behind the Alliance: *other* Alliance powers-that-be. First corporate espionage/subversion/thuggery, and then later direct employ from figures inside parliament itself. Although the crew is never treated as anything more than a few steps removed pawn only sometimes on the edge of awareness of their situations, the potential for system-spanning plot entanglements and culture/paradigm clash is immense. As are the internal tensions and counter-schemes, because our Big Damn Heroes are hardly passive.

Firefly certainly did not die with Serenity, nor did the struggles of our crew.

There are quantum-telegraph cables to be cut, murderous gunmen to be tracked down, samples of vats of copyrighted plastics and proteins to be stolen, reavers dispersed by the Alliance into

local raiding parties in garbage fields, denizens of small spacestations bandying together to fend off the thugs of spectrum monopolists...

I've always really, really wanted to see the crew rob a giant particle accelerator in space. I think there's so much potential there in the implicit cultural and paradigmatic clash. Firefly borrows strongly from Star Wars' complete disinterest in science, but explicitly contextualizes this tendency as a cultural and subjective perspective by working hard to make strides towards a believable scientific framework in the background. In much the same way that Joss Whedon is personally a fan of the Alliance's social democracy (with universal healthcare), yet the story is shot primarily from a libertarian perspective with the other aspects of the underlying reality obscured in what seem like minor details.

Neither Blue Sun nor the history of Shepard Book were sufficiently handled on by the comics—if they're even cannon—and there's so much more room to touch on them, if only fleetingly. Just as the first season built up a pile of references and floating plots, so too would one expect any new series to continue shaking in references and background details to entirely new aspects of their society and relationships with new characters. There's so much more to explore in the 'verse and so much more to be mined from the cultural, aesthetic and paradigmatic clash between periphery and core that made episodes like "Ariel" so popular.

Cosmopolitan revolutionary and radical movements surely exist in the core of the Alliance and I'd like to think we'd get to see them open up and explore the reference implicit in Simon's friends. But sadly a treatment that looks anything like real revolutionary and radical groups rather than nth-iterated cartoonish abstractions of hollywood tropes kinda beggars belief. (It's still viscerally painful for me to watch those scenes in Children of Men, so embarrassingly unreal are the supposed radicals, excellent though the rest of the film is.) So maybe instead of coming into the ranks of radicals and revolutionaries, the final apex of the story is one of finally actually saving people instead of watching them die or telling their tale. I love the idea of a different sort of social landscape opening up in the border planets over the course of the story, of the sort of wildcat labor struggles that filled the wild west after the civil war was won and the railroads established. Futuristic struggles and battles between Wobblies and Pinkertons would nicely parallel the actual west, where a volunteer Confederate soldier and abolitionist like Albert Parsons could ride with the Texas cavalry, start a paper in Waco, fight the Klan, marry an unbelievably badass freed slave, and die on the gallows in Chicago as an anarchist union organizer.

Serenity framed itself and the prior prelude of Firefly as Mal's struggle to finally stand for something, to shake off the wounded defensive nihilism of the Browncoats' defeat and come back into the world. But it also brought to the fore River's similar but hidden journey in ways that hinted at her always being the main character, albeit temporarily obscured in the background detail. In that light Firefly Season One and its spectacular finale look a lot like opening chapter of a George RR Martin book: the person indicated to be of central narrative importance is there primarily to set things up and characters gonna die quickly.

Serenity ends with River exactly where Mal began five years before the show in that junkyard: a couple years after a personal hell, just beginning to coming out of her shell and looking up at what could be. That's a lot of seasons to come. I can't wait to find out what she finally comes to believe in.

Because *that*? That'll be an interesting day.

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