

STAKED BLAKE

The Second Edition.
February 13, 2002

CONTENTS

Editorial	2
Ye Slaying Editor by MISTRAL	2
Heart Attack by STEVE ROGERSON	3
The Reason Servalan Survived Terminal	12
Daddy's Girl by JACQUELINE THIJSEN	13
Thicker Than Water by ELLYNNE G.	41

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fliss Davis	19,32, 38, 60, 92
Jem Dixon	10, 12, 79
Kathryn Andersen	cover, 3, 6, 35, 47, 68
Photo Phred	Photo tweaking & SFX on 26, 42, 50, 56, 68, 74

Word count: approximately 85,000 words.

Warning — boring geekish paragraph follows:

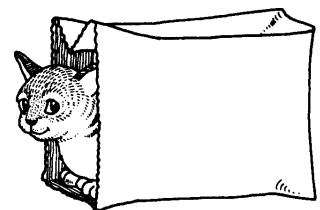
Staked Blake (The Second Edition) was put together using L^AT_EX, T_EX₂ε and ancillary scripts for conversions to things like PDF. Some of the artwork was scanned in with a HP Scanjet 5p flatbed scanner, using either Micrographix Picture Publisher 8.0 or Xsane. Image manipulation and story headers were done with Micrographix Picture Publisher 8.0 and GIMP 1.2.1. Prose text was done in Utopia, headers in Post, and the futuristic font is called Scott.

Staked Blake is an amateur, non-commercial publication. It does not seek to infringe upon any copyright. Contents copyright © 2000, 2001. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in *any* form without prior permission. The authors retain copyright for their own works, and illustrators retain copyright for their art. Contributions of art or written material accepted for use in Staked Blake are in trade for one free copy of the fanzine, or a discount on the zine if the contribution is less than one full page.

Edited by Kathryn Andersen
<zines@katspace.com> <<http://www.katspace.com/zines>>
1 Pictor Court, Donvale VIC 3111, Australia

Agented in the UK by Judith Proctor
<Judith@blakes-7.com> <<http://www.blakes-7.com>>
28 Diprose Road, Corfe Mullen, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 3QY England

Agented in the USA by Mysti Frank
<zines@agentwithstyle.com> <<http://www.agentwithstyle.com>>
9821 Hawkins Creamery Rd. Damascus, MD 20872-2339



Cat-Out-Of-The-Bag
Productions

EDITORIAL

As you could probably guess from the title, **STAKED BLAKE** is an all-crossover *Blake's 7* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* zine.

How did this come about? Once upon a time, back in June 1999, when folks on the lysator *Blake's 7* mailing list were discussing silly casting ideas, Steve Rogerson suggested the *Buffy* cast to play various roles, such as Alyson Hannigan (*Willow*) as Cally, Anthony Stewart Head (*Rupert Giles*) as Blake, David Boreanaz (*Angel*) as Avon and Juliet Landau (*Drusilla*) as Servalan. Then Steve wondered if *Willow* wouldn't be better as Avon, since she was a computer whiz. Then *Mistral* suggested that *Willow* was Avon's long-lost daughter. And then people started discussing crossovers. Then *Mistral* daydreamed that a zine would be lovely. Then I volunteered to edit one.

Yes, the zine's been a long time coming. Mea culpa. No point in excuses. Well, it's here now, innit? This has been an interesting and challenging exercise for me — unlike my previous zines, this was a themed zine, this was a zine where authors wrote stories specifically for it, where they declared their intent, and where I was a lot more involved with the stories from the start, than I had ever been before. Despite *Mistral*'s penning below, I am really not fierce! And we have some cool stories for you; yes, they all involve time travel, one way or another, one in a terribly ironic paradox, and the other two, well, Avon has to meet his daughter somehow, don't he? We have tension, we have betrayals, we have evilness, and those whom we aren't sure whose side they're on — in short, we have everything that makes *B7* and *Buffy* those dark-toned character-driven shows that we love.

Many thanks to the illustrators, especially Fliss, who gave such lovely results with odd instructions like "Avon, Willow and Drusilla, framed by roses..."

I hope you enjoy the results.

Ye Slaying Editor,

Kathryn

APPENDUM FOR THE SECOND EDITON

This is the new revamped version of **STAKED BLAKE**, done with L^AT_EX and L^AT_EX 2_ε and so it's going to look a little different. Slightly different fonts, slightly different looks, same content, some extra illustrations (and a few pages longer). Why do a second edition, why redo everything so completely? It's a long story. Suffice to say, as part of my campaign to never buy another Microsoft product again (if I can help it), I was investigating an alternative desktop publishing solution (L^AT_EX), when Judith Proctor reminded me she was going to do a printed edition for me, and had I changed the title page yet? So, since I was going to redo it all eventually, I decided that Now Was The Time.

YE SLAYING EDITOR

The sign on the door read "Fresh Blood Welcome."

There were roses on the credenza, wolfbane at the window, a computer beside her, blue pencils on the desk.

Grimly she turned the pages of my manuscript, my firstborn sacrifice. Gloom gathered around me.

A man burst in, pale and horrible, waving a contract, breathing threats. She drew a pencil, flung it, stabbed him in the heart; he vanished. She clucked her tongue. "Agents. Bloodsuckers, every one."

Eyeballing me, she drew another pencil. "What? You thought they were antique decor?"

She slashed through paragraphs, whole pages.

I didn't say a word.

(Penned by *Mistral* <mistral@centurytel.net>)

HEART ATTACK

by STEVE ROGERSON <steve.rogerson@journalist.co.uk>

"Ow! Careful."

"Stop whinging, Vila. What the hell was that?"

Jenna looked around the grey metallic walls of a cabin furnished only by the bed, cupboard, washing facilities and, in the corner, a small pot of plastic yellow flowers that had fought and lost its solitary battle to add warmth to this purely functional room. All was quiet apart from the gentle hum of the ship. There was nothing to indicate why, seconds before, a sudden jerk had forced her to crash into Vila. He sat on the bed rubbing his head, his puzzled eyes scanning her face for reactions to his plight. None was forthcoming as she walked over to the communicator and pressed it.

"Blake, what happened? Are we OK?"

A brief buzz was followed by Blake's voice. "We're not sure. We hit some sort of disturbance. It didn't come up on the sensors. Zen doesn't know what it is and, if Orac does, he's being typically vague about it."

"Annoying, you mean," replied Jenna smiling. "Do you want me on the flight deck?"

"Yes, you'd better. We might need you if we hit any more of them."

Vila stayed on the bed, watching her. He'd been building up to this moment for almost four months now and, as far as he was concerned, it couldn't have gone worse. He'd always assumed it would be Blake who'd win Jenna's heart, so he'd hardly dared hope as he built up a friendship and a rapport with her. He doubted if he'd ever been as scared as a few moments earlier when he made a pass at her and, for someone who had developed being scared into an art form, that was no mean achievement.

He turned slightly to get a better view of Jenna's behind as she bent down to pick up a glass that had fallen to the floor. She glanced back at him, a look of distaste on her face. Vila jokingly put his hand over his eyes and was painfully reminded of the recent events. He uttered a small moan when he saw the blood on his fingers, stood up and went to the mirror to inspect his face carefully. Talk about timing. He'd invited her into his cabin for a "chat" he'd said, then spent half an hour trying to broach the subject he really wanted to discuss. He wasn't sure if she was deliberately misunderstanding him, but it felt like it. What else could he do? So he'd grabbed her, tried to kiss her and she bit his cheek! She bit him! He didn't know how she'd react, but biting him wasn't even on the list. Then the ship lurched, their heads collided and here he was looking into the mirror with blood running down the side of his face.



"Don't worry, you won't die."

"How do you know?" said Vila. "I might get gangrene or rabies or anything."

"Thanks very much," she said, opening the cabin door. "If you're lucky, I might kiss it better later, meanwhile clean yourself up and get to the flight deck."

"Me, what do you need me for?" His words bounced off a closing door. "Why do these things always happen to me?"



"Orac, be more specific."

Avon's voice was the first thing Jenna heard as she walked onto the flight deck. Cally was in the pilot's seat and Blake and Avon were in front of the viewer, standing over Orac.

"All the information you need is on the screen. You just need to interpret it correctly."

Blake turned away from the small computer in frustration and paced up and down, stopped and stared at the familiar pattern of stars and an unfamiliar pretty blue and green planet. He shook his head. Cally seemed comfortable at the controls, so Jenna slid into another flight position and started to punch some keys. She looked up, startled.

"What have you found?"

She turned to face Avon. His eyes were drilling into her, demanding an answer to his question. She glared back at him before replying.

"I tried to pick up one of the Federation navigation beacons, but there's nothing out there," she said. "The only communications anywhere are low powered radio transmissions from the planet below. All Federation and interplanetary communications have vanished."

"Orac," said Avon, turning back to the computer. "What's happened to the Federation transmissions? Where have they gone?"

"It is not a matter that they have gone somewhere; they have not yet happened."

"What on earth is that supposed to mean?" Blake was shouting, his anger at the computer obvious. He used to have more self control, thought Jenna. Before Gan died.

"I think I might know."

The three looked up at Cally.

"Know what?" said Vila, as he arrived on the flight deck, the dark swelling above his left eye and the cut on his cheek testament to his earlier accident. Everybody ignored him.

"He means we've gone back in time," said Cally. "Don't you, Orac?"

"I thought that was obvious."

"Time travel?" said Blake. "I know in theory it's possible, the Federation has been experimenting with it for years, but there have been no real breakthroughs."

"And nothing at all to suggest you can do it accidentally," said Avon. "Orac, what caused us to travel back in time?"

"You hit what used to be called a tear in the space-time continuum, but a worm-hole would be a more accurate description. Though they were once thought of as two separated points in space existing at the same place, it has long been theorised that they can also link points in time. To my knowledge we have just experienced the first such worm hole ever discovered. Now I have important measurements to make concerning this fascinating phenomenon, so to save me the tedious problem of listening to your next two questions, it is the end of twentieth century old calendar and the planet we are circling is Earth."

"What!" said Jenna. "Orac, you can't be serious. Earth doesn't look like that."

"No wait, wait," said Blake, motioning her to be quiet. "It might have done once, before the war. Orac, how close to the end of the twentieth century?"

"Does it really matter?"

"Yes it does. Tell me, what year is it?"

"You have the information necessary to work it out yourselves."

Blake sighed. "Zen, can you tell us what year it is?"

"Calculating...1999."

"1999!" Blake whirled round in excitement. "Do you realise what that means? We can stop it all! We can destroy the Federation before it begins! We can change history! All we have to do is close it."

"Close what?" said Vila. "History was never my strong point."

"Another one to add to a long list," said Jenna.

Vila looked at her nervously. He wasn't sure if she was joking, or whether what just happened had ruined their friendship forever. But that comment about kissing it better... maybe there was still hope. He settled for giving her a mock snarl, and gently touching his sore spot. "I still have to get my revenge, remember," he said.

"What, don't you want me to kiss it better then?" she teased. Vila's heart almost missed a beat.

"Will you two stop it?" said Avon. "Blake, you don't mean..."

"Yes," he said. "I want us to close the Hellmouth."

Avon blanched. "Blake," he said. "If we do that, all history changes, us included. We might never be born."

"And the Federation will never have existed," said Blake. "I think it's worth the risk."

"For me, it's not so much a risk as a certainty," he said. "You can't affect what happened in Sunnydale without changing my ancestry completely."

"You had an ancestor at Sunnydale? You never told us that," said Jenna. "Anybody famous? Don't tell me you're a descendant of Buffy?"

"No, but close," said Avon. "Willow."

All eyes stared at Avon. There was an almost unified gasp.

"Willow Rosenberg?" Blake was first to speak. "Buffy's sergeant in arms and the first president of the Federation? The woman who built and designed the first Federation computer?"

"The same," said Avon. "And that computer would still be running today if it hadn't been for tarial cells. It was a piece of sheer brilliance."

"Look, obviously I've heard of Buffy and Willow, everybody has," said Vila. "But are you saying that it is happening down on that planet now? And we can stop it?"

"Exactly," said Blake. "I think we can do it."



Cally was lying on her bed. They'd spent the best part of ten hours working on a plan that would almost certainly wipe out their own existence, whether they succeeded in closing the Hellmouth or not. That Avon's ancestor lived there meant there was no escaping the rules of cause and effect. There was no chance at all that their presence would not change history to such an extent that the world they knew in the future would be radically different, and

she wasn't altogether sure that what they were doing was right.

Being from Auron, Cally's knowledge of what had happened in Sunnydale was not as good as the others' should have been, so she'd taken some time off to view the history files. It was very patchy; the subsequent war that had engulfed the planet had wiped out most records, and those that were left had been put together from people's memories, and they were the memories of the Federation - the winners always write their own history and no doubt their roles in it were somewhat exaggerated.

Most of Earth's official history at the time had come from Willow's regime; Willow was something of a megalomaniac from all accounts, though a brilliant one. But then history is full of brilliant evil dictators.

Willow had started off a brave soldier, second in command in Buffy's army. In the late 1990s, a hole had broken through to an evil realm and all manner of demons escaped. Buffy was referred to as the chosen one and built a mighty army around her. Cally smiled. Just think, as I'm lying here a great battle is waging down below, thousands on either side fighting for control of Sunnydale.

There were some other famous names that came up, and she had committed them to memory; after all, she might soon be meeting them. The master tactician Rupert Giles, Angelus the betrayer, Xander the mighty who was killed on that fateful night, his death triggering the events that ultimately led to the founding of the Federation, and of course Cordelia. What a woman. She had saved hundreds of lives with her selfless devotion. Cally was glad she'd survived the horror and ended up in Willow's administration as chief historian.

But despite such a formidable force, the creatures from the Hellmouth had won. Buffy herself was killed. Legend had it that she'd died before and risen again, but that sort of mythology often grew up around great figures in history.

Earth in the early twenty-first century had been chaos as the creatures from the Hellmouth roamed free, killing millions. What should have been hope at the birth of a new millennium turned to despair. Willow and Cordelia had formed an underground government, a focus to unite the remaining humans to fight the evil, and a force that, against the odds, had won, only to replace one horror with another, a Federation destined to enslave not only Earth but half the galaxy too. Now, maybe, that was all about to change. It was a matter of hours before they teleported down, almost certainly for the last time. They were going into a war zone, and win or lose they were unlikely to come out.



"Willow, just calm down and tell me again slowly what happened." Giles was trying to stay patient, but she was in a state of excitement and not making much sense. From what he could gather so far, a group of two men and two women, wearing strange

clothes, had appeared from nowhere, right outside Willow's bedroom window.

"I told you they just appeared," she said. "One second they weren't, and then they were. They carried things that looked like curling tongs."

"That's it," said Buffy. "I'm off."

Giles looked up. "What's the problem?"

"I'll fight vampires, witches - no offense Willow - and even fire breathing dragons, but I draw the line at hairdressers."

Giles sighed. He had never managed to understand how Buffy and the others could be so flippant, making jokes, especially now, only days away from the Crucible Solstice. The combination of a quarter moon and the solstice once more gave an opportunity for the Old Ones to escape. Each time previously this had happened, the forces of dark had become stronger after the sacrifice of a virgin male. But this year was different. Never before had a Crucible Solstice happened while the Hellmouth opening was so weak. They had heard that Spike and Drusilla were preparing a sacrifice; if they succeeded, the Hellmouth could be ripped wide. It might mean the end for all of them. Now these strangers appearing. It could be coincidence, but Giles gave up believing in coincidences about the same time as he moved to Sunnydale.

"Curling tongs aren't so bad," said Xander, his voice snapping Giles out of his thoughts.

"You've never used them," said Buffy.

"Doesn't matter. What worries me is they might have gel," said Xander. He turned to Willow. "What was their hair like? Did it look greasy?"

"Can we get back to the point?" said Giles. "Willow, after they appeared, what happened next?"

"They sort of all looked round, pointing their curling tongs..."

"Looking for customers, obviously."

"Xander, can we let the hairdresser bit drop now? Willow, continue."

"One of them pointed," she said. "And they ran off down the alley next to Mr Bradshaw's. That's the last I saw of them."

"Didn't you follow?"

"I wasn't dressed."

"No, of course not," said Giles. "I'll look up what I can. There are creatures that can appear as if out of thin air, I mean air. Buffy, on your patrol tonight I suggest you check the alley, see if you can find anything. But be careful. We're not sure yet what we're dealing with."

"Don't worry," said Buffy. "If I find them, I'll just ask what they recommend for split ends."

Giles sighed again.



"Zen must have got the year wrong, it's the only explanation."

"Zen doesn't make that sort of mistake," said Avon, though he could understand Blake's frustration. By all accounts, there should be a full scale battle going on here, instead they appeared to be in a



sleepy little town where the most exciting thing that happened was when the paper boy missed someone's garden.

"Maybe we are too early," said Cally. "This is the old calendar they are working to. But it is very specific, 21 June 1999, the date of the apocalypse; we should be just days away. The history books may just have recalibrated the dates to the modern calendar, that sort of thing happens all the time."

"That seems the most likely," said Blake. "Do those history files you've been reading say how the Hellmouth opens?"

"It's very vague," she said. "Buffy was meant to have been the last hope to stop a sacrifice, but she never made it. She was killed by demons minutes before the Hellmouth opened."

"That could be the key," said Blake. "If we can use our advanced fire-power to help Buffy stop the sacrifice, the Hellmouth might never be opened. Meanwhile, we ought to find out as much as we can. Jenna, go back to the ship and see if you can find us some more suitable clothing, then we'll try to find a computer terminal to see what we can learn. I trust you can handle that, Avon?"

Avon shrugged. "They'll be pretty basic machines," he said. "I doubt if they even have voice input, but I should be able to work it out, providing they're not still running Windows."

Blake looked puzzled.

"An infamous pre-apocalypse operating system," explained Avon. "One of Willow's first edicts after building the new computer was to have all copies of

it destroyed."

"Well, do the best you can," said Blake. "Let's get going. We've a lot of work to do if this really is where the Hellmouth opens."



Alone again. Well not exactly alone. There were other people in the Bronze, they just weren't sitting at Xander's table. He looked round the darkened room, eyes falling briefly on a group of boys playing pool. They seemed to be arguing, but their voices were drowned by the bass beat driven music that filled the air. No band tonight, the music came from the CD player behind the bar. One of the two young women serving drinks had just changed the disc, and it was a popular choice; more than half the scant crowd were on the dance floor, some pairs clinched together despite the music being quite fast.

Watching them brought Xander's thoughts round to Cordelia, or Willow, or both, or which, or Buffy. He didn't know, and that made it a mess. Part of him, if not most of him, longed for Willow, that part that looked on with jealousy when she played with Oz. But he'd never again found the courage to tell his childhood sweetheart how he still felt for her. Strangely, they'd become too close: it would almost have been like dating his sister.

That Willow had still wanted him, he'd known. And somehow that had made it bearable, realising he still had time during his crush on Buffy to ask and that she'd say yes. But then she'd fallen for a werewolf and that door had been closed to him, perhaps forever.

And now here he was going out with a girl who he'd once despised, a girl he and Willow had ridiculed together, one more thing to share. He still wasn't sure what he felt for Cordelia now; lust, definitely, but was there more? He was growing fond of her, and just thinking about her stirred his emotions.

Suddenly he knew he wanted — had — to be with her. He snatched the nearly empty glass of cola, drained the contents in one movement, and spluttered as the warm, flat liquid registered with his tastebuds. God, how long had he been sitting here? Putting the glass back on the table, he stood up and started to push his way through the dancers towards the door. There were only one or two places she could be, he thought, it wouldn't take long to find her, and he needed to get out of this warm sticky atmosphere.

The first thing he noticed as he stepped outside was that the hot California night was little relief from the conditions inside the club. The second was that there was a shape standing in the road directly in front of him. It was Angel. Xander turned, to re-enter the club, but fell straight into the arms of Drusilla; she must have been waiting behind the door.

"Welcome, my pet," she said. "I knew you'd come to me."

Xander tried to struggle free, but felt Angel's arms circling him. His throat was centimetres from

Drusilla's teeth.

Almost as if she could read his mind, she said: "Don't worry, I'm not going to bite. We've got something much more special lined up for you."



"Five days!"

"Not quite."

"It seems like five days. OK, four days we've been on this godforsaken planet and not a sign of an impending doomsday. Let's face it, Blake, the history books have spun us a yarn."

Blake turned to face Jenna, though he could hardly see her. The moon was in its formative phase and there was no lighting in this part of the cemetery. It had been four days of almost fruitless searching, taking it in turns to come down and explore.

"But something happened," he said. "And this town is the key. So what if the history books are wrong? Whatever happens, happens here. We've already spotted the key people — Buffy, Willow, Giles, Cordelia, Xander — we know they're meeting in the school library. We are in the right place, maybe just not the right time."

"So what can we do, and why are we in a cemetery at night?"

"The cemetery is meant to be key in some way, and we look too conspicuous by day in the clothes you dug us out."

"The records say these are twentieth century clothes," said Jenna.

"The twentieth century," said Blake, "lasted a hundred years and was noted for fast changing fashions."

"Well I think those platform shoes and flared jeans suit you," she said. "But I must admit I do get a lot of strange looks wearing this dress."

"That's not a dress, it's a belt," he said, "and... umph!"

Blake collapsed in a heap. His last thought before the blackness overtook him was that someone had taken serious and understandable offence to his wide-collared orange shirt and its brown paisley pattern. Jenna span round, her gun already drawn. She could just make out five dark figures moving towards her and fired quickly at the nearest two. Nothing happened: it was as if the shot had gone straight through them. Old fashioned fighting time then. Leaping forward and leading with her fist sent one of the figures down and, before the others could react, she twisted her body and kicked another in the hip; that normally knocked people out. A moment's hesitation when it didn't was all the rest of the creatures needed: she was surrounded and outnumbered and soon to be overpowered. Hands were grabbing her from all sides, cold clammy hands pulling her to the ground, the smell of rank breath on her face. She retched as saliva dripped into her mouth and sharp pointed teeth moved inexorably nearer. As she felt her neck being punctured, she was reminded of Vila's look when she bit him. She never did get to

kiss him better, a thought too soon wiped out, along with all others, by a dark red cloud.



"This is disastrous." Giles was pacing the library. He turned to look at the four teenagers — three girls and one boy — sitting at the table. "Are you sure there is nowhere else he can be?"

"Well, nowhere we can think of," said Willow. "According to his mother, he never arrived home last night."

"He was still at the Bronze when I left, but that was quite early," said Buffy. "Just before I went on patrol."

"Did you see anything unusual?"

"Nothing," she said. "It was the quietest night we've had for ages. I thought things were meant to be hotting up for tonight."

"That's what I thought would happen," said Giles. "Maybe they are just getting everything ready for the sacrifice."

"You don't think," said Willow, her voice breaking, "that they've got Xander for the sacrifice?"

"Well, he is male, and probably a virgin," said Oz. Buffy and Willow looked at Cordelia.

"What are you looking at me for? We've never... ugh the thought..."

"Cordelia," said Buffy. "This is serious. We know about you two, the whole school knows about you two."

"The whole school? What do you mean, the whole school? What's Xander been saying?"

"That, Cordelia, is not important," said Giles, waving his hand to stop the expected objection. "Have you and Xander had intercourse? It is important that we know."

"No, of course not."

"Honestly?" asked Buffy.

"Honestly."

"That settles it," said Buffy. "If Cordelia hasn't had him, then nobody else will have done. Sad to say, Xander is a virgin."

Willow and Oz stifled a giggle.

"This is not a laughing matter," said Giles. "Xander's virginal status is in great danger of lasting the rest of his life, which may be not very long — what the..."

The sight of two men shimmering into view stopped Giles and brought Buffy to her feet. They were holding what were obviously the curling tongs Willow had told them about.

"Oh my god," said Cordelia. "Look at those clothes. Have you been in prison for the past 30 years?"

"They may be going straight back there unless they start explaining themselves quickly," said Buffy, as she tried not to be dazzled by the golden medallion with thick golden chain resting on the bare chest of one of the men. The medallion was sandwiched by the vertical frills of a bright yellow shirt that hung outside a pair of white jeans flaring out at

the heels and almost hiding completely white plastic boots.

"Where's Jenna?" he asked, obviously very agitated. "And where's Blake?" said the other man. He was sporting a well worn black leather jacket. The silver studs in the back spelt out the words "Hells Angel". A dirty white T-shirt, ripped at the base, was stuck roughly into black leather trousers secured by a black leather belt and a large silver-grey buckle shaped like a skeleton's head. Black leather boots completed the outfit. His dark hair was greased back.

Xander warned us about gel, thought Buffy, as she asked: "Who are Blake and Jenna?"

"And, more to the point," said Giles, "who are you?"

"Er, I'm Vila," said the yellow shirted man. "And this is Avon, and you're Giles."

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"I think you'd better sit down," said Avon. "We've got a long and very strange story to tell. We have to find Blake and Jenna, but we've also got to stop Buffy being killed tonight so she can stop the sacrifice."

Buffy took in a deep breath. "OK, that's got my attention, start speaking."



You could have heard the proverbial pin drop in the library. Even the usual, everyday sounds of an American high school were apparently banished from infiltrating and disturbing the shocked expressions of a small group of teenagers and a normally unflappable, or so he liked to think, Englishman in tweeds. Even in Sunnydale, the tale just related by Avon and Vila stretched bounds of credibility that should by no rights have been capable of stretching further.

Oz was first to break the silence. "OK, even if we accept you are from the future, which I'm not saying I do, we do not know the events are destined to roll out the way you describe. Now wait," he said, raising his hand to stop Avon from interrupting, in what he proudly decided was a perfect imitation of what Giles had done moments earlier, "we already know your history books have got it wrong. By your accounts there should be a full scale war going on here between good and evil, whereas what we have on one side is seated round this table and on the other a pair of misfit vampires who have, for as long as we've known them, been out thought and out manoeuvred by Buffy, with a little help of course."

Oz breathed in before continuing, slightly but pleasantly surprised that he was holding the group's attention so well. The showman in him responded to his appreciative audience as he carried on with his argument.

"What we do know, however, is that the same two misfits are planning some sacrificial rites tonight with our friend Xander as the guest of honour. It also seems likely that your friends, too, have fallen prey to Spike and Drusilla."

Vila groaned. Oz glanced at him before continuing: "As such we have a common goal. My suggestion therefore is that it is irrelevant whether we believe your outlandish story. If they are having a sacrifice, the cemetery is the most likely place. We have to go to their and kick arse, and if you want to join us, the more the merrier."

Oz looked round and realised he was standing up. He was fairly sure he had started his monologue from a sitting position, but couldn't for the life of him remember when that had changed. His eyes fell on Willow, her eyes almost as wide as her mouth. She tried to speak, but only strange gurgling sounds of pride emerged.

"I agree with Willow," said Buffy.

Another silence fell on the group, and slowly all eyes turned towards Giles. His left hand was rubbing his chin and his eyes seemed focused on a small scratch on the table left accidentally, or more likely deliberately, by some former pupil seeking distraction. He became aware that he was now the centre of attention and that his followers were seeking guidance. He wasn't sure he had much to give; that they had to stop the sacrifice was obvious, but what of the two strangers? He adopted a thinking aloud policy.

"It seems to me that if you two are telling the truth, then you are playing a dangerous game," said Giles. "Your existence here today, and from all accounts in Sunnydale for nearly a week, has almost certainly already changed the course of history."

"But not seriously," said Avon. "Because we are still here, and if we had stopped what was going to happen, we would cease to exist."

"What I don't understand," said Vila, "is if we stop what happens and cease to exist then we can't come back in time and stop what happens so it will happen and we will exist and therefore can come back in time and stop what happens, in which case we won't exist... Am I making any sense?"

"Sadly, yes," said Giles. "That's the problem with time travel; you get too many opportunities for paradoxes."

"So what do we do?" said Buffy.

"Well, I see no other option than to follow the reasoning so eloquently laid out by our friend here," he said, resting his hand on Oz's shoulder. Oz beamed with delight. Willow blushed with pleasure. "However, I must warn you that there is a very good chance your two friends have already been converted and that we may have to kill them if we are to stop the sacrifice."

Vila leapt to his feet, but before he could find any suitable words, Avon spoke. "That is not acceptable," he said. "Our first priority is the rescue of our friends. It was Blake's idea to change history, now I'll settle for us just to get the hell out of here. But we do have a common enemy, and from what we know, numbers may be against us. So for the time being we're working together."

"And we are going to save Jenna," said Vila. He paused, and added: "And Blake, of course."

Giles started to turn away. "I hope we can both achieve our objectives tonight," he said. "But first you two are going to need some training. Those weapons of yours will be quite useless against the enemy we are due to face. I think some crossbow lessons are in order."



And so it came to pass that, on the night of the Crucible Solstice, three men, two girls, one werewolf and the Slayer set off from Sunnydale High School towards the nearby cemetery on a quest to save the world. Though Avon and Vila had accepted the crossbow lessons, and now carried them ready for action, they had decided the more familiar weapons of the future should not be discarded, and so they bore the Liberator handguns too, a decision that would contribute to this catalyst of a night. The stage was set, the actors ready and the tools picked; only the story already told was yet to be completed.



Xander lay on his back, naked, the cold stone drawing the heat from his body, making him shiver on this warm Midsummer's Day. Coarse twine cut into his wrists and ankles, holding him still. He could turn his head slightly and make out shadowy figures in the dark tomb. Odd bits of cackling laughter and strange incantations broke the silence. Where was Buffy? Why hadn't she come? He could be dead by now. Maybe that was it. Maybe they all thought he was dead. Maybe they'd given up on him. The thought hung heavy as he realised the incantations were becoming more pronounced, and louder. No, not louder, just closer.



Blake watched from the entrance of the mausoleum as the small ragged army walked through the cemetery gates. He shook his head in amazement that so few hoped to be victorious against such a strong foe. But they did pose a threat, and the forces of dark were right to be worried. He waited patiently in the slim moonlight as they threaded their way through the tombstones and up the hill towards him. It was time to move.

"Avon," he called out. "Quick, this way."

The group stopped at the sound, and turned to see the darkened figure gesturing for them to come to him. Blake's voice had snapped Avon out of his thoughts of the past hour. He'd been sitting in the library experimenting with the adjustment screw on the crossbow when a shadow passed over his work. "Hi," the timid voice had said, and Avon had looked up into his ancestor's eyes, eyes that should have had a youthful innocence but had seen too much horror to look truly innocent ever again. "Hi," he'd replied, trying to sound many years younger. She'd sat beside him to talk, having noticed how he'd avoided looking at her throughout that strange meeting. She'd been worried he might have known she was going to die that night, but how could he

tell her the worry was she'd survive, yet if she died he would cease to exist? He just told her to look after herself and gave her some bland advice about ends justifying means and then held her small hands in his as he tried but failed to express his secret admiration, not for who she was but for who she was to become.



The figures were circling him now, still chanting. Every now and then, one would reach out a hand and touch him, making his skin crawl. But the disgust was nothing to the fear he felt when Drusilla came into view, her sickly body writhing in front of him, the bright, silver knife in her hand occasionally rubbing against his exposed skin, making small but painful cuts.



"Is it him?" asked Giles.

"It's him," said Vila. His hand touched a button on his bracelet and he brought it to his face. "Cally," he said. "We've found Blake. Be ready at the teleport, we may need you quickly."

Cally acknowledged his message and wished them luck. Poor Cally, thought Vila. Something exciting happens at last, and she ends up on ship duty.

"Be careful," said Giles. "Buffy, you go first."

Her slender form half ran to a position between Blake and the rest of them and then she started to walk again up the hill. Avon at first followed but, when Blake was in easy reach, he ran past her towards him.

"Are you all right?"

Blake's answer was interrupted by Vila shouting Jenna's name as he spotted her walking, no, almost floating, towards Buffy. As she neared, Buffy's nostrils flared. Every instinct told her this wasn't a woman approaching but a vampire, instincts confirmed by the face as it came into the light. There was no point in stopping for explanations. Before anyone could move, a piece of pointed wood was in Buffy's hand and plunging into Jenna's chest.

"No," Vila shouted, his hand already at his gun. He watched in horror Jenna's face turning towards him, her eyes pleading for help. Vila shot. Buffy screamed and fell to the ground as Jenna exploded into dust.

It all took a couple of seconds but felt as if it was happening in slow motion. Willow running with exaggerated movements towards Buffy, the air itself appearing to exert a stifling resistance. She fell to her knees and grabbed her friend's hand, tears already welling up in her eyes as she rejected a thought about how Buffy had been right to fear the curling tongs. There was no need to feel pulses or check breathing. Willow knew Buffy was dead. She forced back the grief and let the anger out in a scream.

Vila almost smiled as Willow, still in slow motion, turned, but it was a smile that became a grimace of fear as he saw the crossbow, already cocked, in her



hand and the arrow being released. There was nothing slow about the projectile that plunged into his heart.

Despite the shock of being hit, Vila's last thoughts before losing consciousness for the final time returned to Jenna. She'd dominated his mind these past weeks and now she was gone. Somehow his own death mattered little after that.



Horrified, Avon watched Vila fall. He turned back to Blake.

"He's no longer your friend," shouted Giles. "He's sold us, Avon, all of us, even you."

"Is it true?" Avon's eyes widened as he asked the question.

"Avon, it's me, Blake." Blake started to move towards Avon.

"Stand still." Blake froze at Avon's words.

"Have you betrayed us? Have you betrayed me?"

Blake didn't get a chance to answer, for at that moment the knife held by Drusilla plunged into Xander's heart. A blinding flash lit up the night, followed by a sound like thunder. The ground shook as what looked like a thin laser at a pop concert cut a shaft of light through the sky.

"That light," said Cordelia, "it's coming from the school."

"Oh my god," said Giles. "The Hellmouth, it's open."

Holes started to appear in the grass between the headstones, cracks in the earth radiating quickly outwards from them. The beam widened with an eerie orange-red brightness, as if the devil himself were shining a giant torch to the heavens.

"Willow, Cordelia, Oz, run," shouted Giles.

"But Buffy," said Willow.

"It's too late for her," said Giles. "There's nothing more we can do here. Save yourselves before it's too late."

Creatures of all shapes and sizes were starting to flow from the holes, accompanied by a cacophony of squeals, squeaks, wails, roars, growls and noises never before heard by human ears. There were goblins and spirits, trolls and imps, zombies, ogres and all sorts of bugaboos. There were creatures that Rupert Giles would not have found in a lifetime of research, creatures that time itself had forgotten, unleashed once more onto an unprepared world. Nightmares were banished as reality created a tapestry much worse than could be woven by the most macabre dreamer. The supernatural faced the natural in battle and won the first round with ease.

"Go now quickly," ordered Giles, and gasped as the smell hit him, a pungent smell stronger than the odours from the most vile cesspits on earth.

Cordelia and Oz grabbed the shaking Willow and started to drag her to the cemetery gates. Suddenly Oz shuddered and then jerked. His chest protruded outwards as his whole body lifted from the ground. Cordelia and Willow backed away with horror, watching a spasm shake him until the edges of

his form blurred into the night. His chest exploded.

Cordelia screamed at the hot sticky liquid splashing her face. She saw the hand protruding through his chest holding — no squeezing — his still beating heart. Clawed, dark fingers pressed tighter until, with a dull plop, the organ succumbed and another shower of blood sprayed both girls. Cordelia screamed again.

The creature withdrew his hand and let the limp body collapse to the ground. It started to move towards the girls, but stopped, uncertain. There was something about the smaller of the two humans, something about the way she looked, fixed, staring. Her mouth opened. "I'll be back," she said, fighting back the tears and the grief, but not the anger. She didn't know it then, but the tears had been banished forever; only the anger was to remain and shape her life from this moment on. She forced a calm authority into her voice. "I'll be back and you'll pay for what you've done today. All of you."

"Run," called Giles, "before it's too late. There's more of them." He watched as Cordelia grabbed the semi-resisting Willow and pulled her through the gates. Only when they were both out of sight did he turn back to Avon.

"Avon, get out of here now," he half shouted, half gagged. It was more harmful than just a smell, he realised. His vision started to blur and his legs wobbled. He was being touched now, all over. Something wet and slimy covered his face as mercifully he lost consciousness.

"They don't understand," said Blake quietly to Avon.

"Neither do I," said Avon.

"I set this up."

"Yes," realisation suddenly dawning.

"Avon, I was waiting for you." Blake started again to walk towards Avon, and stopped as the arrow from Avon's crossbow embedded itself in his chest. He tried to continue his approach but slumped to his knees, his eyes looking up to Avon's face. His lips mouthed Avon's name one last time before the creature they had once known as Blake burst into dust.

Avon looked up, and around. Strange dark shapes were approaching him from every direction. He deliberately put one foot either side of the pile of ashes on the ground and took another arrow from his belt, fitting it to the crossbow, grimacing slightly as he pulled back the string. His eyes fell on the nearest of the creatures; he slowly raised the weapon to his face and took aim. The smile that crossed his face was obliterated by the cloud crossing in front of the moon and plunging the cemetery into darkness.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many, many thanks to Harriet Monkhouse for beta reading this story and coming up with a host of useful suggestions. And to all those, especially Mary O'Connor, who explained moon cycles to me.



THE REASON SERVALAN SURVIVED TERMINAL

(drawn by JEM DIXON <JemD@skyview.demon.co.uk>)



Daddy's Girl

by JACQUELINE THIJSEN <inquisitioner@wish.net>

Years of dealing with vampires, werewolves and assorted demons had given Xander something of a knack for noticing the unusual. So when he walked into the library, he immediately stopped and gasped: "What the hell is going on here?"

"I'm reading a book," said Buffy, rather defensively. "This *is* a library, remember?"

"Well, yeah." Xander sat down next to her and grinned impishly. "But I mean, isn't reading the books Giles' job or something?"

"Actually, as the school librarian, it's my job to persuade *you* to read the books." Giles looked cheerful and reasonably undistracted as he walked out from between the stacks, so Xander relaxed. One of the side effects of their librarian's fascination with ancient lore about monsters was that when one of the subjects of that fascination presented itself, he invariably got extremely distracted. And speaking, or rather thinking, of which: "Wasn't Oz supposed to be in the cage?"

"Not really," Giles busied himself with some new books which had just arrived. "Oz only changes into a werewolf after moon-rise which will occur an hour after sunset today. And as the sun set only 45 minutes ago, there is still some time. He and Willow are taking a stroll in the school yard."

Xander pressed down hard on the twinge of jealousy he felt when hearing that and picked up something from the table to fiddle with so that he could more easily hide his feelings. He put it back quickly when he discovered he'd inadvertently picked up a book called "The care and feeding of hellhounds, serpents and scorpions", routinely ignoring Giles' disapproving look. Their favorite librarian never understood how someone could not like reading one of those five inch thick tomes about creepy crawlies that he considered light bedtime reading. "Well," he said, intending to get out before Giles could start lecturing him on the subject of the wondrous world of books, "Much as I'd love to see the hairmeister caged, I have a test tomorrow. I'm off to study." Ignoring Giles' incredulous look just as routinely as the disapproving one, he started toward the door.

When he got there, he nearly bumped into Willow and Oz as they came running in. A few moments of mutual apologies were cut short when Willow stopped stammering unintelligibly and instead thrust the note she held in her hand in the general direction of Giles. The librarian took it and adjusted

his glasses as he opened and read it. The growing look of alarm on his face was enough to make Xander forget all thoughts of escape from the library. Buffy put down her book and joined them. "What is it?" she asked.

Giles didn't answer, but instead asked Willow: "Who gave you this?" Oz, apparently noticing that Willow was not yet ready to put two words together, answered "Jeremy Quigley."

"Wait a minute, Jeremy died in a car crash four days ago, didn't he?" asked Xander.

"That's what we all believed." Giles kept studying the note while he answered. "And since he was the only one to be buried at Woodland Cemetery this week, and we had no reason to believe vampires were involved, we didn't feel that it was necessary to patrol there. There were several other things keeping us rather occupied at the time." His quick look at Buffy and the guilty look on her face made it clear to the others that most of these "other things" had been of a personal nature. Not that they blamed Buffy. Even a slayer needs some time off every now and then. Besides, Buffy probably felt enough guilt without them adding to it.

She broke the tension for all of them by asking, "So what's in the note?"

"Ah, yes, the note." Giles straightened it another time and started reading out loud: "I have your father. Meet me at Woodland Cemetery at midnight and bring your book of spells." He turned the note around in his hands as if he hoped that doing so would make the message clearer. "It's signed with an S," he said.

"Book of spells?" Buffy looked confused. "I've got stakes, crosses, holy water, garlic and a bar of chocolate. No book of spells."

"I know of no demons that can be fought with chocolate," said Giles, looking up from the note.

Xander couldn't resist a chance to bait: "Maybe she wants to use it to scare off the tooth fairy."

"Unlikely," answered Giles, his attention returning to the note. "That particular demon was recently spotted in Italy. Besides, it likes chocolate."

"The chocolate is for me," Buffy explained, cutting off Xander's spluttering, "Patrolling makes me hungry sometimes."

"I see," Giles drew them back to the issue at hand. "Well, I don't think the note was meant for you. The reference to spells makes it more likely that it was

meant for Willow. That is undoubtedly also the reason Jeremy gave it to her."

Willow shuddered when hearing that. She moved a little closer to Oz. "So who is this S character?" he asked, putting his arm around her.

"Principal Snyder?" offered Xander. "Maybe he wants Willow to make him taller."

"Possible, but unlikely." Buffy's eyes twinkled at the suggestion, but she made an effort to be serious, anyway. "Our head gnome is not exactly up to having vampires delivering his messages for him."

"Quite," agreed Giles, "Since Jeremy is now a vampire, S is likely to be one, too." He paused for a moment, lost in thought. "It could be Spike."

"But it can't be Spike." Willow had regained some of her composure during the discussion, but the thought of Spike, and possibly Drusilla, holding her father prisoner visibly upset her. As the others looked at her, she explained: "Well, he promised never to come back here again, didn't he?" Her voice, never very strong to begin with, became weaker as she realized that it wouldn't be the first time he had broken that particular promise, and for a very similar reason at that.

"Yes, well, the situation will almost certainly become clearer when we go to the cemetery tonight." Giles had some trouble playing the cool voice of reason in this situation, but for Willow's sake he tried anyway. "For now, I believe it's time for Oz to get into the cage. Xander, if you could take over first watch from Willow, Buffy and I will accompany her to the cemetery. In the meantime, it won't hurt to check if Willow's father is actually missing."

"I'll call my mom." Willow, glad to be able to take action, quickly walked over to the phone on Giles' desk and dialed the number. While she was talking to her mother, Oz went inside the cage and Buffy and Giles both made a great show of checking the lock. Anything to keep from thinking about what might have happened to Willow's father for a moment. Willow's slumping shoulders and bowed head, however, made it clear that what they feared had indeed happened. She finished talking to her mother and came over to the cage. "My dad hasn't come home yet," she told them. Oz stuck his fingers through the wires to hold her hand. He started to say something to her, but at that moment the moon rose and he started to change. Buffy, Giles and Willow moved away from the cage and out of his reach. Until the sun rose again, Oz would not be able to help them.



Midnight at the cemetery would have seemed spooky to some, but to Buffy, Giles and Willow it had become comfortably familiar. They sat on a stone bench, making small talk while they looked out over the graves. Buffy had already slain the one vampire that had crawled out of its grave that night, so there was really nothing left to do but wait for the writer of the note to put in an appearance.

When he did, it was almost an anticlimax. Spike

obviously didn't feel like fighting, as he came walking towards them without making any attempt at stealth. He first turned to Buffy and Giles: "You two weren't invited."

"Well, the more the merrier." Buffy stood up, ready to fight at the least sign of trouble. "You didn't really think we'd leave you alone with Willow, did you?"

"Where's my dad?" Willow looked like she was close to fainting, but she didn't let this keep her from confronting Spike. "And what have you done with him?"

"Don't worry, little girl, Daddy's perfectly all right. And he'll stay that way if you do what I want."

Spike seemed to enjoy taunting Willow, so Buffy decided to draw the conversation away from her. "So what exactly do you want her to do? You're a little old to need a date for the prom."

"Oh, I'm sure there are still plenty of girls who'd love to have me along," grinned Spike, "but I'm here to make a trade. A daddy for a daddy."

"What do you mean by that?" Buffy had little patience for Spike's word games.

"It's a gift for Dru, really, a little something that'll help me get her back. She still seems a little annoyed with me and I've just thought up the perfect little thing to show her how much I care."

"What do we look like, Toys R Us? This is a cemetery, not a gift shop."

Spike grinned at that, but continued as if there had been no interruption. "You see, when she became a vampire, she killed off most of what family of hers that Angel had left alive, but she didn't know who her father was. So she never got to kill him."

"And what do you want Willow to do about that?" Buffy was by now standing directly in front of Spike, as if ready to attack. Spike responded by lazily sitting on a gravestone and languorously stretching out his legs before he answered. "Something very simple, really. Dru tells me there's a spell by which people can be brought through time to the present." He looked at Willow who did her very best not to shrink back from him. "So I want you to do that with Dru's father."

"Wait a minute." Buffy was amazed at Spike's callousness, even though she should have known better by now. "You don't really expect us to conjure someone up for you, and then allow Dru to kill him, do you?"

"Willow is the witch here, so *you* won't have to do any conjuring at all." Spike sounded almost cheerful as he added: "Besides, the man is already dead, so I really don't see what your problem is." He sat back, calmly waiting for their reactions.

Buffy was ready to start a heated argument and Willow just looked scared, so Giles decided that this would be a good time to calm things down and start buying some time. "I think I know which spell Dru meant. It's not an easy one to perform and it takes a lot of preparation."

"That's funny, according to Dru you hardly need any preparation at all for this spell. She also men-

tioned that it had to happen during a full moon." Spike smiled in an almost friendly manner. "You wouldn't be trying to delay us until after tomorrow night, would you?"

Giles would have happily tried wiping the grin off the vampire's face if it hadn't been for the fact that Spike had the upper hand here. So he restrained himself by focusing on practical matters. "We'll still need to do some research. Willow is not yet experienced at summonings."

"Research away. Just make sure she's ready to do the spell tomorrow night." Spike, an evil grin on his face, stood up and put his arm around Willow's shoulders, giving them a friendly squeeze. "Or her daddy is going to start coming back to you. One piece at a time. Minus his blood, of course. Waste not, want not, right?" He smiled most charmingly one more time and then jauntily strolled away, whistling a few bars of a cheery tune. Giles took Buffy's arm when she started to follow him. At her questioning look, he explained: "We can't do anything to Spike as long as he holds Willow's father. And if he notices that you're following him, he might hurt Mr. Rosenberg just to make a point." He held Buffy until she cooled down and nodded her understanding. That was indeed the sort of thing Spike would do.

Willow looked more frightened than ever. "I've never done a summoning before and this is time traveling, too. Are you sure it's possible?"

"No, I'm not," said Giles "but even if it doesn't work, we'll still have until the moon sets tomorrow night to find your father. I suggest you start looking at the spell and get the necessary ingredients. Buffy and I will spend the time trying to find out where your father is."

"Angel is going to help, too," added Buffy. "You know, use a vampire to catch one. Or two, in this case." Willow nodded gratefully. Buffy and Angel together should be able to handle Spike and Drusilla. She did have one more concern, however: "What are we going to do if it does work? I mean, we can't just drag someone here and then give him to Drusilla."

"I wouldn't worry too much about that," Giles tried to reassure her. "Even if the summoning itself isn't too difficult for you, I believe that one of the requirements for it to work is that the summoner has to be rather closely related to the one being summoned. Unless I'm very much mistaken, you and Drusilla would at the very least have to be cousins for this to work."

"Yechh," shuddered Buffy, "now there's a disgusting thought." Willow vigorously nodded her agreement with that sentiment.

"Indeed," Giles agreed as well. "But since Drusilla was born in England over a century ago, the chances of that being the case are slim to none."

"So you want me to act like I'm doing this spell while you're looking for my father?"

"No, I want you to actually perform the spell. We can't risk Drusilla or Spike realizing that you're faking it. Since one of the requirements is impossible

to meet, that should be safe enough."

Willow nodded "All right, I'll go back to the library then, and start looking over the spell."

"Right now the only place you're going is to your bed, young lady. There is always a risk when you're casting a spell, even when it can't work. You'll need to be well rested before you start."

Giles was right, so Willow nodded, but she didn't look happy about it. "I don't think I'll be able to sleep much."

"I know, but even a little sleep is better than none at all." Giles put his hand on her shoulder. "Come on, I'll drive you home."

"And I'll go tell Angel what happened. I went by his place earlier this evening and he's been searching ever since." Willow nodded gratefully to Buffy and then went with Giles.



"I don't get it." Angel leaned against the wall, a worried look on his face.

"What's not to get?" Buffy looked up from checking her backpack and shrugged. "Dru loves her family to death, and she hates having missed her father."

"That's just the point, she didn't miss her father. I was there when she killed him. So was Spike, for that matter."

"Now *I* don't get it. Why would Spike tell us that Dru never knew her father when he watched her kill him?"

"I don't know, but I don't like it. And I like this summoning business even less."

"Yes, that bothered me, too. Since when is Dru into spells and stuff? I thought her gigs were fortune telling and hypnotism."

"We saw someone performing that spell once. A witch and her sister wanted to speak to their mother one more time, so the witch did the spell for her sister."

"Sounds like you could use this to bring people back from the dead indefinitely. So why isn't it used all the time?"

"You could bring people back, but you wouldn't want to. The mother killed both sisters almost immediately after she appeared. As it turned out, someone's soul will not travel past the moment of death when this spell is used. The result was something very much like a vampire, only without the eating habits."

"Ugh, well I guess that wouldn't matter much to Drusilla."

Angel looked grave. "Not to her, but it would matter to Willow. If she succeeds, Dru's father will almost certainly try to kill her right after he appears."

"Well, according to Giles the spell can't work for her, so that shouldn't be a problem."

Angel relaxed a little. "I suppose not. But I'm still going to do my best to find Willow's father tonight. I really don't want to see that spell being used ever again."

Buffy smiled, grateful for his concern. "I'm sure Willow would like that better, too. So would the rest

of us, for that matter.”



Two hours later Buffy was rolling over the pavement, ending up in a rather undignified sprawl between some cardboard boxes that cluttered up the end of the alley where she and Jeremy were fighting. She shook her head to clear it, then jumped up to renew her attack. Jeremy had turned out to be a much better fighter than she remembered from the self defense classes they had had to endure at school when Oz first became a werewolf. Obviously, he had taken some extra lessons since then. She ducked to avoid a kick and at the same time kicked at the leg Jeremy was standing on. This time he was the one to go down in a sprawl of limbs. Buffy wasted no time jumping on top of him and held a stake ready to pierce his heart. “Where is Willow’s dad?” she asked him.

Just like the first two times she’d asked him this, Jeremy just laughed in her face and doubled his efforts to get Buffy off his chest. With a mighty heave he succeeded in doing so, tripping and crawling away from her. Buffy jumped up from the ground to go after him and unceremoniously staked him in the back.

Through the dust she saw Angel watching her from the entrance to the alley. “Killing the messenger?” he asked.

Buffy shrugged. “He wasn’t going to talk. I don’t think he knew anything, anyway. Have you had any luck?”

Angel shook his head. “Spike may have used Jeremy to deliver his message for him, but other than that he must have worked alone. Nobody seems to know what he’s up to. I’ve also checked all the places he’s used before. Willow’s father isn’t in any of them and neither is he, for that matter. And although some of the people I asked have seen him, nobody seems to know where he’s staying. The funny part is that nobody has seen Drusilla.”

“That’s strange. Drusilla is not exactly the type to stay home for her man.”

“Maybe she isn’t here. You told me that Spike means this to be a gift for Drusilla. He could be trying to surprise her.”

“Which means we only have to deal with him. Well, that’s a relief, anyway.” Buffy unsuccessfully tried to stifle a face-splitting yawn.

Angel looked at her. “You need to get some sleep. There really isn’t much more we can do now except patrol the streets to see if we come across Spike. And I can just as easily do that on my own.”

Buffy was forced to agree with that. The chances of running into Spike when he didn’t want to be found were slim to none even if both of them were looking. “Just be sure to call me as soon as you find something.” Angel nodded, and Buffy started walking home. Despite the circumstances, the only thing on her mind at that moment was her pillow, and how soft it felt when she fluffed it up before laying her head on it.



When Buffy walked into the library the next evening, Spike was sitting on one of the tables, dangling his left leg with a bored look on his face. “You weren’t invited,” she told him.

Spike grinned, looking almost as wolflike as Oz. “What was it you said again, the more the merrier? Well, I’m a very merry sort of guy.” He looked at the cage when Oz started growling. “New pet?”

“Yeah, we usually sic him on pesky vampires.” Xander was being his usual ungracious self when dealing with people he didn’t like.

“Don’t push it, little boy, we don’t need you for this.” Spike stood up to look down on Xander menacingly. Xander tried to stand taller and look at least a little menacing.

“Will you two knock it off?” Buffy had very little patience for a testosterone battle. Spike shrugged and Xander sulkily retreated to a spot where he could keep an eye on Spike. Spike seemed amused by that, but chose not to comment. Buffy shook her head and walked over to where Giles and Willow were busily putting bowls, candles, feathers and some things Buffy didn’t recognize in their proper place around a chalk pentagram that was drawn on top of a table. Both Giles and Willow looked up expectantly when they noticed her. She shook her head and they slumped and resignedly resumed their preparations. Angel had called her a little earlier to tell her that he might have a lead, but he hadn’t sounded very sure, so she didn’t want to get their hopes up. “Are you ready to start the spell?” she asked Willow.

Her friend vigorously shook her head. “No, not yet.”

Spike came over to look at the pentagram. “So when will you be ready, then?”

“Umm, in about a century?” Willow was obviously none too happy about having to try this, but at a look from Spike she added “but I guess I can start trying now.” Giles looked worried, but stepped back when Willow sat down at one point of the pentagram. He held the book in front of her as she started chanting. To Buffy, it sounded like a long string of nonsense words. She found herself thinking that she should ask Oz if this wouldn’t sound good with a slow beat and some eerie kind of music to accompany it. Buffy shook her head at the weirdness of that thought and tried to concentrate on keeping an eye on Spike. She really wanted to keep an eye on Willow, too, to make sure that she was OK, but decided Giles was better qualified to do that in this case. She was rather worried about Willow. For a spell that wasn’t supposed to be working, it seemed to take a lot out of her. After a while, little drops of sweat started to appear on her forehead as she strained to keep her voice level during the entire chant. Nothing happened, however, and after about five minutes of continuous chanting, Willow stopped. Buffy was feeling relieved at that, even though she tried to convince herself that she *had* trusted Giles’ judgment.

"What's the matter?" Spike moved towards Willow. "Why are you stopping now?"

"She's tired." Giles stood protectively between Willow and the blonde vampire. "She'll have to rest for a while before she can try it again."

"Besides, she's missing the main ingredient." They all looked at the door as Drusilla strode in. She stood in the doorway, smiling while she took in their reactions and then told them: "Me."

Spike rushed over to her. "How did you know about this?"

"I dreamed about it." She smiled and kissed him passionately. When they untangled again after a while she stroked his face. "I think it's very sweet of you."

Spike looked embarrassed. "Well, we all have our weaker moments."

Still smiling, Drusilla squeezed his arm and then glided over to the table where Willow sat. She sat down on the opposite side of the pentagram. "Now try it again" she ordered.

"I need some time to rest," Willow protested nervously. "I'll try again in ten minutes. Because, uh, if I try it again now, I might mess up and get someone else here. Like Elvis for instance. Although I think somebody else already brought *him* back."

Dru was about to start threatening her, so Buffy stepped in between her and Willow. "Ten minutes," Buffy told her, "unless you want to fight me about it."

Dru seemed to consider this, then decided: "No, not yet." She smiled vaguely as she settled down to wait.



"Eeeuuw, I think I saw a rat."

That was her fifth eeeuuw this night, Angel mused as Cordelia disgustedly picked her way through the ruins of the factory. He and Buffy had searched it the previous night before they did anything else, but this night they kept finding rooms and hallways they'd missed then. It didn't help that the roof had partially collapsed, hiding quite a bit of the interior. Now he was searching it again, because one of the people he'd questioned claimed to have seen Spike leaving it. Cordelia was with him at Buffy's request, because her bickering with Xander drove everyone to distraction. He hoped Buffy would join them again soon, since Cordelia was now driving *him* to distraction. He did, however, appreciate the fact that despite her disgusted reactions, Cordelia was often quite practical. On two occasions this night, in the middle of her prattling, she'd pointed out a place he'd missed. Sometimes she reminded him of the way Buffy had been when he'd watched her slay her first vampire.

At the moment he was trying to clear away a large pile of rubble that looked too odd to have fallen that way naturally. Even with his vampiric strength it was slow going, partly because he didn't want to risk having the whole pile come down on top of him. Cordelia had tried helping, but most of the debris was too heavy for her. So now she was looking

around again, commenting on everything she saw. "Oh yuck, I think I just stepped in something. Ugh, this place is just so filthy. Someone really ought to come in here and clean it up."

Yuck number eight, thought Angel, sighing. "I think I saw a broom a few rooms back. You're welcome to have a go at it."

"Puhlease, there's, like, *people* who do that sort of thing."

"Yes of course, how could I have forgotten."

"That's all right, the underprivileged often do."

Angel gaped at her, not quite believing what he'd just heard. Then he resumed working, heaving another big piece of concrete aside with just a little more force than necessary. Buffy had better appreciate what he was doing for her.



At the library, Willow was ready to try again. While Drusilla sat at the other side of the pentagram, smiling beatifically, Willow drew a deep breath and then once again started her chanting. After only a few sentences, she felt that something was different this time. The candles started flickering erratically and suddenly she felt something pulling at her, as if from a great distance. It felt wrong somehow, as if it should have come from somewhere else. She couldn't explain why she felt that way. After all she'd never done this before, so she had no way of knowing how it *should* feel, but the feeling of wrongness at the direction of the pull persisted. She felt a part of her pulling back, struggling to keep whatever it was from pulling her away to wherever the feeling came from. She kept up the chanting because stopping at this point in a spell could be extremely dangerous, but she was suddenly very frightened. Careful not to disturb the flow of the spell, she started resisting the feeling of being pulled away, trying at the same time to determine where it was coming from. The science nerd in her was actually fascinated by the effect, trying to analyze it so she could come up with some rational response to it. Perhaps the speed of her chanting or the intonation should be changed. She experimented by varying both a little, but the struggle to stay where she was and her own rising fear made it increasingly hard to concentrate on experiments. After a few minutes of this the pull became too much and she knew she had to do something fast, lest she be dragged to wherever by whatever it was. As an orderly person, she had a great aversion to being dragged to wherever. She liked her destinations well defined, thank you very much, and she'd go there under her own power, or not at all. In this case, that meant she had to stop being careful and take decisive action, fast. She drew a deep breath and, offering a quick prayer in her mind, gave a big mental heave. At once she knew she'd overdone it, whipping the thing pulling at her across time and space in the opposite direction of where it had been coming from. She tried to correct what she'd done and succeeded in slowing it down, but now she was nearing the end of the spell. Despite her best ef-

forts to get a mental “look” at it, whatever it was that had been pulling at her released its hold when she chanted the final words. She had to admit to herself that she was glad it did. If that thing on the other side was powerful enough to pull at her from across time, then she really didn't want to meet it up close and personal. She was still shaking with the effort it had cost her to keep it at bay.

Now if only she could convince Spike and Drusilla that stopping would be a good idea. Or perhaps she could try faking the spell next time. Not that that was likely to work. She might have been able to fool Spike about faking something like this, but the guileless sweet smiling face of Drusilla hid a mind that was at least as sharp and perceptive as her own, and dangerous to boot. Willow shuddered as she realized that she would have to face the thing at the other end of the spell again after all.



“Down and safe.” Avon lowered the arm with the teleport bracelet as he considered his surroundings. Irritated by what he saw, he raised the bracelet to his mouth again. “Vila, you idiot, you sent me to the wrong coordinates. Bring me back up.” He frowned when he didn't get an answer. “Vila, wake up.” Still no sound came from his bracelet. Apparently it was malfunctioning. Things certainly couldn't have gone wrong on the other side, since Zen hadn't detected any pursuit ships and a breakdown in the communications equipment would have been fixed by the self repair systems in less time than his attempts to contact the Liberator had taken. Normally he wouldn't have worried about it. Vila or one of the others would come looking for him if they didn't hear from him within a few hours at the most. But now he wasn't where they'd expect him to be. He was wearing his white desert outfit, because he had been headed for the fringes of a large and extremely hot desert, on a planet called Bana. Those clothes didn't provide much protection against the cold, damp forest he found himself in now. He checked that his gun was in order and ready to draw. Then, with a disgusted sigh, Avon started moving along a narrow path that ran next to a brook. It didn't seem very promising, overgrown with weeds as it was, but as long as no other alternatives presented themselves he'd take it. At least moving around would keep him somewhat warm. He shook his head in an attempt to clear it. Normally he didn't feel anything at all when he was being teleported, but this time there had been a sensation of almost uncontrolled movement which had left him feeling distinctly woozy. Checking the teleport system was definitely going to be first on his to do list when he got back. And if nothing was wrong with it, chewing out Vila for mishandling the teleport was going to be second.

After about two hours of walking he saw a small wooden house. The path got wider past the house, which probably meant that it would lead to other houses, and perhaps even a town. Avon decided to check out this house first, to get a feel for whether or

not the locals were likely to be hostile to strangers or, more importantly, to Liberator crew members. There was a woman standing in the vegetable garden that surrounded the house, watching him as he came down the path. She seemed to be intrigued by him, if a little worried. That was a good sign, he supposed. Strangers were apparently reasonably welcome here. When he came near enough for conversation, he called out, “Excuse me, I seem to be lost. Could you tell me where I am?” The woman smiled. “None of us are lost in the eyes of the Lord,” she told him. Oh wonderful, thought Avon, remembering only too well the descriptions of the religious cult on Cygnus Alpha. The woman didn't seem to notice his disgusted reaction. “You look tired. Please come inside to rest. Are you hungry or thirsty?”

Avon remembered that, according to Vila, Gan had been quite enamoured of one rather pretty follower of that cult. This woman was certainly not bad looking. Maybe this *could* be a comfortable place to stay until his crewmates found him. After all, that shouldn't take more than a few hours and this particular cult might not be as virulently insane as Vargas and his followers had been. He followed the woman into the house. Remembering his intention to check the attitude towards his rebel group, he told her, “I'm Avon.”

The woman didn't seem to recognize the name. “My name is Amelia,” she said. Amelia smiled at him as she busied herself pouring him something to drink and cutting off some bread and cheese. Avon had become rather hungry and thirsty during his walk, so for the next ten minutes he concentrated on transferring all of what his hostess offered him to his stomach. The drink turned out to be a light ale, so he decided not to ask for another. Having one's wits dulled while in an unknown environment had always struck him as the worst kind of stupidity.

When he was done, he took a better look at his surroundings. The house contained only a single room, with a rough wooden table and three mismatched wooden chairs, one of which he was currently sitting on. There was a wooden cupboard against the wall and a wooden bed in a corner. Apparently wood was the cheapest building material on Bana. The only metal he'd spotted so far was in the eating utensils like knives and mugs. Avon had never seen a metal mug before. It gave a strange taste to the ale. He made a mental note to check for metal poisoning as soon as he was back on the Liberator. Other than the taste of the ale, however, his surroundings were quite unthreatening. He decided to wait where he was. There really was no point in moving around, when staying in one spot would actually make it easier for the Liberator's scanners to find him. He sat back in his chair and relaxed for a while.



Four hours later, Avon was getting irritated. He still hadn't heard from the Liberator, even though he was sure that Tarrant was by now almost as com-



petent at using the equipment needed for tracking him as he himself was. He'd already checked his bracelet and it seemed to be working fine, but his repeated attempts at contacting the Liberator had failed. It had briefly occurred to him that the others might have abandoned him, but he had immediately dismissed the possibility from his mind. Even in the unlikely event that Cally and Vila were angry enough at him, they all knew very well that they needed him. None of them could handle the Liberator's internal systems or Orac as well as he could. So for some reason, despite their and his best efforts, they had failed to locate him. Since it was already getting dark, Avon decided to spend the night where he was and then head for the nearest population center with communications equipment. There certainly wasn't any in this place. As a matter of fact, there was an absence of technology here he'd rarely encountered even on a frontier world. Perhaps this particular religious sect had something against technology. It certainly didn't fit in with what he knew of the part of Bana that he was originally headed for. And yet, Amelia apparently didn't understand what he was talking about when he'd asked her where he could find some way to contact his ship. For some reason she seemed to think that writing his message on a piece of paper and then giving it to someone would do the trick. Avon felt he should try finding a somewhat more sophisticated communications system first.

But that could wait until tomorrow. Since there was no artificial lighting (Avon didn't think of candles and a fireplace as artificial lighting), he decided to go to sleep shortly after sunset. That way he could get an early start in the morning. He was rather startled when Amelia slipped into the bed with him. At his questioning look, she told him, "It's the only bed in the house." Avon couldn't argue with that. Apparently sharing a bed with guests was normal here. Amelia was certainly very matter of fact about it. Avon recalled reading that cuddling up close in bed was sometimes done in colder climates, to preserve body heat in those cases when there was no other source of warmth. He settled down to go to sleep again, hoping his hostess wouldn't keep him awake by snoring or moving around too much.



"I really don't know if I should do this again. It's dangerous." After almost an hour of trying reason and other delaying tactics, Willow had resorted to pleading with Spike, with just as little result. "Your father is in danger, too," he told her. "Now, you either get Dru's father, or you lose yours." Buffy stepped in between Spike and Willow as if to physically protect Willow against Spike's harsh words. Oz put in his two cents worth by growling at everything that moved and Xander paced nervously, obviously wanting to do something and just as obviously out of his depth. While Buffy was staring down Spike, Giles took Willow aside and tried to encourage her by once again reminding her that the spell couldn't

possibly work for her. Willow wasn't convinced. She knew for a fact she'd felt something being pulled towards her and she also knew that this something had been pulling at her as well. Whatever it was, she was very sure she didn't want to bring it any closer to where she was. She looked at Drusilla, who still sat at her end of the pentagram, serenely smiling and waiting for Willow to start again. Dru obviously knew Willow didn't have a choice and could therefore afford to wait until she got what she wanted. Willow felt a sudden flash of hatred for her. Spike might be frightening and quite ruthless in his own way, but he never came close to matching the cold and calculating ruthlessness of Drusilla.

Willow sighed. It was now an hour after her last attempt at the spell, so she could no longer believably claim a need for rest. Frightened but determined, she sat down again. She'd kept the monster at the other end of the spell at bay once and she'd do it again, if it was the last thing she ever did. Keeping her voice as steady as she possibly could, she started chanting.



Avon was once again trying to get some sleep. His hostess had most certainly kept him awake, by moving around in several extremely interesting ways. She'd been far more willing to experiment than Dayna had been on his first meeting with her. She was currently asleep, with a slight smile on her face that Avon liked to think he put there. He actually felt like smiling a little, himself. As relaxed as he could be in a strange place, he settled down to sleep. He dozed off thinking of the choice words he was going to aim at Vila for putting him down in the wrong spot and at Tarrant for not getting him out of here sooner. Given the circumstances, however, he might be somewhat forgiving towards Tarrant.

He was jolted out of his pleasant doze when a man came crashing into the house, shouting curses. Avon jumped up and reached for his gun. He got hold of it, but the cord that connected the gun to the powerpack came loose in the struggle with the furious intruder, rendering the entire thing useless. He used both gun and powerpack to try hitting the man, hoping he'd hit him hard enough to at least dampen his enthusiasm a little. It didn't seem to make much of an impression. The man was built very much like Gan had been, slow moving but heavily muscled. When Gan had been on a rampage after his limiter had shorted out, it had taken two of them to subdue him even for the few moments it took to sedate him. Alone and with a non-functional gun, Avon didn't think he'd stand much of a chance against this man. He jumped away and ran around the table, putting it in between him and the big man. Since his hands were still full, he used his arms to heave the table over so it crashed into his adversary. He took advantage of the moments that action bought him by bolting through the door. He ran straight for the woods, hoping to find a hiding place for at least the time it would take him to reconnect his gun. Behind