

= Mythology of Carnivàle =

Carnivàle is an American television series set in the United States during the Great Depression . The series traces the disparate storylines of a young carnival worker named Ben Hawkins and Brother Justin Crowe , a preacher in California . The overarching story is built around a good and evil theme , which serves as a human @-@ scaled metaphor within a complex structure of myth and allegory . Samson , the carnival 's dwarf manager , sets up the show 's mythology with a prologue in the pilot episode , talking of " a creature of light and a creature of darkness " being born " to each generation " preparing for a final battle .

Most mythological elements in Carnivàle relate to so @-@ called Avatars (or Creatures of Light and Darkness) , fictional human @-@ like beings with supernatural powers who embody good and evil . In its first season Carnivàle does not reveal its characters as Avatars beyond insinuation , and makes the nature of suggested Avatars a central question . By the second season it is established that Ben is a Creature of Light and Brother Justin a Creature of Darkness . Other than through the characters , the show 's good @-@ and @-@ evil theme manifests in the series ' contemporary religion , the Christian military order Knights Templar , tarot divination , and in historical events like the Dustbowl and humankind 's first nuclear test . Show creator Daniel Knauf did not respond to questions about the mythology but did provide hints about the mythological structure to online fandom both during and after the two @-@ season run of Carnivàle . Nevertheless , many of the intended clues remained unnoticed by viewers . Knauf left fans a production summary of Carnivàle 's first season two years after cancellation . This so @-@ called Pitch Document , originally written to give HBO and Knauf 's co @-@ writers an overview of the intended storyline , backed up and expanded upon the assumed mythological rules .

= = Avatars = =

The term Avatar (also spelled Avatara) originates in Hindu mythology , where it most commonly refers to the incarnation (bodily manifestation) of a higher being or the Supreme Being on Earth . Carnivàle 's story never clearly establishes the meaning of this term , yet HBO and the writers used the term interchangeably with the Creatures of Light and Darkness of the series ' opening monologue . The series portrays Avatars as human @-@ like beings with supernatural powers who embody good and evil , and whose constant and age @-@ long struggle serves to explain the Dark Ages and Ages of Enlightenment in humanity 's history in the real world . Carnivàle represents this Avataric duality as Light and Dark in several instances . The surnames of the main characters , Ben Hawkins and Justin Crowe , suggest a symbolic link to hawks and crows , the winged Creatures of Light and Dark . The last two Tarot cards seen in the Carnivàle 's opening title sequence are " The Sun " and " The Moon " , standing for God and the Devil . By the same token , the show 's title card and the logo of the carnival depict a sun placed opposite a moon . Show creator Daniel Knauf designed this logo .

= = Characteristics = = =

The characters Ben Hawkins and Brother Justin Crowe are revealed to be Avatars through the usage of their supernatural powers ; however , viewers did not find it immediately apparent whether a suspected Avatar served as good or evil . The series gave clues , such as depicting the Creatures of Darkness with coal @-@ black eyes (according to Daniel Knauf , Creatures of Light have an invisible aura) . An Avatar 's nature is determined by the type and application of his powers . As the Pitch Document states , Avatars draw their talents and powers from the same pool . These abilities may vary in type and strength , and include but are not limited to the manipulation and transfer of life force , spiritual healings , telekinesis and telepathy , and granting small measures of powers to a mortal . Although the series showed the powers of Ben and Brother Justin , reviewers were still unsure about the main characters ' Avataric nature by the end of the first season . When Ben 's good nature and Justin 's dark heritage became clearer in Season 2 , reviewers began to describe

Carnivàle 's underlying message as " essentially the opposite of spiritual belief : fatalism " . Daniel Knauf disputed any theory of determinism , and repeatedly pointed to the characters ' free will to overcome their destiny . Free choice allows the story to portray Avatars as deliberately not making use of their powers or as acting contrary to their nature ; an Avatar would however still have to put consistent effort into not lapsing back into his defined moral behavior .

The Pitch Document described Avatars as sharing the ability to envision the past , present and future , both literally and symbolically . Accessing this plane of pure truth is given as an Avatar 's birthright and can be improved through study and practice . Avatars can manipulate and transmit the resulting visions through dreams to others . As far as established , only Creatures of Darkness suffer physical weakness or pain when their opposite makes use of his powers . Avatars can sense the existence of their moral opponent , but are unable to detect or identify them outside of close physical proximity . They can , however , easily detect and locate an Avatar of like kind over great distances with great accuracy . These abilities contribute to the convergence of the two storylines in Carnivàle .

= = = Terms and order of succession = = =

Daniel Knauf overlaid the Avatars of the fictional universe with an elaborate order of succession by blood , similar to the ascent of royal families . The descriptors Royals , King and Prince are replaced in the series with Vectori , Prophet and Prince . Female royals like Queens and Princesses do not have a fictional counterpart and are instead replaced with the concepts of the Alpha , the Omega and the Usher . These Wild Card Avatars have special rules in addition to , or replacing , the normal ones . Reviewers rarely focused on the significance of the mentioned Avataric terms and their implied characteristics in the story , despite detailed explanations by Knauf and the later public availability of Carnivàle 's Pitch Document , setting out the complex mythological structure .

The first Prophet in the mythology of Carnivàle is the Alpha . This creature is never mentioned in the series , but Knauf described her as a female who lived before the Flood and whose story was lost with the destruction of the Royal Library of Alexandria . The Alpha spawned the first pair of Avatara , manifestations of some higher power or House ; one is Light and the other Dark . A Creature of Light and a Creature of Darkness have been born to each generation since , and unlike the Alpha , they have always been male .

The Avataric Blood travels within families forming a dynasty . The first @-@ born son of an Avatar receives a so @-@ called mantle at birth that manifests him as an Avatar of a new generation ; whether the new Avatar is Light or Dark is chance . Therefore , there is one Avatar to each House per generation . Giving birth to a new Avatar leaves the mother barren and insane . Before that time , she can give birth to an unlimited number of females from an Avatar . These children as well as their respective offspring are called Vectori , beings with Avataric Blood who are not themselves Avatara , and who thus become generationally further removed from an Avatar in the bloodline . While Vectori cannot become Avatara , as that mantle is only conveyed upon birth , they can still exhibit some minor powers and often show signs of insanity .

The eldest generational Avatar within a House is dominant and called the Prophet . He possesses blue blood , also called Vitae Divina . The next in line is the Ascendant Prince . Any additional Avatara within the House are Princes ranked by generation . Although Avatara form blood dynasties from father to son , House affiliations can be mixed within a dynasty . If the youngest Prince in a dynasty dies , the dynasty is ended . Most dynasties only last on average three generations , since typical Avatara can be killed by any means . When a dynasty ends , the first male child born elsewhere in the world with the most Avataric blood will be a new Prince starting a new dynasty .

When a Prophet dies while an Ascendant Prince also lives , one of two things happens . If the Prophet is killed by his Ascendant Prince , the Prince will gain the mantle of the Prophet with a boon (full measure of power) . For the boon to be passed , the Prophet must be of sound mind , and either willingly pass on the boon , or be taken by surprise so that he cannot put up a psychic defense . If however the Prophet is impaired , the Ascendant Prince may be driven insane . If a Prophet dies in any other way , the Ascendant Prince will be automatically raised to Prophet in his

stead , without chance of a boon .

Two unique Avatars join the Alpha as an exception to the Avataric rule . Carnivàle 's Avataric mythology prophesied the Usher of Destruction throughout the ages as a harbinger of the End Times to usher in the Armageddon . He is known by a thousand names in a thousand books , but can only manifest once . He appears as the Tattooed Man in visions , and he can only be killed with a weapon infused with the Vitae Divina that is thrust into the bough of his tree tattoo where his dark heart dwells . Injuries from such anointed weapons are said to never fully heal . Also prophesied is the Omega (known in the Pitch Document as Omega The Destroyer and the Antichrist) , whom Carnivàle 's occult characters had assumed for a long time to be one and the same with the Usher . The Omega is , like the Alpha , a female and the only other known exception to the male restriction in Avatar succession , and because of the allusion to " the Beginning and the End " in naming , the Omega is commonly accepted as the last Avatar .

= = = Manifestation in the series = = =

Certain characters have seemingly supernatural abilities from the beginning of the series . Ben Hawkins and Brother Justin Crowe not only have common visions of two soldiers (one of them also appearing in a tuxedo) and a man with a tattooed tree on his chest , but also of each other . Ben can heal and resurrect beings at the cost of others ' life , while Brother Justin can read and manipulate people 's minds . Ben and Lodz , a blind mentalist of the carnival , experience visions of the medieval Knights Templar . Carnival fortuneteller Sofie can communicate telepathically with her catatonic mother , whom she once sees being raped by the Tattooed Man . The progressing story increases the importance of the two mysterious soldiers , who are revealed as Henry Scudder and Management . Strange words of unknown meaning appear throughout the series . Variations of the phrase " Every Prophet in his House " are repeated , seemingly without context . Ben finds the repeating letter string TARAVATARAVA in a mineshaft , which he is later able to interpret as Avatar . Season 2 introduces the word Usher in particular relation to Brother Justin . Management repeats this term to Ben in two instances . After Management 's death , Ben has sudden knowledge about Princes , Prophets and the Usher , even knowing to whom these terms apply , respectively . The sentence " Sofie is the Omega " is seen once , written across a mirror without further explanation . Sofie demonstrates powers and attributes similar to those of Ben and Brother Justin in the last Carnivàle episode .

The context for some of these events is provided by the (fictionally used) Gospel of Matthias , a book in Season 2 that connects the Templars to Ben 's father . Written in archaic English , reminiscent of the King James Bible translation , it contains parts of Samson 's Season 1 prologue , mentions the Avatars , and alludes to an apocalyptic passage in the Book of Revelation . It also contains etchings of a gnarled and bent tree , which in one image is attacked by a Knight Templar holding a knife . Wilfred Talbot Smith interprets this book to Brother Justin , quoting , " By the hand of the Prince , the Prophet dies . Upon his death , the Prince shall rise , " and " [Beware the Usher . A dark heart dwells where branches meet .] Anointed dagger plunge thee deep . " Management and Ben repeat these verses independently of Smith .

= = = = What is an Avatar ? = = = =

As confirmed by Daniel Knauf and the Pitch Document , the Avatars of the current generation (at the end of Season 2) are Ben as the Creature of Light and Brother Justin as the Creature of Darkness . Justin is also the Usher , spiritually represented by the Tattooed Man . Their respective fathers were Avatars of the previous generation : Henry Scudder was the Creature of Darkness , and Lucius Belyakov (Management) was the Creature of Light . At each time , an Avatar 's blood color mirrored his status . Ben 's and Brother Justin 's blood were red when they were Princes , and upon becoming Prophets , their blood turned into Vitae Divina (blue blood) . Scudder 's father Hilton was an Avatar of undisclosed nature . The mentalist of the carnival , Lodz , was merely a mortal who had once received Avataric skills from Scudder in exchange for his sense of sight .

Several women in Carnivàle are tied to Avatars , but only two have Avataric blood : Belyakov 's daughter Iris is a Vectorus by definition , and Justin 's daughter Sofie is the Omega . Although Sofie is two years older than Ben , her father 's Avataric generation places her in the next Avataric generation . The other affected women are human mothers who began to suffer from mental illness or strange behavior after giving birth to an Avatar . Ben 's mother Flora was a religious fanatic who would not touch her son . Scudder 's mother Emma cut her eyes out and killed several of her family members the night Scudder was born . Sofie 's mother Apollonia became catatonic after Sofie 's birth . Justin 's and his older sister Iris 's mother receives no special mention in the series , but the Pitch Document mentions her chronic paranoid schizophrenia after Justin 's birth . As far as known , none of these mothers became pregnant after giving birth to an Avatar .

Knauf hinted at more Avatars in a February 2005 chat : " What do Jesus , Caligula , Alexander the Great , Caesar , Buddha , Vlad the Impaler , Brother Justin , Ben Hawkins , Luscious [sic] Belyakov , Hilton Scudder , and Henry Scudder have in common ? " The Pitch Document stated , " If an Avatar was dedicated to developing and mastering his power , he could direct it with the precision of a scalpel . Such was the case with many of the Prophets , with Buddha , Jesus and Mohammed , with Caligula and Vlad Dracul . " In this early plot summary , Rasputin and the Borgias were Avatars as well . But like other Avatars in Carnivàle , none of these historical figures were explicitly revealed as such on the show .

= = = The Tattooed Man and the tree = = =

A man with a tattooed tree on his chest and back is introduced in the opening minutes of Carnivàle 's pilot episode , and appears in many other Avataric visions and dreams : in Ben 's and Brother Justin 's common recurring dreams chasing Henry Scudder in a cornfield , in Ben 's microsleep @-@ like visions , in Sofie 's visions of the rape of her mother , and in an extended vision of Brother Justin foreshadowing his dark future . Ben encounters a little boy with a similar tree painted to his chest and back late in Season 1 . Brother Justin finds this tree grown on a hill early in Season 2 , which prompts him to get his chest and back tattooed accordingly . The tree is also depicted in the show 's Gospel of Matthias book , in a painting at the Templar Hall in Loving , New Mexico , and on many images in the room of Templar chaplain Kerrigan . Management and Wilfred Talbot Smith imply the tree 's significance for the resolution of Carnivàle .

Show creator Daniel Knauf stated that the tree in Carnivàle is the iconic Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden . Its implied meaning and power prompted him to place it on the Tattooed Man 's chest because " this is where you will build your empire . This is what it all boils down , [...] and it just had a certain power . " Played by Don Swayze , the Tattooed Man is often depicted without a focus on his face , although a few frames in the pilot episode show him played by Clancy Brown (Brother Justin) . Knauf confirmed the Tattooed Man as the spiritual representation of the Usher of Destruction .

= = Historical and cultural allusions = =

= = = Dust Bowl = = =

The story of Carnivàle takes place in the mid @-@ 1930s during the worst of the Great Depression , a time of massive social and political upheaval . Unemployment rates were high , and European fascism was on the rise , in the years leading up to the Second World War . People in the Great Plains suffered from the effects of the Dust Bowl . Farmers often not only ran into debt and lost their properties but also risked their health ; dust pneumonia was a common cause of death .

Carnivàle is a retrospective interpretation of these times . Okie Ben loses his mother and his farm to the dust when a carnival picks him up . While the carnival travels throughout the Southwestern United States , California preacher Brother Justin tends to the needs of Dust Bowl refugees , who slowly become his biggest supporters . Although Carnivàle replaces the real sociological @-@

scientific reasons for the drought conditions with fantasy elements and the presence of the Devil , it still addresses the Dust Bowl situation repeatedly . Samson 's catch phrases are variations of " Let 's shake some dust ! " The episode " Black Blizzard " focuses on Ben and the carnival coping with a major dust storm . Rain only occurs twice in the show . The first occurrence is when Ben and Sofie copulate ; the writers wanted to highlight that Avataric sex " affects the heavens " . The second is when Brother Justin forcibly takes the Boon from Henry Scudder in the episode " Cheyenne , WY " .

= = = Religion = = =

A major part of Carnivàle 's story is religion . Samson 's prologue in the pilot episode is based on a few introduction paragraphs on the Pitch Document 's cover sheet that were initially not planned to be performed . But whereas Samson 's prologue only shortly mentions the Genesis creation narrative before introducing the fictional mythology , the original segment put more emphasis on the battle between God and Satan :

" Before the Beginning , after the great celestial war that rocked the very foundation of Heaven and Hell , God and Satan established an uneasy truce . Never again would they face each other in direct confrontation . So God created the Earth , inhabiting it with the crafty ape he called Man . And henceforth , to each generation was born a creature of Light and a creature of Darkness , and they would gather to them men of ilk nature and thus , by proxy , carry on the war between Good and Evil . "

Show creator Daniel Knauf believed Carnivàle 's religious aspects stemmed from the epic of good and evil as a major fabric of the 1930s , while executive producer Ronald D. Moore regarded religion as a way to express the struggle of good versus evil , faith , and the nature of humanity . Neither the audience nor the actors were given advice on how to interpret the show 's biblical imagery . Clancy Brown , the actor who portrayed Brother Justin , did not know whether his character was the Creature of Light or Darkness during the first season . He however thought that the visions made Brother Justin believe to be on a righteous mission of God until late in the first season . Compared to Brother Justin , Brown stated he practiced religion in moderate ways .

Daniel Knauf felt that Brother Justin shares patterns with certain religious leaders who were often persecuted for their delusional visions . Historical figures like Father Coughlin , Aimee Semple McPherson and Brigham Young served as inspiration , although the writers refrained from re-telling their particular stories . Daniel Knauf originally thought of making Brother Justin a Protestant minister , but when the producers needed to decide on a specific religious affiliation , Knauf contested their plans to make him a Catholic priest . Knauf , a Catholic himself , settled on the Methodist denomination , which he perceived as significantly less clichéd , suspicious or controversial . When asked whether God had influenced him to write the story , Knauf replied no .

Carnivàle relies on other religious symbols and parallels for its mythology . The National Shrine of the Little Flower , funded by Father Coughlin in the 1930s , was an inspiration for the temple in Brother Justin 's vision in the episode " Los Moscos " . This vision foreshadows the world that Justin will potentially build as he comes to power as a radio preacher . The producers planned to use radio towers instead of regular steeples for the temple ; the design also incorporated Eastern European domes and Western European cathedrals . In the same vision , the Tattooed Man appears near a tree that resembles the iconic Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil , and implies that Justin is the Usher . According to Knauf , the Usher represents a " timeless character who shows up in all different cultures " , and who is " there to usher in the Armageddon " as " the harbinger of End times " .

= = = Knights Templar = = =

Carnivàle introduces the Knights Templar , a medieval Christian military order , in the late Season 1 episode " Lonnigan , TX " , where Ben meets the freak finder Boffo Phineas . When Ben comes in contact with Boffo 's ring , he experiences a powerful series of visions of the Knights Templar practicing rituals , putting heads on spikes , and being burned at the stake . The ring bears a red

@-@ crossed symbol , and when Samson passes a trinket with the same symbol to Lodz , the mentalist has the same visions as Ben and falls to the floor chanting " in hoc signo vinces " (" in this sign you will conquer ") . The Knights Templar remain a recurring subplot until Ben discovers the symbol 's significance in early Season 2 . The Lodge of the Benevolent Order of Templar has its last appearance in the mid @-@ Season @-@ 2 episode " Old Cherry Blossom Road " , where the escaped convict Varlyn Stroud uses it to track Ben . When Wilfred Talbot Smith asks for the location of the Saunière manuscript late in Season 2 , Scudder answers that it is hidden in Rennes @-@ le @-@ Château .

Despite being of only tangential importance to the series ' two seasons , the Knights Templar have an elaborate backstory that was left untold due to the cancellation . The Pitch Document described the fictional Order , then simply called the " Order Templar " , as a fraternity of fellow travelers that was once charged by the Roman Catholic Church with locating and aiding the Avatars . Knauf said both Henry Scudder and his father Hilton were members of the Templars ; Scudder was so because he wanted access to their knowledge and library . The Saunière manuscript would have been " mildly relevant " for the future storyline .

= = = Trinity = = =

The Season 2 episode " Los Moscos " has Management urge Ben to seek Scudder ; Ben needs to learn the name of the preacher of his dreams (Brother Justin) to prevent a future catastrophe . An induced vision transports Ben into a desert where he suddenly hears an alarm @-@ like noise . A massive explosion occurs , followed by a rising mushroom cloud . When Ben opens his eyes from the blast of dust , Justin kneels in front of him and asks " Ye offspring of serpents , who warned you to flee from the wrath to come ? " Ben drives past this location one episode later in " Alamogordo , NM " . In a shared vision in the episode " Creed , OK " , Ben and Sofie kiss in a desert , surrounded by bright light and swirling dust . Season 2 takes place in 1935 .

Reviews interpreted these visions as Ben 's challenge to find and defeat Brother Justin ; Ben has to ultimately stop the creation of the atomic bomb as " the world 's march towards doomsday . " The Season 1 prologue already suggested this interpretation , mentioning " a false sun explod [ing] over Trinity , " at which point " man forever traded away wonder for reason . " The Trinity test near Alamogordo , New Mexico was humankind 's first test of a nuclear weapon in 1945 , and Daniel Knauf would have finished Carnivàle 's six @-@ year run with the explosion of an atomic bomb as the beginning of the " Age of Reason " . Still , Knauf 's story is " not about the deployment of the bomb , it 's more about the invention of the bomb , " with the focus " around Alamogordo and the Trinity test site rather than Hiroshima and Nagasaki . " Much research was put into the visual effects of the explosion . Stock footage of the first beats of nuclear explosions and a self @-@ created explosion of 300 gallons of gasoline were used for reference . The ground effects and blowing dust were created with combinations of volumetric computer graphics smoke , and the fireball of the nuclear explosion was built from Hubble images of the Sun . Knauf left the interpretation of the kiss vision open to both the characters and the audience .

= = = Tarot divination = = =

The tarot readings of fortunetellers Sofie and her mother Apollonia advance the plot significantly . Sofie 's readings in the pilot episode induce visions in Ben that give insight into his healing powers of his childhood . Season 2 shows Sofie 's attempts to leave her former job , which is repeatedly interrupted by tarot cards reappearing . Another of her readings sets Ben on a journey to Scudder , the man he has been looking for since the beginning of the series .

When incorporating tarot symbolism into the show , show creator Daniel Knauf started with the Rider @-@ Waite tarot deck and then took liberties in interpretation . The same deck was used in the series and in several web games , as tarot divination played a significant part in Carnivàle 's online marketing . The producers had wished to provide a " personalized , interactive tarot @-@ card reading experience similar to what is depicted in the series " . The official HBO website

collaborated with RealNetworks to offer Fate : The Carnivàle Game , a downloadable game based on tarot symbolism available for trial and purchase .

Carnivàle 's opening title sequence features tarot cards that are panned in and out of in camera perspective ; these cards were digitally designed based on paintings and are not available for purchase . As the creative team behind the opening titles stated , it was their goal " to create a title sequence that grounded viewers in the mid @-@ 1930s , but that also allowed people to feel a larger presence of good and evil over all of time . " The creators offered a detailed interpretation of the tarot cards in the opening titles , and covered topics like good and bad , heaven and hell , wars , and the age of science as the antireligion in the 1930s . The following list specifies the tarot cards featured in the opening sequence , the provided keywords and the used artwork .

" The World " ? Completion . Perfection . Eternal life . ? The Last Judgment by Michelangelo .

" Ace of Swords " ? Ardent love . Ardent hate . A vanquisher is born . ? Destruction of Leviathan by Gustave Doré .

" Death " ? Transition . Change . Death . ? The Last Day of Pompeii by Karl Brullov .

" King of Swords " ? A powerful commander . A wise counselor . A judge . ? St. Michael Victorious by Raphael .

" Temperance " ? Moderation . Balance . Harmony . ? The Peasant Dance by Pieter Bruegel the Elder .

" The Magician " ? Originality . Confidence . Skill . ? Crucifixion by Josse Lieferinxe .

" The Tower " ? Sudden change . Disruption . Downfall . ? The Battle between the Romans and the Carthaginians by Jean Fouquet .

" Judgement " ? Renewal . Rebirth .

" The Moon " ? Deception . Disillusionment .

" The Sun " ? Success . Joy . ? Creation of the Sun and Moon by Michelangelo .

= = Reception , interpretation and legacy = =

Executive producer Ronald D. Moore was confident that Carnivàle was one of the most complicated shows on television , while show creator Daniel Knauf admitted that " you may not understand everything that goes on but it does make a certain sense . " In stating that Carnivàle was meant to be a demanding show with a lot of subtext , Knauf refrained from giving explicit clues . He did not wish his intent as an author to supersede the viewer 's interpretation .

= = = Interpretations during the run of Carnivàle = = =

Reviewers of the first three episodes interpreted Carnivàle 's story as being full of myth and allegory . The show was seen as more than just a human @-@ scaled metaphor of good and evil , with the power of spirits as one of the show 's strongest elements . Some reviewers were deeply confused and described almost everything as " mysterious " ? the characters and their powers and abilities , characters and scenarios within visions , the whole carnival ? wondering how it all fit together . The visions of the two main characters were shortly addressed , distinguishing between violent and benign visions , but parallels between the visions and the beings of good and evil were not necessarily drawn . The characters ' stories were described as unfolding in " zig @-@ zagging starts , moving back and forth in time and space , dropping oblique clues along the way . "

Carnivàle 's central premise was considered " cloudy " , " unconventional " , and filled with " convoluted symbolic interpretations of historical events " after Daniel Knauf had told TV critics that he regarded the 1930s as " the last great age of magic " being ended by an atomic bomb to herald the Age of Reason . Many reviews quoted and commented on Samson 's prologue to explain both the apocalyptic premise and the mythology of the show . Some reviews asserted that the good and evil creatures described in the prologue were Ben and Justin , preparing for a final battle . Still , many reviews were reluctant to state who of the main characters was good and who was evil , aware that it might take some time until this question was answered for sure . Ben and his healing powers led most reviewers to believe that he was the good creature , and that Justin was a demon

or at least a dangerous zealot who received instructions from either God or Satan . Some reviews described the question of Ben 's parentage as one of the big puzzles and the show 's driving mystery , but refrained from defining further details of the series . The lack of revelation of the characters ' roles was apparent by the end of the first season , although critics expected Sofie to gain significance later in the story .

DVD reviews for Season 1 and previews for the Season 2 premiere had the advantage of retrospective on the first season , and some reviewers continued to consider the show 's mythology convoluted , circuitous , " peek @-@ a @-@ boo " and silly . The significance of the prologue was emphasized again , while previous reviewers ' character descriptions , the good @-@ versus @-@ evil theme and the assumed story merge were generally repeated . The good nature of Ben and evil nature of Brother Justin seemed clearer to most reviewers , with " many bizarre coincidences that seem to imply a deeper and more sinister connection " between the two main characters . Visions were summarized as disturbing and grotesque , dreams as cryptic and mysterious , and abilities as unexplainable . Henry Scudder was noted to be " connected to everything and everyone " , and it was considered Ben 's job to piece together the mystery of his own past . The events of early Season 2 were said to mark a shift in the story from mystery to journey , with Ben accepting and exploring his powers , while Brother Justin was seen completely embracing his evil nature . Reviewers regarded Sofie 's turn in the final episode as an unexpected new threat in the story .

= = = Reception and analysis of themes = = =

Carnivàle was often compared to David Lynch 's 1990s mystery TV series Twin Peaks and John Steinbeck 's 1939 novel The Grapes of Wrath . Matt Roush of TV Guide called Carnivàle " the perfect show for those who thought Twin Peaks was too accessible " , whereas the show reminded Salon.com 's Heather Havrilesky of the " disappointment you feel as a kid when you come to the last few pages of The Grapes of Wrath . " She argued that a " surreal Twin Peaks @-@ style shockfest [...] hardly bears repeating , " especially if it " avoid [s] the ' hugging and learning ' of mainstream television [by serving up] such a steady diet of anguish and dashed hopes that viewers refuse to take the risk of making an emotional connection . " Carnivàle , as The Australian stated , " seems to have been conceived in essentially literary terms " which " can sometimes work on the page but is deadly on the large screen , let alone a small one . It 's almost like a biblical injunction against pretension on television . " A reviewer admitted his temptation to dismiss the first season of Carnivàle as " too artsy and esoteric " because his lack of involvement prevented him from understanding " what the heck was going on , [which] can be a problem for a dramatic television series . " TV Zone however considered Carnivàle " a series like no other and [...] the fact that it is so open to interpretation surprisingly proves to be one of its greatest strengths . " Carnivàle was lauded for bringing " the hopelessness of the Great Depression to life " and for being among the first TV shows to show " unmitigated pain and disappointment " , but reviewers were not confident that viewers would find the " slowly unfolding sadness " appealing over long or would have the patience or endurance to find out the meaning of the show .

= = = Fate and legacy of the mythological storytelling of Carnivàle = = =

Viewership did drop significantly in Season 2 , and Carnivàle was cancelled in 2005 after two of six planned seasons . In a post @-@ cancellation interview , Daniel Knauf was positive that someone would let him finish his story someday , if not as a television series , then possibly as a series of features or graphic novels . Knauf approached Marvel Comics to continue the future Carnivàle storyline that he had kept to himself . They seemed interested , but HBO , who own the show and the characters , would not confer their rights . During the 2007 Writers Guild of America strike , Knauf stated that " an idiosyncratic show like Carnivàle would never be greenlit today , " and claimed that present @-@ day television included a high percentage of " talking heads " with " the vast majority of television writers [not being] visual storytellers . " Enjoying his creative freedom as graphic storyteller , he has considered directing his efforts away from television series creation .

Meanwhile , the mythology of Carnivàle remains in the public conscience . In 2008 , Alessandra Stanley of the Australian newspaper The Age remembered Carnivàle as a " smart , ambitious series that move [s] unusual characters around an unfamiliar setting imaginatively , " while A.V. Club called the show " a fantastically rich series with a frustratingly dense mythology " .