

Cartoon Planet - "Love that Brak!" by summa sniff

The Internet makes it really easy to find new TV to watch. Whenever I'm bored, I can just surf the AV Club, or Vulture, or Pajiba to find some new show that fits neatly into a Venn diagram of my interests. You like 19th century dramas about surgery starring Hollywood hotties? Here's three. You like watching comedians do math? Try this out. We truly live in the future.

The only thing is... it takes a lot of the fun out of tv watching. I'm way more critical of what it finds for me. I expect to be fully entertained for the entire 42 commercial-free minutes, and, if not, I can go find literally thousands of other things to watch.

It would have never picked Cartoon Planet for me. Only a lack of supervision, a cable box, and too much sugar did that.

When I was in the fourth grade, I had this friend, Emily. She was an only child of a single mom who worked nights, so obviously she had the best sleepovers. Three of us (the weirdos in the class) would hang out Friday nights, watching whatever was on, drinking Peach Nehi, and playing Ouija all night.

Cartoon Planet was always on.

It was the beginning of Cartoon Network, before they really had anything to air. During the day, it was mostly reruns of Wacky Races and Scooby Doo, and at night, their flagship original show, Space Ghost Coast to Coast. I was too young to really "get" Space Ghost, since at 9, I had no idea who Bjork or Thom Yorke were. Cartoon Planet was the non-interview Space Ghost show, and came on after, around 1 AM.

Each episode was twenty minutes of bizarre recurring goofs played over stock footage of some old cartoon. There wasn't that much footage, so it was just

special which would host the interaction of, not cartoons for old people like The Flintstones (sorry Chuck), but all the cartoons I loved right now (right now being 1990). Michelangelo, Garfield, Slimer, The Smurfs, The Muppet Babies... interacting with the likes of Huey, Dewey, Louie, Alvin, Simon, Theodore, freaking ALF and more. AND MORE.

There was a full color half-page ad in the Sunday paper the week before Cartoon All-Stars to the Rescue premiered and I carried that thing around to show all my friends before taping it's creased remains to my bedroom wall. I could not comprehend how such a cartoon could come into being. They must've discovered the secret! If any one of these cartoons is good on it's own, a cartoon starring all of them would be... the best thing ever produced. It was one of those easy solutions that 8-year old me figured out instantly, but for some reason adults never implemented. Like print more money. Except this time, they freaking went through with it.

Blank tape readied in the VCR, I sopped those visuals in like a thirsty sponge. And it was everything I had hoped it would be. It was a 30 minute cartoon with all of my favorite characters. Singing about how marijuana will make you steal from your little sister. And steal beers from your dad. And then your skin melts off.

I'm not sure I knew going in that this was going to be an anti-drug thing. And I didn't care. I watched that VHS hundreds of times. I probably knew it wasn't good. But they got me and I loved it.

Pole Position - "Dial M for Magic" by @mldmjo

As video game tie-ins go, Pole Position was a stretch. The Atari-era grand prix arcade racer—a titan at bowling alleys and Action Family Arcades—had you speeding around a race track. The show featured three crime-fighting siblings with two talking, autonomous, gadget-stuffed supercars. Think Scooby-Doo, but the Mystery Machine was a slick tractor-trailer with living quarters and a built-in car carrier. Each week there was a new mystery, a new ne'er-do-well, and the kids in the secret Pole Position team drove their way to justice.

When Pole Position aired, we had a couple of ancient, cheap-import 1970s Saabs in the garage that, any given Sunday, Dad was probably wrenching on. The teens in the show had cars that could be anything.

In one episode, an illusionist controls a whole winning village by terrorizing the townsfolk with fake ghosts. Over less than 30 minutes, the cars show off a) firehose turbines, b) high-power searchlights, c) net launchers, d) self-inflating rats, e) self-driving (duh), f) flying, g) catching falling objects mid-flight, and h) hovercraft conversion via Delorean-style folding wheels.

Did I mention they talked? None of my pull-back-and-go Darda cars or Majorette coupes could talk. Maybe a talking Saab would've warned me not to leave crayons in the back-seat ashtray to melt in the summer sun.

Dahl is something that the wide release Batman movies never really managed to pull off: a sympathetic yet creepy villain. Many times in the episode, you only see her giant stylized eyes. Her dancing and lilting girly taunts are disturbing. With her frilly breeches and overpronounced curls, she comes off as a living, malicious toy.

She is also a human being dealing with insane circumstances. When she sees (hallucinates?) herself as a normal woman in a funhouse mirror, she breaks down, begging to know why Batman couldn't just let her play her pretend kidnapping game. She fires her Derringer-doll at all the mirrors, destroying her false images. When she realizes she has lost, she grasps Batman's legs, sobbing in a normal adult voice "I didn't mean to..." Bruce Timm and Paul Dini have punched you in the gut again.

You know what you're getting into when you hear that operatic and almost keening Shirley Walker opening theme instead of the action packed Danny Elfman number. The show would continue to get older and darker, and you would continue to age and mature with it.

