

# **OUTSIDE IN GAINS A SOUL**

**127 NEW PERSPECTIVES ON  
127 ANGEL & FIREFLY STORIES BY  
127 WRITERS**

**EDITED BY ROBERT SMITH?**

# **SAMPLER**

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## 48. CARPE NOCTEM

### PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

#### TREY KORTE

Performance sneakers. Performance water bottles. Performance underwear, even. The word “performance” is everywhere in the fitness world, a world I’ve become more familiar with in the past year, as I’ve joined a gym and hired a personal trainer — and actually stuck with it this time. And, while most of the fitness industry uses the word in its definition of function — the body as a machine — the other definition of “performance”, the theatrical one of putting on an act, is equally visible at the gym. The guy grunting loudly at a much lower octave than his speaking voice? Performance. The motivational posters filled with exclamation points? Performance. The woman in the group class loudly joking about how much she has cheated on her diet? Performance. Me, an insecure gay guy when it comes to fitness and body image, perfecting the silent look with the ballcap pulled down low so you can’t see my eyes and athletic apparel I never thought I’d wear to appear more ruggedly masculine? Oh, hell yeah, it’s a performance.

And performance — especially male gender performance — is everywhere in *Carpe Noctem*. In the pre-credits scene, we have Angel performing for the gang that all is fine (even though his true love has just died) and Fred performing for Angel in an especially giggly way as they go on a sweet “date” to see machoman Charlton Heston in a double feature. Meanwhile, the first victim is enjoying a different type of double feature with two escorts, as he brags they are about to enjoy “Round 4” of sex, a testament to his performance in the bedroom. (Of equally impressive performance is the threesome’s hair which, after three exhausting and presumably sweaty sessions, remains immaculately coiffed and styled, a truly impressive feat.) Even his death is a performance of sorts, as all rituals are, with its rehearsed line and theatrics.

The performances continue when the investigation begins, as the owner of the gym has a performance spiel lined up for Angel, followed shortly by Cordelia performing for the members as she flirts with them. But the greatest performances arrive with the cliché of the body switcheroo and Marcus inhabiting Angel’s form.

We never find out much about Marcus’ past, and it’s unclear whether he was the Lothario he tries to be now or was instead sexually frustrated. No mention is made of family, which could be attributed to either possibility: the playboy or the outcast. Either way, Marcus is all performance, a player in every sense of the word. Certainly, when he’s in Angel’s form, he seems to be acting like the archetypal bro, one we’ve all known from college or the workplace. Interestingly, people around Marcus also shift into a performance, whether it’s the orderly Ryan falling into the usual routine or the woman at the nightclub giving MarcusAngel the eye.

And it's here where the layers of performance reach meta levels, as David Boreanaz has to play a Marcus who plays both a younger "bro" as well as what he thinks Angel is actually like. Boreanaz's performance is astonishingly good here as Marcus-in-Angel, his eyes constantly darting around in search of prey, his fingers restlessly tapping in a way only entitled bros can tap them. These scenes are mainly played for laughs, which indicate that it's not just the characters or actors performing a role, but the episode itself, as a horror-drama decides to do a body-swapping spell of its own, with *Angel* becoming an episode of then-current-and-popular *Friends*.

Because *Carpe Noctem* is written as one of those misogynistic sitcoms that were popular at the time. It's misogynistic because, oddly, for a story set in the usually feminist Buffyverse, the female characters are presented as all being deeply desirous of men and will do anything for them against their better judgment. Fred is infatuated with Angel, acting like a middle-school girl — and it's seen as sweet. Cordelia can't remain focused on the investigation, as she uses the opportunity to get phone numbers at the gym. Lilah is revealed to have had sexual desires for Angel and does not hesitate in almost copulating with her enemy. The woman at the club can't wait to cheat on her boyfriend based on nothing more than MarcusAngel's looks and cheesy pick-up lines. And the two escorts are quite impressed and also exhausted from the aforementioned three rounds. It's as if the script has decided to treat the women exactly according to Marcus' worldview. Accordingly, rather than using the plotline as an opportunity to say something about the male gaze or the pick-up-artist mentality or even the anxiety men feel about growing old and no longer being able to perform, the script instead opts for full-blown sitcom mode, employing many of the tropes of the sitcom to create attempted humor.

Most sitcoms will have episodes where a person says one thing but the other character has a misunderstanding the audience is aware of. All the scenes of MarcusAngel thinking the name "Fred" belongs to a man — and his attendant homophobia — are of this brand of comedy writing. Another classic sitcom trope is for a character to walk in on a situation at the most inopportune time; i.e., Fred walking in on Lilah and MarcusAngel. The orderlies treating Angel, whom we know is a badass vampire, as a deluded senior citizen is played for laughs. Even the music in these sequences gets in on the game, making a frightening and horrific situation into something funny.

But, as any actor will tell you, performance is exhausting. The effortlessness is an illusion. And, just as Marcus' performance can't last forever, reality also catches up with the episode. *Angel* as a series can't sustain the illusion of comedy for long any more than Marcus can remain perpetually youthful. Like Marcus, it's trapped in a genre it wishes to escape from. And, like Marcus, its heart is simply not up to the task.

*Trey Korte is an English and drama teacher, where he teaches about the levels of performance, and an emerging gym bunny, where he frequently witnesses levels of performance.*



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## 57. WAITING IN THE WINGS

### FAN DANCE

MELISSA BEATTIE

My first ever episode of *Angel* was *Waiting in the Wings*. This is somewhat unusual for me; I have the bad habit of always picking the worst episode of a given series to start with, meaning that I end up taking a few episodes to get into something. Not so in this case; this particular episode turned me into a fan more or less instantly.

There are a number of things to love about this episode: great characterization, astounding visuals — Wesley’s face reflected in a brass mirror remains my go-to for examples of brilliant shot composition — and a storyline with tendrils stretching backwards and forwards in narrative time. But there’s something that’s always bothered me about the episode, so, if you’ll indulge me, I’d like to discuss it for a bit.

Media in general and “cult” media in particular has always had a difficult time with representing fans of things. I’m sure you can think of many examples yourself where even the most well-meaning of production teams ends up falling into some sort of stereotype-based trap; the *Saturday Night Live* “Get A Life!” sketch is probably the most notorious of these. And, if you recall, when speaking through Cordelia, the ballerina refers to Kurskov as “nothing but a deluded fan” who believes she loves him.

This... is a problem.

In addition to being a fan of a wide variety of things, I also study fans and fandom as part of my academic research. One of the main things that we’ve argued against for decades is the idea that a fan, especially a cult media fan, is somehow crazy or sick or lacking something in their lives that “makes” them so passionate about whatever it is that they love. There are many, many reasons for these types of pathologizing arguments. Despite the best efforts of all of us in the fan-studies community to point out that this is wrong on so many levels, it remains very common in the popular press and even popular media. While you can certainly find examples of fans suffering from an untreated or undiagnosed mental illness, you can find that in any large group of people. Whatever they’re a fan of determines only how that illness is expressed. One does not cause the other. And that (completely inadvertent, I’m sure) connection being made between fans and this type of psychological problem — remember that *Angel* suggests that Kurskov start a website for the ballerina to show his love, thus connecting his level of insanity to the idea of starting a website — just reinforces that misrepresentation of the “crazy fan”.

So instead of calling him a fan, let’s call Kurskov what he is.

An abuser.

*Further reading*

The depathologisation of fandom really began in 1992, when both Jenson's edited volume *The Adoring Audience* and Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* came out. This work was continued by Hills in *Fan Cultures* (2002), Sandvoss in *Fans* (2005), Gray et al's edited collection *Fandom* (2007), Zubernis and Larsen's *Fandom at the Crossroads* (2012), Stein's *Millennial Fandom* (2010) and Booth's *Digital Fandom 2.0* (2016). Information about abuse outcomes is from Wiehe's *What Parents Need to Know about Sibling Abuse: Breaking the Cycle of Violence* (2002) and Etherington's 1995 paper "Adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse" in *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*. Vol 8.3. 233–242.

The ballerina tells Angel that Kurskov "made" her, potentially implying that he was a combination of an abusive parent figure and an abusive partner who found someone vulnerable to groom. He demanded absolute control over her, as many abusers require, isolating her to do so. Learned helplessness and the belief that one is nothing without that abuser is another common facet of such relationships, as is the idea of the abused person as a possession of the abuser. The fact that it's Wesley who connects with Kurskov and that he and Angel both work out what Kurskov is just reinforces this; Angelus was an abuser who became obsessed with various women (Drusilla being the most obvious parallel here), while Wesley was abused by his father, and, as the later *Lineage* implies, his father may have abused his mother as well. Both of them thus understand and recognize the behavior, with Wesley having recently had a reminder in *Billy*, and, it's implied, both could also become

another Kurskov, due to Cordy's reunion with Groo and Fred choosing Gunn.

What is most important here is not that both Wes and Angel have experience of this kind of abuse. Both recognize that abusive, controlling behavior is wrong, and that is one of the most important factors in an abused child not becoming an abuser themselves (the inevitability of the abused becoming an abuser being another fallacy that needs to be removed from the popular press and media). The awareness that one has done wrong and thus changed one's behavior is another important factor in someone trying to reform, especially if we see Angelus or vampirism as an addiction analogy. Thus, instead of echoing, they are breaking the cycle to move on with their lives and are helping others to do the same. But tying these ideas to fans and fannishness in many ways trades one fallacy for another.

One of the most important things I've learnt in my studies is that everyone is a fan of something. That doesn't mean that everyone is damaged or missing something in their lives or their minds; it just means that we're all human. Expressing and nurturing that common humanity is our strongest defense against abuse of all kinds, but that is

clearly something for which most societies seem not yet ready to embrace. Thus we are left to wait in the wings — or start to change things for ourselves.

I'm a fan of that last idea.

*Melissa Beattie has the emotional maturity of a blueberry scone.*

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# 91. UNLEASHED

## CARNE EN VIVO

### ROMAN BANIAS

*Doctor Tastebuds Episode 24*

FADE IN:

EXTERIOR, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

*Beautiful vistas of Los Angeles at dusk. Tall high-rise buildings cut the horizon. The city glows with streetlamps and traffic.*

SMASH CUT TO:

INTERIOR, HOTEL ROOM

*DOCTOR TASTEBUDS stands near the window of an upscale hotel, gazing out at the city. He turns to look at the camera.*

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Hey everyone, Doctor Tastebuds here! We've got a very special, exciting episode lined up for you today. I've been selected to take part in a very exclusive, invite-only event. So, after making the long trek from Winnipeg, Canada, all the way down to Los Angeles, California, I'm waiting in my hotel room to be picked up and taken to a secret location for a meal that promises to be truly once-in-a-lifetime!

To tell the absolute truth, I'm not exactly sure how I was selected for this event. I've had restaurants contact me before for grand openings and such, but this seemed different somehow. I received an email from someone representing a group that promised an experience I'd never forget. I was planning on visiting some friends down here anyway, so I booked my flight and got ready for my adventure.

*A KNOCK at the door.*

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Sounds like it's time!

*Doctor Tastebuds opens the hotel door. A PAIR OF GOONS in suits stand in the opening.*

GOON #1

You the “Doctor”? Time to go.

EXTERIOR, HOTEL

*The pair of goons lead Doctor Tastebuds to a large, black, nondescript sedan. One opens the rear door.*

GOON #1

Get in.

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Thank you...

INTERIOR, SEDAN

*The goons sit in the front of the car. Doctor Tastebuds sits alone in the back seat.*

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Well, here we go. Now, I was assured that our chef tonight could work with most food allergies, as the meal that will be served is to be made fresh from scratch right at the table. That’s absolutely fantastic, because as you all know I have an allergy to sunflower seeds and oil. I’m also quite intrigued at this practice, as most places have a decent amount of prep work already taken care of to keep order-to-serving time at a minimum. I hope that doesn’t negatively affect tonight’s experience.

*The car comes to a stop in front of a large home. The goons open the car door and usher Doctor Tastebuds to the front door. After knocking on the door, a peephole slides open. Someone looks through, nods, and closes the peephole. The door opens, and Doctor Tastebuds is brought into the house proper. They round a corner and enter the dining room. JACOB CRANE stands from a chair and approaches.*

JACOB CRANE

Ah, welcome. You must be “Doctor Tastebuds”.

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Yes indeed, Mr. Crane. Thank you for inviting me to this event. I’m quite excited to see what your chef has in store for us tonight.

JACOB CRANE

Yes, well... like I said in our correspondence, this is most likely something you've never experienced before... or will again. By the way, you may think twice about releasing this review on your normal channels.

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Oh? Why's that?

JACOB CRANE

Your viewers may find the... spectacle... hard to believe. I had a similar issue a month ago, in fact. I had some... uninvited guests who seemed to take issue with our preparation methods. I've had to downsize somewhat since my last event, hence my coming to you to drum up more interest in what we do here.

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Well, I certainly hope that tonight goes well. A positive review from me, and who knows what can happen!

HARD CUT TO:

EXTERIOR, LOS ANGELES

*Night has fallen, and the streets are awash with harsh streetlight. Aerial shots of downtown buildings reaching high into the air. The moon's edge barely peeks over the horizon.*

FADE TO:

INTERIOR, JACOB CRANE'S HOME

*A man, chained and gagged, is rolled into the room on a cart. He is covered with a linen cloth and surrounded with garnish. He has a wild look to his eyes. The cart is stopped in front of a man in a chef's outfit.*

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

I think I've seen something like this once before. A few years back, I had the pleasure of travelling to Japan, and had the most wonderful sushi served on the body of a beautiful woman. I've never heard of it combined with bondage before, and I truly hope they've shaved this gentleman... but let's see where this goes.

*A server brings a tray of champagne. Doctor Tastebuds takes a glass, nods to the server.*

*He watches the chef intently as he prepares various sauces on a portable hotplate.*

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

It appears that something tonight will be served “en neige”. Curiouser and curiouser...

*Jacob enters, takes a glass of champagne.*

JACOB CRANE

I hope you're ready, Doctor. The moon rises, and it is time for the feast... to begin!

*The man on the cart writhes and screams. He slowly transforms into a werewolf.*

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Oh, bloody hell, not again...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXTERIOR, STREET OUTSIDE JACOB'S HOME

DOCTOR TASTEBUDS

Well, that was a bust. You know, I don't have much luck traveling for these events. Might be best if I just stick to Winnipeg for the time being. I mean, the worst that's ever happened there was my favorite shawarma place ran out of lamb, and that Wendigo was mighty pissed...

Anyway, I can absolutely say that Crane's Bistro and Bazaar is definitely not Doctor recommended. I can't believe this chef thought that werewolf would be best served with truffle oil. Completely wrong for the style of meat. I mean, it's a carnivore. The flavor is much too tangy for that sort of thing to work. Perhaps a mole sauce... or even a red-wine reduction to allow the sweetness to balance the sharpness? In any case, I think it's another case of a chef trying to impress beyond his abilities. Trying to get too cute with what he was working with. Would not recommend.

FADE OUT

*Roman Baniyas has a small-time restaurant review channel on YouTube called Doctor Tastebuds. He has never actually consumed werewolf in his life. To the best of his knowledge.*



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# 100. YOU'RE WELCOME

## THE BETTER DEVILS OF OUR NATURE

### JILL SHERWIN

In the book *A Wrinkle in Time*, the heroine Meg is told “I give you your faults” as a gift. And she thinks that’s a terrible gift. How can one’s faults be a benefit? But I always saw the wisdom in that. It’s our faults that make us human. And, in some cases, it’s our faults — like Meg’s stubbornness — that prove to be our greatest strengths.

So it was for me as a viewer with Cordelia Chase, whom I always found to be a far wiser, more compelling character as the seeming “mean girl” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* than when portrayed as the true angel of the show *Angel*. I respected the Cordelia I saw on *Buffy*. I was bored to tears by her in *Angel*, no matter how often we were beaten over the head with how special she had supposedly become.

In both shows, it was easy to write off Cordelia as a ditz, but she never was (that was Harmony), though she could pretend to be, socially. Instead, she was a voice of blunt, painful truth. She may have seemed like a bitch at times, but she was a brutally honest one. The episode *Earshot* proved she said EXACTLY what she thought, but if you were paying attention, you could see that all along. In *Killed By Death*, she says it straight out, in full self-awareness when Giles accuses her of lack of tact. “Tact is just not saying true stuff; I’ll pass.”

But the value of her straightforwardness was never clearer than in *When She Was Bad*, an episode that saw Buffy return to Sunnydale, traumatized by the events that had transpired between herself and the Master. Cordelia is the one who sees Buffy being abusive to her friends and calls her out on it. When Buffy tries to be cutting in return, Cordelia isn’t fazed; she can hold her own. And she proceeds to lecture the hell out of Buffy, who deserves it, giving her the advice to get over herself: “Embrace the pain. Spank your inner moppet. Whatever. But get over it. ‘Cause pretty soon you’re not even gonna have the loser friends you’ve got now.” It’s that Cordelia — the über-practical voice of reason — whom I respected. She’s more insightful and conscious of people’s motivations than she was given credit for.

A particularly clear example of this is in *Out of Mind, Out of Sight*, where, from the beginning of the episode, she shows she can actually analyze behavior (through her own particular lens) by answering a question in English class about Shakespeare, illustrating an understanding of the material — even if skewed to a narcissistic viewpoint. It’s in this episode that we see her first true moment of humanity and self-awareness. She asks Buffy: “You think I’m never lonely because I’m so cute and popular? I can be surrounded by people and be completely alone. It’s not like any of them really know me. I don’t even know if they like me half the time. People just

want to be in the popular zone. Sometimes when I talk, everyone's so busy agreeing with me, they don't hear a word I say." And when Buffy asks if Cordelia feels so alone, why does she work so hard at being popular? To which Cordelia replies, "Well, it beats being alone all by yourself." That Cordelia probably had the best read on people when she bothered to show it; the willingness to be unfiltered made her unique and worth paying attention to, even if what she said was abrasive.

Yet somewhere between *Buffy* and *Angel*, Cordelia lost her bite, her edge, her inner strength. On *Buffy*, she was the voice of reason — whether people liked hearing it or not. She was blunt. She was honest. She was insightful and had clarity and was not simply rude or oblivious.

On *Angel*, she turns up in the first episode, *City of...*, vapid, weak and desperate. They took this bright light of a character and muted her color and shine and made her as dull as the rest of the show and as sappy and sacrificial as everyone else there. Yet another one in a crowd of heroes instead of a standout individual of her own making that you couldn't miss.

In *Buffy*, Cordelia was just a girl in the world — not a chosen one, not a slayer, a witch, a vampire, a werewolf, a Watcher. A girl, strong and influential to others as "merely" that. But, nine episodes into *Angel*, they had to make her more... and less... than she ever was before to justify why and how she could help others.

When we see Cordelia in *City of...*, she's a starving actress, all but throwing herself at showbiz folks for a chance at stardom. By the end of the episode, she settles for being *Angel*'s secretary. A few episodes later, in *Hero*, she gains the ability to receive painful visions passed on to her, presumably chosen in this special duty by the Powers That Be.

Or was she? Throughout the series, there is a back and forth that perhaps it was a mistake... or a manipulation... or perhaps it was intentional after all. She is told in *Parting Gifts* that this was Doyle's legacy he could leave to her. Then in *To Shanshu in L.A.*, a demon curses her to see all the world's suffering through her visions, and she decides she wants to help all those who are suffering. Hello, Saint Cordelia.

By *Birthday*, it turns out the visions are killing her, and she is presented with a choice to have never met *Angel* nor receive the visions at all. But when she tries that reality (really, didn't she learn from Anya that she picked bad alternatives when she tried to change history?), she finds she still has the urge to help others, including her former friends. So she decides her purpose in life includes the visions. And when she is told that the only way she can survive the visions is to go through a painful transformation to become half demon, she takes a quick look at traumatized *Angel* and says she'll do it, proving herself the sacrificial angel of the show. She literally floats as she reports her next vision.

The deification of Cordelia becomes more and more on the nose, just in case the viewers weren't clear when they were being hit over the head with it. In *Waiting*

*in the Wings*, Lorne says Cordelia is a champion. Why? Why couldn't she simply be an awesome woman? An awesome human? But no, it had to be fate. She had to be chosen. She had to be a champion. And, of course, it's at this point that Angel realizes he has feelings for her. Which is one of the most forced things in this series. By *Tomorrow*, Cordelia realizes she loves Angel — after Groo tells her so and breaks up with her. What happened to self-aware girl? (And why is Fred the only one caring/worried that Angel may get too happy?)

Even Joss Whedon said Buffy/Angel was “one for the ages”, and he's a Buffy/Spike shipper! Agreed. And there is no universe in which I would buy Cordelia/Angel as anything other than friends. Cordelia/Wesley was more convincing (meaning NO).

But, in that same episode, demon Skip tells Cordelia she's outgrown this plane/dimension, that she's become a higher being, which Cordelia readily agrees with and so opts to forsake her feelings for Angel in exchange for ascending to a higher realm. In a flurry of glowing stars, angel-saint Cordelia ascends to heaven.

Of course, by *Inside Out*, Skip suggests Cordelia wasn't really picked for ascension by the PTB. In fact, all events were manipulated — including Cordelia getting the visions — for Jasmine to live. But then finally in *You're Welcome*, Cordelia is allowed one last opportunity to be Angel's guide and helper, saying that the PTB woke her from her coma to get Angel back on track. Throughout, she is serene and wise, saying she understands Doyle's sacrifice to keep Angel fighting. Yet there is also a moment, a taste of the practical tell-it-as-it-is Cordelia, reminding Angel who he was. And THIS was how they and she worked — as friends, not love interests. But then she has to go all higher power, telling Angel “There *are* no people like us.” Because she's just so sweet and special and chosen, insist the writers to the viewers.

After their adventure together, Angel has a new confidence, a feeling he can beat the bad guys. Cordelia said she always knew it, she just needed him to know it too. And she says he'll win in the end — she just wished she could be there to see it. She claims the PTB owed her one and she didn't waste it: she got Angel back on track. She grabs and kisses him before leaving. The phone rings, and she tells him he has to get it. And “you're welcome”. The call is from the hospital, telling him Cordelia passed away that morning and she never did wake up. He looks around for her and says “thank you”, but she is gone. And, with that, the angel of *Angel* left the Buffyverse behind, as well as her humanity, having become a truly holier-than-thou character that hardly resembled the very real, superior, yet full of faults person she had once been.

I'm not saying I didn't shed a tear at the end of *You're Welcome* for Cordelia Chase, but it was more for who she had been than for who she had become. That was her greatest strength.

*Jill Sherwin is the author of “Quotable Star Trek” and “The Definitive Star Trek Trivia Book, Volume I & Volume II”, and she maintains that Buffy>Angel... but Spike>both!*

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## 124. OBJECTS IN SPACE

### 不合格的傻瓜之間的對話

**DAVID M. BARSKY**

*The names in the account that follows have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent...*

It was late afternoon, and there were just three of them sitting in the most sterile meeting room the executive building had to offer. They had been there for so long that none of them bothered to look out of the two walls of windows that offered a panorama of the hills and the ocean beyond.

“Okay, so what’s next?” asked 可怕的老暴君.

The other two were on the opposite side of the 16-seat half-moon conference

room table. They each had a single printed page.

"Well," said 一直沒用, looking down at a single, sparsely inked printed page, "there's *Firefly*."

"Forget it!" 尷尬的肛门 chimed in. "It has zero audience at all."

It was almost true, numbers-wise. The writing was on the wall for *Firefly*, and everyone involved with the production knew there was little that could be done to spare it from being a first-season flop.

"Well it does... have... a bit of a following." 一直沒用 said, desperately trying not to sound like an apologist.

"Says who? Where are they?" demanded 可怕的老暴君.

一直沒用 considered answering for a moment. *Why do these meetings always turn into some sort of farcical game? Do I show my hand this early? Or was that a rhetorical question? So darned hard to tell in this room most of the time.*

一直沒用 actually enjoyed *Firefly* and had even logged into a Usenet discussion. Once. It was after the fourth episode aired. "There's been decent presence on the internet."

"Well, maybe they should start being a presence in their living rooms."

可怕的老暴君 was relentless. "We have a fringe show with an audience that buries their heads in their computers. Maybe they'll start watching once this whole inter-thingsy bubble bursts, huh?"

*Okay, time to double down now,* thought 一直沒用. "Well perhaps that is an argument for giving it a chance and perhaps giving it early consideration for a second season. The audience for these cult shows do tend to grow slowly."

Both 可怕的老暴君 and 尷尬的肛门 stared with raised eyebrows, each of their furrowed brows conveying distinctly different tones of "Did you mean to say that out loud?"

They all let the moment pass as 一直沒用's ante faded into oblivion.

"I really should have sat in the edit bay for the pilot."

一直沒用 thought it was a ludicrous notion but was nonetheless thankful 尷尬的肛门 broke the silence. *Oh yeah, like that worked with Opposite Sex and The Street.*

"The show had such potential," added 尷尬的肛门.

一直沒用 couldn't decide if 尷尬的肛门 was now trying to play the martyr or just plain sucking up, knowing that 可怕的老暴君 was an early champion of the show.

"Audiences are confused. Everyone on the show is going from planet to planet on spaceships like a sci-fi show, but everyone on the planets is riding horses and shooting revolvers like they're all out of some western." 尷尬的肛门 seemed almost rehearsed now. "When is the last time you saw a western on television, much less in space?"

"Well *Star Trek* was basically a western in space."

“*Star Trek* was way more subtle about it though. And *Star Trek* was never scored like they were at a freakin’ hoedown” countered 尴尬的肛门.

“Well, Gene Roddenberry Joss Whedon is not.” 可怕的老暴君 seemed to be more dismayed than mocking.

“He ain’t no Gene Roddenberry,” parroted 尴尬的肛门. “And what’s with all the Asian writing all over the place? They speak it sometimes too.”

“It’s Chinese. It’s just a touch that makes the show more futuristic. Its shows their spreading influence in the world.”

“Well they really half-ass it, though, don’t they? It’s just not present enough to drive the point home.”

So much for that subtlety you were just calling for. 一直没用 made sure not to say that aloud.

一直没用 was pretty sure it was 尴尬的肛门’s note in the pre-production phase to limit the Chinese presence in the show and even went as far as demanding that one of the main character’s ethnicity be changed from Chinese to Caucasian. It wasn’t worth reminding anyone at this point though.

可怕的老暴君 was sanguine about the inevitable decision. “Look, we gave it a try and did everything we could for this show. We even aired the best ones up front to try to find an audience.”

“Maybe we should have aired them in the actual order they were intended,” 一直没用 opined. “The episodes had a bit of a through-line over the season.”

尴尬的肛门 was beginning to get irritated by 一直没用’s uncharacteristic boldness and was obviously ready to shut down any further calls for reason. “Really? Episodics shouldn’t have to be aired in order. Like the audience remembers — *or even cares* — what they saw a week ago.”

“Well they certainly don’t remember what they saw three weeks ago.”

There had been a nearly three-week gap between broadcasts of the most recent pair of episodes. 一直没用 had admittedly developed sympathy for Whedon, having worked closely with him these last few months. Certainly, fighting the good fight around a conference table was the only thing that could keep *Firefly* on the network at this point. Finding an audience would somehow have to come later.

“We all know regular series take a bit of a hit this time of year, with the holidays and all. There are going to be some casualties,” said 可怕的老暴君.

“Well, so much for the seven-year arc Joss had planned...” 一直没用 was drawing dead, so it was time to bring out the big guns.

尴尬的肛门, never one to be forgiving of the hubris of content producers said “Seven-year arc! Rather presumptuous of him; I don’t care who he knows.”

“Yeah, that was an idea. But, unfortunately, *Firefly* just isn’t *Babylon 5*...”

“This ain’t no *Babylon 5*,” was the sardonic endorsement from 尴尬的肛门.

一直没用 was out of coffee and thus alternative uses for the mouth. *Time to*

*Speak again, I guess.*

“But it does have its fans. We have received thousands of postcards from people who watch the show.” 一直沒用 was in full tilt now.

“So?”

“Well, in the sixties when *Star Trek* —”

“Enough!” 可怕的老暴君 was intent on ending the discussion with some sort of resolution. “Again, this isn’t *Star Trek* we are talking about here. How many weeks deep are we now in with this, including this Friday?”

“Ten episodes.” 尷尬的肛门 sounded almost somber.

“And which one airs this week?”

“Does it matter?” 一直沒用 was incredulous. Really? *Now* they care which episode is airing when.

“Maybe.” 可怕的老暴君 responded, finally turning to look out the window for the first time in an hour.

“Okay, well it’s called *Objects in Space*. Joss believes that one plays best out of the four that are left.” Whedon had of course known the show was under the gun for a few weeks by now, and he and 一直沒用 had discussed how to best let it end.

“Plays better? Plays better as what?” 尷尬的肛门 sounded legitimately confused.

“If the series had to end this week, he would rather have the intended last episode of the season to air next.”

“But is it better? Is it now our responsibility to tie everything up in a tidy little bow for a handful of fans? If the show tanks this week, it will go away, and no one will ever think about it again.”

“I’m not saying this week will be the last airing,” 可怕的老暴君 declared.

“Well, it will be Friday the 13th, you know. Good luck with that!” 一直沒用 was now convinced 尷尬的肛门 was becoming gleeful with the prospect of never having to discuss *Firefly* again.

“Let’s air the pilot next week and see how it rates. Maybe the audience can get on track.” 可怕的老暴君 was confident.

“The pilot? Didn’t we *not* air it because it was so god-awfully slow?” 尷尬的肛门 was keen to remind the room.

“So it’s more than likely the show will end broadcasting with what was intended to be the first episode...” 一直沒用 was making an effort to see the logic.

“It could be like a reset.” 可怕的老暴君 was unconvincing, but the boss was the boss. “Let’s take a break. More coffee?”

*David M. Barsky* 是电视执行官，可能会或可能不会听到如上所述的对话。

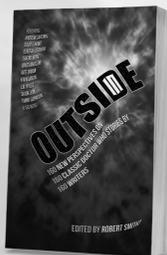
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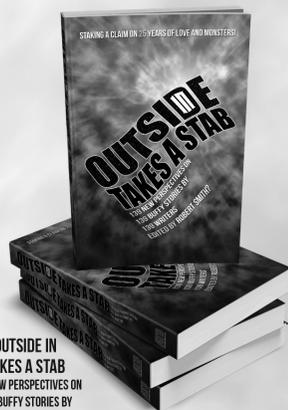
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