



**William Wandless**

## **Undead Letters: Searches and Researches in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***



Buffy, I have volumes of lore, of prophecies and predictions. But I don't have an instruction manual. We feel our way as we go along. And I must admit, as a Slayer you're doing pretty well.

—Rupert Giles, in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"

(1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* banks on a very simple premise: folks dig research. Admittedly, they also love brushes with the supernatural, snappy dialogue, trendy clothes, pretty people, sweltering smoochies, and the occasional bleached-blond British vampire, but nothing pulls them in like an overhead shot of a man in tweed thumbing through a dusty, leather-bound book. Sadly, squeezing all the requisite trappings of vampire-slaying into forty-five minutes of television time places severe limitations on how much research work can be depicted in each episode. To keep viewers coming back for more, the series teases them with only a few scant moments of tantalizing page-turning per week.

(2) Over the course of four seasons, however, the nature of those moments—and the surrounding narrative content which reflects and is reflected in them—has changed dramatically. While Giles and the Sunnydale High School Library formerly centralized and localized the Scooby Gang's researches for the majority of the first three seasons, their methods and their measures have gradually expanded and adjusted to enable them to understand phenomena and combat adversaries well beyond the realm of everyday vampire-slaying. Research once offered *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a degree of internal unity: the team rendezvous in the library regularly served as a kind of familiar, and often comfortingly familial, intermission between an initial encounter with a threat and the informed response to follow. Reassuring rapport, playful banter, and hushed discussion of the dangers ahead reigned over these calm intervals of intelligence-gathering, and the knowledge gained in these relatively quiet cabals ordinarily proved equal to the confrontations to follow. The characters grew and their relationships changed, but their common alliance against the assorted evils of Sunnydale remained constant.

(3) The onset of the fourth season, however, marked the emergence of new hazards for the team: the threat of group dissolution in the college environment; the presence of the Initiative, a competing group of vampire- and demon-hunters with different methods, ethics, and objectives; and the existence of Adam, an essentially unresearchable foe. In light of the events of the fourth season, the destruction of the library in the battle with the Mayor at the close of the third seems emblematic of a decisive shift in the role of research in the series. The center of the Scooby Gang's research world—and the very heart of their shared high school experience—ceases to be, destroyed in an explosion of their own engineering. The loss of the library occasions physical displacement and movement outward, and Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander begin to forge more fully separate lives as individuals, exploring identities beyond the protective enclosure of the group. The pursuit of knowledge correspondingly turns inward for each of them, and it is only in the final episodes of the fourth season that the collective yield of their independent researches begins to take on a familiar shape, a renewal of the moments before the destruction of the library, when a victorious Buffy can insist to her friends that "we were great" ("Primeval").<sup>[1]</sup>

(4) That expressive we epitomizes the characteristic guise of knowledge in the series, a form of understanding that emerges as a consequence of intercommunication and interaction. The central expression of this collaborative condition in the first two seasons arises from the gradual revelation of Buffy's destiny as the Slayer and in the more understated disclosure of Giles' related fortunes as her assigned Watcher. The initial friction between them is at once comic and intense, as Buffy's vehement resistance to ordination as the vampire-hunting Chosen One is met by the arid wit and seemingly encyclopedic occult knowledge of the buttoned-down Brit. Both, however, are victims of comparable tragedies. Buffy has been robbed of any real chance at teenage normalcy, and Giles, too, has been robbed of youthful dreams: "I was going to be a fighter pilot," he laments, "or possibly a grocer" ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"). The analogy between Slayer and Watcher, however, has intrinsic limitations: a segment excerpted from the original teleplay of "Reptile Boy" has Buffy rebuff Giles' attempt to commiserate with her youthful impulses by reminding him that he doesn't "know what it's like to be sixteen, and a girl, and a Slayer" (Golden 6). The growth of their relationship, as a consequence, is contingent on the ebb and flow of reciprocal discovery.

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(5) Giles learns that his assigned Slayer can be governed only loosely, if at all, and he develops a deep and abiding respect for the sacrifice Buffy proves finally willing to make and the unconventional way she determines to make it. Buffy, in turn, gathers that her assigned Watcher is more than just a wooden functionary, and she develops a profound trust in his guidance and his friendship. Though Giles initially attempts to indoctrinate Buffy in the formal trade of slaying, by the midpoint of the second season he admits that, in Buffy's case, he's essentially thrown out the Slayer handbook ("What's My Line, Part Two"). The concession is a significant one, both as a reasoned response to Buffy's intractability and as a reflection of Giles' regard for the strength of her commitment and conviction. Though Giles is fully aware of the strictures and rituals of the Watcher's Council, his understanding of the essential purpose of his office—and the peculiar virtues of his vampire-slaying protégé—makes him wise enough to accept their uncommon relationship. His knowledge, he quickly learns, must be fitted to her power; the converse simply does not work.

(6) Though Giles consequently may not be the ideal Watcher in the traditional sense, as the Scooby Gang's principal source of arcane knowledge, their chief researcher, and their *de facto* "Superlibrarian" (as Xander calls him in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"), his value to the team is manifest. Giles' role early in the series is doubly important: he not only needs to uncover the information Buffy needs with speed and precision—or at least as much speed and precision as hours of archival research admits—he also needs to interpret and present that information in a language accessible to his young ward, her friends, and the viewing audience. He must, in essence, transform occult research into practical knowledge, something the team can reason with and ultimately apply. In an appreciative assessment of Giles' efficacy, GraceAnne A. DeCandido summarizes the virtues of his peculiar practice of the researcher's craft:

Giles believes that what he needs to know for Buffy's sake lies in his many volumes at home and at work. Giles also makes the necessary leap of faith common to all good librarians: He bridges the chasm between the information as it lives in the text and the transfer of that information into a form the Slayerettes and Buffy can actually use. Sometimes that means literal translation, other times it means recasting what he reads into stories, tag lines, or aphorisms that make sense to the teens he serves. (46)

Giles often works at the periphery of the Scooby Gang, but his researches are frequently central to the resolution of the external crises that beset the group. Though Buffy, Willow, and Xander incessantly razz him for his unvarying "get my books . . . look stuff up" response to their myriad problems (as it is ironically construed in "The Pack"), they never disparage or undervalue his contribution to the welfare and the communal knowledge of the team.

(7) As the primary source of lore and arcana for much of the series, at least during the first three seasons, Giles is usually responsible both for articulating the essence of his research findings, for interpreting and predicting phenomena, and for tendering a responsive course of action. In his own vampiric way, however, he is also responsible for infecting the group with his contagious appetite for knowledge. The entire Scooby Gang often grudgingly hunkers down in the library over dusty volumes in some of the show's most convivial scenes, and in this intent yet collegial atmosphere its members develop an enduring appreciation for the researcher's craft, as DeCandido continues in her discussion of the shared quality that binds the group together in their fight against evil:

The thirst to know . . . is at the core of it all: to know the forces of darkness, to name them, and hence to defang them; to know themselves, as they dance on the edge of maturity; to search out the specifics of how to overmaster a particular demon along with the principles of how knowledge can lead to larger truths. (46)

(8) Research in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* often hinges on such a balanced understanding of knowledge. While the intelligence the team gathers is rarely collected for its own sake—immediate utility, and not simply the abstract value of knowing, usually governs the act of gathering—it also constitutes a crucial part of the group's shared network of experience. Knowledge in the series does not simply turn up in the pages of rare books: it issues from every moment of group interaction, from every discovery Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander make about each other and about themselves. When the usually flippant Xander, in an effort to convince Willow that Giles can take care of himself on a dangerous errand, reminds her "that knowledge is the ultimate weapon" ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"), he succinctly expresses an idea which effectively dominates the first three seasons.

(9) Significantly, coming-to-knowledge in the series is neither static nor stable. Dynamic and fluid, it moves in fits and starts, engaging the entire team in different ways on different occasions. Attempting to define a conventional model for internal or external researches in *Buffy* proves virtually impossible. Buffy typically supplies experiential reconnaissance of the hazards at hand, but her intuition and determined reasoning are crucial for countering an unseen threat like *Der Kindestod* in "Killed by Death" or for accidentally talking a distraught Jonathan out of suicide in "Earshot." Giles usually provides the bulk of the team's archival researches, but his resume also features spellcasting knowledge and abilities, as evinced in "The Witch" and a handful of other episodes, and the capacity for explosive violence (see "Angel" and "Graduation Day, Part Two"). Willow customarily offers a salutary dose of modern knowledge and know-how to Giles' archaic scholarship, but she also performs detective work firsthand (uncovering the secrets of Joyce's new beau in "Ted," for example) and her own nascent spellcasting powers—she tells Joyce "I'm a dabbler" in "Gingerbread," even though she has already summoned the formidable soul-binding magic of "Becoming, Part Two"—serve to expand her offices considerably

summoned the formidable soul-binding magic of becoming, Part Two serve to expand her circles considerably. Xander frequently offers crucial intuitive input to the team, yet he also complements his glib connective inferences with a surprising versatility, showcased in the undercover work of "Go Fish" and the unacknowledged exploits of "The Zeppo."

(10) Moreover, the group also acquires intelligence from a number of external sources: the computer savvy and gypsy lore of Jenny Calendar and her technopagan network, the centuries of lived (or un-lived) supernatural experience of Angel, Spike, and other vampires, the underground demonic connections of Willy, and the clues, hints, and sundry intimations offered up, willingly or unwillingly, by a host of other informants.

(11) Unsurprisingly, the intelligence the group acquires from their motley collection of sources varies widely in its reliability. At times, information is trustworthy even when the informant is not, as in the case of the deranged Dr. Carlyle in "Teacher's Pet," who fully grasps the nature of the She-Mantis yet suspects his mother has been reincarnated as a Pekingese; at other times, evidence itself is cryptic, like the violent reenactments or spiritually-chalked messages of Grace and Stanley in "I Only Have Eyes for You." Occasionally, the group even must deal with information that is appallingly exact—the prophecies of the *Pergamum Codex* in "Prophecy Girl" come immediately to mind—yet proves happily incomplete. In every case, however, what Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander come to know in each episode is invariably enriched by how they come to know it, and the manner in which they put the knowledge acquired to use speaks volumes about the integrity—here indicative of both uprightness and wholeness—of the group.

(12) The formation and development of this integrity through the accumulation of group knowledge, archival knowledge, and self-knowledge provides the foundation for the central narratives of the first three seasons. Though narrative abstraction necessarily detracts from the complexity and sophistication of *Buffy*, each season ultimately focuses on a single primary conflict: the Scooby Gang's efforts to prevent the Ascension of the Master and the opening of the Hellmouth unify the first, their efforts to come to terms with the dual nature of Angel/Angelus and to thwart his attempt to awaken the demon Acatla connect the second, and their efforts to frustrate the demonic Mayor's plans for his own ascension dominate the third. Buffy is the nominal Slayer of the series; however, the successful resolution of all three major crises is contingent on the complementary exertions and collective action of the group. Surprisingly, the very existence of a group is anomalous—Slayers, aided only by their Watchers, have historically worked alone.

(13) An encounter with Kendra, the exceedingly orthodox Slayer activated at the moment of Buffy's death at the hands of the Master, reveals the abnormality of a group arrangement. Startled by Willow's arrival at a private Watcher-Slayer conversation, Kendra receives a stammering explanation of her presence from Giles:

*Giles:* Kendra, there are a few people—civilians, if you like—who know Buffy's Identity. Willow is one of them. And they also spend time together . . . socially.

*Kendra:* And you allow this, Sir?

*Giles:* Well . . .

*Kendra:* But the Slayer must work in secret, for security.

*Giles:* Of course. But with Buffy, however, it's . . . some flexibility is required. ("What's My Line, Part Two")

That flexibility, which both Giles and Kendra regard as a token of his immoderate permissiveness as a Watcher, nevertheless serves a crucial purpose. Buffy's commitment to a close circle of friends, though a violation of the Slayer handbook, profoundly transforms her own existence as an object of knowledge. The forces of darkness, which traditionally only had a single young woman to deal with, find themselves challenged by a team of adversaries, not a single foe. To effect their dark designs, they must outthink and overcome not only Buffy, but her friends and allies as well.

(14) Even a cursory scan of the first three seasons reveals exactly how advantageous Buffy's various friendships can be and how profoundly they can impact the efforts of the forces of darkness to assess accurately the threat she represents. Buffy's climactic confrontation with The Master at the close of the first season serves as an exemplary instance in this regard. The episode centers on the fulfillment of prophecy, both for Buffy and the Slayerettes and The Master himself. Buffy must deal with the unequivocally clear prophecy from the *Pergamum Codex*, a volume of unerring lore, on the eve of the conflict: "Tomorrow night Buffy will face the Master, and she will die" ("Prophecy Girl"). The Master, meanwhile, is quite smug in his own knowledge of the prophecies surrounding his Ascension. He, too, knows Buffy will die. Moreover, he knows that Buffy is actually the agent of his escape from his underworld prison. He defeats her readily, affording him ample opportunity for gloating. "Prophecies are tricky creatures," the Master informs the mesmerized Slayer as he draws her to him—"You're the one that sets me free," he hisses, "think about that!" ("Prophecy Girl"). He drinks her blood, the fuel for his exaltation, and releases her; she falls to the ground, where she comes to rest, face down, in a pool of water.

(15) Buffy drowns; both vampiric lore and textual research prove faultless in their prediction of the fate of the Slayer. They fail to reckon, however, with the consequence of the Slayer's friends. Xander and Angel arrive on the scene following the Master's ascent, and Xander succeeds in reviving Buffy with CPR. Buffy defeats the Master shortly thereafter—when he rages "You were destined to die! It was written!", Buffy pertly responds "What can I say? I flunked the written" (Prophecy Girl)—thus setting a precedent that will govern the next two seasons. In each of the major conflicts to follow, Buffy's chief adversary fails to account adequately for her special status as a member of a larger social network. In the second season Annelus successfully deals with the

special status as a member of a larger social network. In the second season, Angelus successfully deals with the threat of Jenny Calendar and her soul-restoring spell, but he overlooks the possibility that an injured Willow might prove equal to its casting in "Becoming, Part Two." The Mayor prepares quite deliberately for his own attempted ascension in "Graduation Day, Part Two," the third season's finale—he adopts his own Slayer and gathers an army of vampires to back him up—but finds himself totally unprepared for the organized resistance of Buffy, the Slayerettes, and the entire Sunnydale High School student body, not to mention a library packed with explosives. When Whistler, the enigmatic demon who brought Angel to Buffy, encounters Buffy herself just before her confrontation with the soulless Angelus, he offers her a bit of existential advice: "In the end, you're always by yourself. You're all you've got. That's the point" ("Becoming, Part Two"). In the first three seasons, that point consistently proves untrue.

(16) The fourth season, however, marks a turning away from collective activity. What Buffy's affronts to her friends (in "When She Was Bad") and her disappearance following the damnation of Angel (chronicled in "Becoming, Part Two" and "Anne") could not effect—the dissolution of her core group of friends—is precipitated by a far more banal cause: enrollment at UC-Sunnydale. Though they continue to work together intermittently, the group suddenly disperses. Buffy struggles to adapt to college, enduring her genuinely demonic roommate and seemingly demonic professors, but eventually secures a measure of comfort in the arms of Riley. Willow, in contrast, thrives in the university environment, finding intellectual stimulation, the opportunity to practice her witchcraft, and a friend and lover in Tara. Giles, now an unemployed librarian and ex-Watcher, begins to develop his own interests, an old flame named Olivia and coffeehouse-crooning among them, and becomes more and more distant from the youthful members of the Scooby Gang. And Xander, following a soul-searching road trip replete with mishaps and male strippers, returns to a basement apartment in his parents' house, where his anxieties about being the only non-collegian and the Zeppo of the group soon return. The absence of the library and the regular gatherings it once housed heightens the sense of physical and emotional disconnection among the members of the group. Though Buffy and Willow eventually wind up being roommates, the transition from the third season to the fourth finds the team growing up and growing apart.

(17) Significantly, the increasing distance between Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander is not merely physical. The exchange of knowledge also suffers as a result of their separation, and information becomes a commodity which is sometimes, by accident or design, withheld, not shared. An early catalyst is Willow's separation from Oz in "Wild at Heart," a separation made doubly painful by the onset of Buffy and Riley's romance. Willow, though she feels like she's been "split down the center and half of [her] is lost" in "Something Blue," fails to find a sympathetic ear among her friends and eventually resorts to spellcasting to heal her broken heart. Giles, for his part, finds himself increasingly out of the loop. He invests weeks researching the Initiative, "trying to get a single scrap of information about [the] mysterious demon collectors," only to find out, in "A New Man," that the remainder of the Scooby Gang already knows quite a bit about the organization and that Buffy is dating one of its members. Soon thereafter, Willow wonders aloud at Buffy's deepening involvement with the Initiative, noting how the time she formerly spent with her friends has markedly decreased ("The I in Team"). In turn, Willow begins spending more time with Tara, and Willow admits that, though she's part of "this group thing that revolves around the slaying," she would like to preserve "something that's just, you know, mine" ("Who Are You?"). Moreover, Willow conceals the nature of her relationship with Tara as long as possible, afraid her friends will not understand. To complicate the exchange of knowledge even further, Tara successfully impedes Willow's attempt to use magic to find demonic signatures in Sunnydale, Buffy withholds the full details of her relationship with Angel from Riley, and Professor Walsh withholds information about the true purpose of the Initiative from the commandos of the Initiative itself. The channels of communication become radically obstructed, and knowledge itself soon becomes an isolated personal property within the Scooby Gang.

(18) This individuation of knowledge, though it profoundly impacts the relationship of Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander, has little effect on the military hierarchy of the Initiative. The organization of the two groups differs strikingly, as do their research methods and tactics. For Buffy and friends, demons and vampires are subjects of folklore and mythology—monsters, it's true, but monsters with roles and objectives. For the soldiers of the Initiative, however, these monsters are scientific objects, a collection of facts and data to be analyzed and neutralized. In "Doomed," both teams encounter the same trio of demons; what they learn and assume about those demons illustrates the essential incompatibility of their separate approaches. The Initiative commandos collect plain facts about the demon: its height, weight, any special hazards it might present, and the pheromone signature that will make it easy to track. The demon's purpose is immaterial; they assume it's simply "on a basic kill-crush-destroy." The Scooby Gang, meanwhile, unearths far more significant details in their research. The demons, they learn, are not the generic creatures the Initiative takes them to be: they are Vahrral demons, and they are collecting the material components needed to open the Hellmouth. With only a poor understanding of the nature of the threat, Initiative commandos dutifully patrol their assigned quadrants, unaware that, were Buffy and her friends to fail, Sunnydale would be overrun by the denizens of Hell.

(19) The lack of awareness evinced by the commandos in this instance also extends to their understanding of the Initiative itself. Though the organization's ethics are dubious from the outset—the neurologically-neutered Spike is a troublesome presence for much of the season, though the Scooby Gang, satisfied by the impotence of their longtime foe, consider the rectitude of the procedure only in passing—their methods never openly come into question until the final few episodes. Riley's response to Buffy's questions about the researches and practices of the Initiative seems typical: "I know all I need to know. We're doing good here—protecting the public, removing the subterranean threat. It's work worth doing" ("The I in Team"). Riley, Buffy, and their respective teams, however, soon gain a far better understanding of the organization's larger designs. Professor Walsh, the Initiative's "mother," sends Buffy into a death trap, and Riley, upon discovering Walsh's apparent deception, walks out on her. In "Goodbye Iowa," the following episode, another wrinkle in the Initiative's methods comes to light: Buffy learns that the commandos have been fed a steady diet of performance-enhancing drugs offered to them as vitamins. The emergence of this new information

performance enhancing drugs, offered to them as vitamins. The emergence of this new information understandably shakes Riley's faith in the Initiative and its methods, and his inability to bear witness to the brutal experiments performed on Oz in "New Moon Rising" finally force him to sever his ties with an organization he can no longer accept. He deserts, unwilling to be part of the ethical nightmare it has come to represent.

(20) The ethical transgressions of the Initiative, however, are soon eclipsed by the revelation of its ultimate transgression in "Goodbye Iowa": the "kinematically redundant biomechanical demonoid," Adam. Previously identified only as "Project 314," Adam's existence was known only to Dr. Walsh, his creator, her circle, and the demons aware of his assembly, who considered him an abomination. Adam's escape from the Initiative compound allows him to pursue his own researches into the human, demon, and vampire condition. He is perceptive in the extreme—in "Superstar" he asserts that "No one . . . has ever been as awake and alive as I am"—but he also possesses a childlike curiosity, especially about chaotic elements beyond his control. More problematically still, he has a special interest in Buffy; in his estimation, "she makes things interesting" ("The Yoko Factor"). Though Spike, acting as a double agent in the hope that his violence-inhibiting microchip will be removed, urges Adam to be cautious, he proves obstinate in his desire to introduce Buffy into the mayhem he is intent on creating. The chaos Adam has conceived actually *requires* her presence: he plans to instigate a war between the Initiative commandos and the demons they hold captive, a war that will create a supply of body parts for the demonoid army he seeks to construct, and Buffy is needed, as she surmises in "Primeval," to "even the kill ratio."

(21) Adam is not, however, entirely deaf to suggestions. Spike's history with Buffy—and his understanding of the source of Buffy's peculiar success as a Slayer—brings about a crucial reversal. Adam, an opponent of man-made origins, is not researchable in the traditional sense. Though the Scooby Gang eventually learns that he's powered by a core of uranium, they cannot simply crack open a succession of dusty volumes to discover the readiest way to defeat him. By the fourth season, however, the Scooby Gang itself has become a researchable quantity, and Spike's intimate knowledge of their collective success causes him to broach the matter of Buffy's companions with Adam:

*Adam:* I will restore you to what you once were. When I have the Slayer . . . how and where I want her.

*Spike:* Easier said. She's crafty. Her and her little friends.

*Adam:* Friends?

*Spike:* There's your—what do you call it—variable. The Slayer's got pals. You want her evening the odds in a fight you don't want the Slayerettes mucking about.

*Adam:* Take them away from her.

*Spike:* Now there's a plan. She's working solo, she won't have a chance to come after us when the wild rumpus begins. Plus, it will make her miserable. And I never get tired of that. ("The Yoko Factor")

(22) Spike's plan to remove Buffy's friends from the picture is a simple one: using tensions already at work in the group, he contrives to sow additional discord. He reminds Giles that he no longer serves any official capacity in the group, adding that Buffy and the gang treat him—and think of him—"very much like a retired librarian." Spike, with unexpected help from Anya, Xander's persistently tactless girlfriend, persuades him that his friends look down on him and think he should join the Army. Finally, in a series of damning *double entendres*, Spike convinces Willow that her computer skills have eroded, a circumstance Buffy and Xander both blame on her involvement with wicca and her involvement with Tara. Capitalizing on his knowledge of each individual's apprehensions about his or her current standing with the rest of the group, Spike heightens their collective anxiety. His plan ultimately works, at least in part, because Spike's words echo what a season of separation and self-examination has taught them to imagine.

(23) The reassembly of the entire group intensifies the doubts Spike set in motion—Buffy's return causes tensions seething beneath the surface of the group to suddenly erupt. Desperate to gain any information that may be of help in the fight against Adam, Buffy complains to Willow of her slowness in cracking the encryption of computer disks Spike supplied. Buffy unwittingly slights Xander as well, underscoring his sense of inutility and inadequacy by refusing to let him help her track down Adam. Giles, for his part, gets sloppily drunk, and gleefully informs Buffy that, because she never trains with him anymore, "[Adam]'s gonna kick your ass." A full-fledged conflagration follows, as a season's worth of pent-up angst finally spills over. Buffy proves equal to the rage of the Slayerettes, however, and, realizing they can be of no help to her until they work through their fury, levels the most withering reproach of the series at them: "So . . . I guess I'm starting to understand why there's no prophecy about a Chosen One—and her friends. If I need help, I'll go to someone I can count on." The fragmentation of the gang seems complete, as each falls prey to the private misgivings borne of living separate lives.

(24) In the penultimate episode of the series, Spike, eager to have the microchip removed, crows of his success in divorcing Buffy from the group: "She's separated from her friends. They want nothing to do with her. She's all alone" ("Primeval"). An oversight on his part, however—he broke up the gang before Buffy could acquire the information encoded on the disks he left with Willow, intelligence that, had it been decrypted in time, would have delivered her to the Initiative compound alone—forces him to play peacemaker. He journeys to Adam's lair to urge Buffy to retrieve the information, an act which awakens her mistrust of his intentions. A reunion of the Scooby Gang brings Spike's machinations to light, and an embarrassed team realizes they've been had. Though they are collectively honest enough to recognize that Spike only fanned a spark that already existed—as Buffy admits, the "trouble was stir-rippable"—they are also invested deeply enough in their group friendship to confess their doubts and move onward.

(25) That forward movement signals a dramatic return to the research-and-action methodology which characterized the first three seasons. The resolution of the Adam crisis requires a synthesis of the unique skills

characterized the first three seasons. The resolution of the Adam crisis requires a synthesis of the unique skills that each member of the team brings to the table, and the original, unified group dynamic returns. Buffy, the Slayer, provides the strength, ingenuity, and tactical skills needed to get to Adam. Giles provides the arcane knowledge, his fluency in Sumerian, needed to cast a specific spell. Willow supplies the actual spellcasting ability, and Xander offers the crucial intuitive leap that brings it all together: "all we need is combo Buffy—her with Slayer strength, Giles' multi-lingual know how, and Willow's witchy power" ("Primeval"). The spell that finally binds them in the depths of the Initiative compounds articulates a complete fusion of individual ability and shared experience, as mind, spirit, heart, and body—Giles, Willow, Xander, and Buffy—work together to tap into incalculable power. Adam gets the chaos that he wished for: a group of friends unites to offer him a kind of resistance that far surpasses his capacity for knowing.

(26) The final episode of the fourth season, rather than serving as a straightforward epilogue to the team's shared adventure, emphasizes instead the limitations of their knowledge. Cryptic dream sequences bring each individual into contact with the essence of the First Slayer and, though everyone but Buffy fails to grasp fully the nature of that essence, they are not destroyed by the encounter. Instead, they find their personal anxieties rekindled and dramatized, though the bond between them—perversely represented by a recurring bearer of cheese—remains intact. Unsurprisingly, the content of the dreams is dense and opaque; interpretation of each sequence can only be speculative, at best, and the knot of dream symbolism remains to be untangled in the fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. What remains clear, however, is that the researches of the Scooby Gang are not yet at an end. The season ends with an unsettling gesture toward the team's collective future, as the voice of Tara—the initial guise of the First Slayer in Buffy's dream—murmurs above the image of a thoughtful Slayer in the closing moments of "Restless": "You think you know what's to come, what you are. You haven't even begun." Something, it seems, remains to be understood. Something remains to be done.

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[1] All quoted materials from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are excerpts taken from the episode transcripts located at the "BuffyWorld" web site ([www.buffyworld.com](http://www.buffyworld.com)). When possible, textual extracts from the site were compared against other sources, most notably [www.buffyguide.com](http://www.buffyguide.com) and *The Watcher's Guide*. Conventional spelling and grammar was used whenever possible ("gonna" was converted to "going to," for example), and vocal effects (Giles' stammer or Kendra's accent) were reflected in the explication of the text or omitted.