

1-1-2012

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Published version. "Zombies, Reavers, Butchers, and Actuals in Joss Whedon's Work," in *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion: The TV Series, The Movies, The Comic Books and More*. Ed. PopMatters Media. London: Titan Books, 2012: 285-297. [Publisher Link](#). © 2012 Titan Books. Used with permission.

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For all the standard horror movie monsters Joss Whedon took up in *Buffy* and *Angel*—vampires, of course, but also ghosts, demons, werewolves, witches, Frankenstein's monster, the Devil, mummies, haunted puppets, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, the “bad boyfriend,” and so on—you'd think there would have been more zombies. In twelve years of television across both series zombies appear in only a handful of episodes. They attack almost as an afterthought at Buffy's drama-laden homecoming party early in *Buffy* Season 3 (“Dead Man's Party” 3.2); they completely ruin Xander's evening in “The Zeppo” (3.13) later that same season; they patrol *Angel*'s Los Angeles neighborhood in “The Thin Dead Line” (2.14) in *Angel* Season 2; they stalk the halls of Wolfram & Hart in “Habeas Corpses” (4.8) in *Angel* Season 4. A single zombie comes back from the dead to work things out with the girlfriend who poisoned him in a subplot in “Provider” (3.12) in *Angel* Season 3; Adam uses science to reanimate dead bodies to make his lab assistants near the end of *Buffy* Season 4 (“Primeval” 4.21); zombies guard a fail-safe device in the basement of Wolfram & Hart in “You're Welcome” (3.12) in *Angel* Season 5.

That's about it—and most of these don't even *really* count as zombies at all. Many can talk, and most exhibit a capacity for complex reasoning and decision-making that is totally antithetical to the zombie myth. Not a one of these so-called zombies seems especially interested in devouring our heroes' delicious flesh. Of the aforementioned episodes only “Dead Man's Party” (*Buffy* 3.2) and “Habeas Corpses” (*Angel* 4.8) really come close to evoking the wonderfully claustrophobic adrenaline rush of the shambling, groaning zombie horde that has become so popular in American horror since George Romero's genre-establishing *Night of the Living Dead* series: a small group of people, desperately hiding within a confined, fortified space, with nowhere to run and no hope for survival when the zombies finally penetrate their defenses.

In interviews Whedon frequently cites Romero as a major influence on his work. In one he describes his early ambition to become “a brilliant, independent filmmaker who then went on to make giant, major box office

summer movies” as “Spielberg by way of George Romero” (Whedon, “The *Buffy* Writer”); in another he credits Romero with writing strong, complex female characters long before either James Cameron or Whedon himself came around (Whedon, “Sci-Fi-Online Interview”). In a video interview with Fear.Net Whedon describes Romero as “a huge influence,” adding that Romero “is the only really ambitiously political filmmaker in that genre—and the *Night of the Living Dead* trilogy is just an incredible example of what can be done with gut-wrenching terror” (*Fear.Net*).

Why then are there so few (and such poor) zombies in the early Whedon canon? We might speculate that filming a properly immense zombie horde would have risked busting the budget for any show, an ever-present concern for supernatural and science fiction series on television, especially on UPN and the WB. A properly ravenous horde, too, might have made Broadcast Standards and Practices rather nervous; American television’s very first zombie-themed series, AMC’s gory hit *The Walking Dead*, only made it to cable in 2010. When cost and potential censorship are not a factor, Mutant Enemy turns to zombies almost immediately; Whedon wrote a zombie horde attack on the Slayer castle in the first arc of the *Buffy Season Eight* comic, *The Long Way Home*, and zombies have been a common fixture in *Buffy* video games as well.

But let me suggest there’s something more at work. First, despite his admiration for Romero, Whedon seems to exhibit a strong preference for the original Haitian *zombi*—a nightmarish transfiguration of slavery into a curse that continues even after death—over George Romero’s mindless, ravenous consumer of flesh. The American horror zombie is a corpse without a mind, wandering aimlessly in search of food and governed by pure instinct; the *zombi*, in contrast, is only sometimes a revived corpse, and is more commonly a traumatized but still living person whose will has been replaced with the will of the zombie master and whose body has been put to work. Whedon fairly frequently makes his characters pedants on this point; in “Some Assembly Required” (*Buffy* 2.2) Giles scolds Xander when he suggests that zombies might feed on the living, and Wesley does the same thing to Gunn in *Angel*’s “Provider,” dismissing flesh-eating as a myth (though Wesley’s zombies still “mangle, mutilate, and occasionally wear human flesh”). Anya says it again in *Buffy* Season 6’s “Bargaining, Part I” (6.1), when Xander speculates that their resurrection spell might have accidentally turned Buffy into a zombie who will attempt to eat their brains: “Zombies don’t eat brains, anyway, unless instructed to by their zombie masters. Lotta people get that wrong” (Alas, Romero!).

Remembering Whedon’s oft-stated political ambitions for the *Buffy* franchise, a second reason why zombies receive so little attention emerges.

“The first thing I ever thought of when I thought of *Buffy: The Movie*,” he explains on the DVD commentary track for the first episode of *Buffy*, “Welcome to the Hellmouth,” “was the little blonde girl who goes into a dark alley and gets killed in every horror movie. The idea of *Buffy* was to subvert that idea, that image, and create someone who was a hero where she had always been a victim” (Whedon, Commentary). As he says this he’s talking, interestingly enough, over the very first scene of the series, which features not Buffy but Darla, playing the part of a misleadingly naïve high school girl who lures an unsuspecting boy into a deserted classroom before unexpectedly revealing herself as a vampire and going for his throat. The scene subverts and reverses the horror movie cliché; the sketchy football player turns out to be the victim, while the blond ingénue turns out to be a killer.

That scene—like countless later scenes featuring such lovable and charismatic vampires as Angel, Spike, Drusilla, Dracula, The Master, Harmony, Mister Trick, and Holden—just wouldn’t work if a dead-eyed, lurching Darla were groaning incoherently, covered in pus and blood, her skin falling off. This is the difference between vampires and zombies: despite superficial similarities in appetite, bad skin, and ghastly undeath, vampires are characters, they are agents, they are (despite everything else) *people*. The popularity of the vampire as a figure for both transgressive heterosexual lust and queer sexuality—both on *Buffy* and in popular successors like *True Blood*—could never be located in the zombie, as the zombie is never a possible point of identification or romance but is always hopelessly, permanently, intractably Other. The Hollywood zombie popularized by Romero is not a person but a force of nature: it can’t be reasoned with, it certainly can’t seduce us, and it cannot ever be redeemed. It doesn’t want anything but to gnaw on your bones.

Of course, most vampires in the Buffyverse never get the sort of elaborate backstory of Angel, Spike, or Darla; most are actually so much like zombies that to include both might have seemed frankly redundant. The random monster-of-the-minute vampires who jump out snarling in dark alleyways are zombielike in their hunger, apparently slaves to their impulses and just as fundamentally disposable as any individual zombie in a horde. Giles lays out this proposition early in *Buffy* when he insists that “A vampire isn’t a person at all. It may have the movements, the memories, even the personality of the person it took over, but it’s still a demon at the core. There is no halfway” (“Angel” 1.7). But Whedon can’t seem to stick to this edict over the course of the series; where in the beginning all vampires must be killed, with Angel as the sole exception only because of the infamous Gypsy curse that re-ensouled him, by the end of the series Spike is able to choose to

seek out the return of his soul out a desire to be a better man, and even as vapid a vampire as Harmony is, by the end of *Angel*, able to voluntarily give up human blood altogether without much difficulty at all. Central to Whedon's vision of postmodern horror is a layering of complication and contradiction in his characters that presents itself, especially as the series goes on, as a kind of mania for addition: Buffy is a ditzy cheerleader who is also a Slayer; Angel is a vampire with a soul *and* a soul-loop-hole; Willow is a nerd who becomes a witch and becomes a junkie and then gets better; Spike is a nebbish poet who becomes a vampire and falls in love and gets chipped by the government but remains fundamentally evil until he eventually goes off to win back his soul, and that's not even counting the post-hypnotic suggestions implanted in his mind by the First Evil or the time he briefly becomes a ghost after sacrificing himself to save the world...

Vampires and the other creatures Joss favors in *Buffy* and *Angel* are about all addition; they're humans, plus a little something more. But zombies are typically about subtraction, about the expression of a fundamental, irrecoverable lack. As Marina Warner notes in her essay "Our Zombies, Our Selves," the difference between vampires and zombies originates in the problem of will: "Unlike phantoms, who have a soul but no body, zombies and vampires are all body—but unlike the vampire who has will and desire and an appetite for life (literally), a zombie is a body which has been hollowed out, emptied of selfhood" (*Phantasmagoria* 357). Warner's definition points at the common thematic thread linking the Romero-style consumer-zombie with the original Haitian producer-zombie: both are stories of "soul-theft" (357), the evacuation of individual will in favor of either mindless herd instinct or whims of the enslaving zombie master. This soul-theft manifests itself in myriad ways; most relevant to the Buffyverse zombie is the fact that unlike vampires (who as Warner notes sometimes even dictate their own autobiographies, as in Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*), the zombie cannot speak at all, replicating the tongue-mutilating punishment sometimes inflicted on slaves (358). (Perhaps this is still another reason Whedon shied away from vampires in *Buffy*; zombies offer little opportunity for his famous Buffyspeak.)

Whedon and the Mutant Enemy writing stable ruin nearly every one of their early attempts at zombie stories by refusing to let this fundamental lack remain unfilled. They can't let zombies just stay zombies. In the Marti Noxon-penned "Dead Man's Party," for instance, which condenses the typical zombie home invasion plot to about twenty minutes, the instinct driving the zombies is not the desire for food but to reacquire a mask Joyce has foolishly hung in the Summers' home. When one of the zombies is able

to acquire this object, the mask turns the character into a kind of zombie god—which among other things grants it that power zombies never have, the power of speech. “I live, you die,” the zombie god asserts, just before things devolve into the usual fistfight.

Similar problems abound in most of the other Buffyverse zombie episodes I’ve mentioned. None of them really scratches the zombie itch, in part because none of them are really about *zombies* at all; they’re just about dead people who come back to life. To tackle the zombie, Whedon has to move from horror to the realm of science fiction, a place where the contemporary zombie of *28 Days Later*, *I Am Legend*, and *The Walking Dead* is a little more at home. In distinction from the original Romero zombie—which is generally a universal condition, cause unknown, affecting every dead body on the planet whether they’ve been bit by a zombie or not—the contemporary zombie is generally a biological contagion, very commonly a disease that has escaped from a government laboratory. The new, science fictional zombie reflects Vivian Sobchack’s observation in *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* that “the horror film is primarily concerned with the individual in conflict with society or with some extension of himself, the science fiction film with society and its institutions in conflict with each other or with some alien other” (30); the old-style horror zombie reflected (as in Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*) a monstrous emptiness at the core of everyday American life, while the new zombie is something that’s been done to us, something foreign that’s invaded from outside. (Sobchack puts this in terms of the sort of chaos created by the monster; the horror monster generates “moral chaos,” while the science fictional monster generates “social chaos.”) This difference in scale is certainly reflected in Whedon’s shift from horror to science fiction; Tracy Little’s four-word summary of basically every *Buffy* plot—“high school is hell” (Little)—reminds us just how local that show remained over the course of its seven seasons, almost never leaving its tiny California suburb. *Firefly* and *Dollhouse*, in contrast, take place at the margins of worlds so vast we only ever see the tiniest sliver of what’s really going on.

If in horror zombies are scary, in science fiction they become utterly apocalyptic. And both *Firefly* and *Dollhouse* turn out somewhat unexpectedly to be centered on this aspect of the zombie; on these narratives the zombie becomes a limit for society, its final destination. In creating this bleak vision of a zombie future Joss, true to form, finds a way to transform the zombie lack into a new type of excess—performing a clever kind of subtraction by addition that allows him to make the zombie function as something more than just a hole where a character used to be.

ZOMBIES IN SPACE: *FIREFLY/SERENITY*

In *Firefly*—Whedon’s gone-much-too-soon “space Western” from 2002—Romero-style zombies appear as rampaging space maniacs called Reavers. In the television series we never actually *see* a Reaver; they appear only in the form of rumors, whispers, and threats, and occasionally in the form of a distant spaceship on the viewscreen. But we can be certain that they’re zombies. Described both as “men gone savage on the edge of space” and “men too long removed from civilization,” Reavers will “rape us to death, eat our flesh, and sew our skins into their clothing; and if we’re very very lucky they’ll do it in that order,” as Zoë memorably warns Simon in the show’s original pilot (“Serenity” 1). The mere mention of Reavers brings panic to everyone on board, causing Inara to bring out what appears to be a suicide kit and causing even resident tough-guy Jayne to abandon any hint of machismo. Human beings transformed into monsters, Reavers are now simply outside the family of the human altogether: “Reavers ain’t men. Or they forgot how to be. Now they’re just nothing. They got out to the edge of the galaxy, to that place of nothing, and that’s what they became” (“Bushwhacked” 1.3). They likewise exist beyond life and death. The crew’s first close-up vision of a Reaver vessel directly suggests a kind of undead status; they figure out it is a Reaver ship because it is operating suicidally without radioactive core containment.

Over the course of the television series neither the audience nor the crew ever actually sees a real Reaver; the closest we come is the survivor of the Reaver attack in “Bushwhacked,” who has been so traumatized by what he has witnessed that he begins to associate, transforming into a Reaver himself. This is the first way Whedon makes the zombie’s lack into an excess; as Mal explains, it becomes trauma:

“They made him watch. He probably tried to turn away—they wouldn’t let him. You call him a “survivor?” He’s not. A man comes up against that kind of will, only way to deal with it, I suspect... is to become it. He’s following the only course that’s left to him. First he’ll try to make himself look like one... cut on himself, desecrate his own flesh...then he’ll start acting like one” (“Bushwhacked” 1.3).

Sure enough, this is exactly what happens: he tattoos himself, splits *his own tongue* down the middle (giving himself the zombie’s muteness), and soon after begins to run violently amuck.

We only finally *see* Reavers in *Serenity* (2005), which begins when a bank heist the crew is engaged in is unexpectedly interrupted by a Reaver attack on the planet. The animalistic sound effects that accompany Reavers in the film—as well as the quick-cut flashes that represent River’s psychic flashes

of the violence in their minds—have been borrowed directly from zombie cinema, most directly the various “fast zombie” films that came in the wake of *28 Days Later*. The Reavers’ actions, as much as the cinematography, suggest the extent to which they have been modeled on zombies; when they capture a man during the crew’s escape, they begin to eat him, and when Mal takes pity on the man and shoots him through the skull, the Reavers immediately drop the corpse. River understands why: “They want us alive when they eat us.”

For much of the film the early Reaver attack seems to be an entirely gratuitous action sequence for a film that is otherwise about the attempts of the crew of *Serenity* to evade an uncannily serene government agent, known only as The Operative, dedicated to retrieving the fugitive River. But near the end of the film the central importance of the Reavers reemerges with newfound clarity; the “campfire stories” about men driven mad by the blackness of space turn out to have just been just fairy tales, obscuring the more disturbing truth that Reavers are actually the accidental byproduct of deliberate Alliance governmental experiments with behavior-modifying drugs intended to pacify the population. The Reavers aren’t killers at all; they’re victims too. Recalling the concept of “blowback” coined by the Central Intelligence Agency to denote euphemistically the inevitable unintended consequences that result from its efforts, the Alliance state has become a monster itself in a doomed effort to perfect the human. Like colonial powers and imperial militaries right here on the Earth-That-Was, the Alliance outlives its usefulness to become itself the greatest impediment to its self-proclaimed mission of civilizing the Outer Planets and bringing light to darkness. This is the peril that political theorist Achille Mbembe has called “the mutual ‘zombification’ of both the dominant and the apparently dominated” (104); in the structures of domination that arise in of the colonial system and survive into the postcolonial era, both parties are ultimately sapped of their vitality.

In her essay for the Jane-Espenson-edited anthology *Finding Serenity*, Mercedes Lackey argues that this is why the ‘verse, despite its futuristic trappings, feels so real to us:

“...the rules by which this dystopia operates are familiar. The Alliance uses a lot of the same psychological weapons on its own people that all the major governments of the world used back when I was growing up and are still using today. Demonization of the enemy, even the construction of enemies that don’t exist, create the fear of nebulous threats and the willingness to sacrifice freedoms for security” (Lackey 63-64).

Taking up where Romero’s politicization of the zombie left off, Whedon

again transforms the zombie's lack into an excess—not of any individual person but of the very notion of Homeland Security, its unacknowledged dark side and its secret truth. Reavers terrorize the Alliance at the edge of civilized space—but it was the Alliance that put them there.

But this critique of state power is still not Whedon's final turn of the screw. Where Whedon ultimately takes the zombie mythos is in the discovery that the only way to defeat zombies—whether ravenous Reavers or zombie governmental institutions that now exist only to perpetuate themselves and their own power—is not to be more alive than they are, but to be more dead. This strategy of judo-like reversal mimics the logic of the original Haitian *zombi* myth, where the flipside of the *zombi*'s enslavement is his capacity to defy the limits of both death and pain. Alongside the legend of the enslaved *zombi*, then, we have from controversial anthropologist Wade Davis a description of the related legend of the Bizango, a zombified outcast who functions not as a ghoul but as a protective spirit for the community (*The Serpent and the Rainbow*), as well as the importance David Cohen and C.L.R James (*The Black Jacobins*) have placed on voodoo rituals as a means of communication, military coordination, and morale-building during the 1791 Haitian revolution. In their recent “Zombie Manifesto” Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry point to this history to suggest that the zombie, in its position at the boundary between subject and object, rebel and slave, life and death, is still the best metaphor we have for what it means to resist power (86).

In accordance with this political prehistory of the zombie, the last hour of *Serenity* is one long, continuous reprisal of that ubiquitous scene in zombie cinema in which a live human must attempt to pass for a dead one in order to escape an otherwise hopeless situation—only our characters aren't exactly pretending. First Mal orders his crew to retrofit *Serenity* as a Reaver vessel, complete with a leaking containment core and corpses lashed to its exterior, so they might pass safely through Reaver space. By the time they arrive at the site of the final confrontation with the Alliance, most of the crew has by now accepted that this is a suicide mission and that they are all already dead: “Do you really think any of us are gonna get through this?” In the midst of all this hopelessness, with much of the crew seriously injured or already killed, River is finally able to access consciously her super soldier training and dives headlong into a battle with a group of Reavers that has also made landfall on the planet, singlehandedly killing them all. The shot that lingers on River after this battle is over makes it clear: animal-like, uncannily unfeeling, and completely covered in blood, River has essentially become a Reaver herself.

The same happens to Mal. In his fistfight with the Operative at Mr. Universe's mainframe, the Operative is winning as always—until the Operative punches Mal in the back and appears to disable him. (The Operative is using his own super soldier training here: the targeted punch, like the “touch of death” from a kung-fu film, is intended to temporarily paralyze one's opponent by overwhelming his muscles' ability to move.) The Operative takes a moment to gloat: “You should know there's no shame in this. You've done remarkable things. But you're fighting a war you've already lost.” He turns his back—allowing Mal to strike. He'd had that particular nerve cluster removed as a result of an injury he'd received during the war. Already metaphorically dead—his nerve cluster literally so—and with nothing left to lose, Mal is just enough of a zombie to finally win the fight.

ZOMBIES IN CYBERSPACE: *DOLLHOUSE*

In *Dollhouse* Whedon takes this twist on the zombie myth still further, focusing more directly on the original myth of an immortalized slave that stands behind Romero's ghouls to explore the unexpected agency to be found even in positions of extreme powerlessness. *Dollhouse* depicts a world in which (mostly female) human bodies might be fully stripped of their autonomy and be made *zombis*, subject entirely to the whims of the computer programmers who can now write and rewrite the human brain as well as any hard drive. “Dolls” are programmed with new personalities in order to fulfil various one-off jobs that almost always involve satisfying the sexual fantasies of the extremely rich and powerful. The Dolls themselves are nominally volunteers, having signed a contract (if, in some cases, under duress) in exchange for a large cash payout at the end of their tenure and (often) a promise that some aspect of their personal psychology will be reprogrammed to make them happier people afterwards—but real questions linger about the extent to which you decide to can sign away the very power to make decisions.

In an episode that features in-universe news reporting on “urban legends” about the Dollhouse, “Man on the Street” (1.6), one woman, dressed as a Wal-Mart employee, suggests she would be quite happy to work as a Doll even without this payment: “So being a Doll, you do whatever, and you don't gotta remember nothing, or study, or pay rent, and you just party with rich people all the time. Where's the dotted line?” This woman's eagerness reinforces the wisdom of another interviewee, an African-American woman

who angrily denounces the very idea that workers in the Dollhouse are “volunteers”: “There’s only one reason why a person would volunteer to be a slave: if they is one already. Volunteers. You must be out of your fucking mind.” When the newscaster interviews a college professor, perhaps a teacher of biology or cognitive science, he takes a much more aggressively nightmarish view of the possibility of the Dollhouse:

“Forget morality. Imagine it’s true. Imagine this technology being used. Now imagine it being used on you. Everything you believe, gone. Everyone you love, strangers. Maybe enemies. Every part of you that makes you more than a walking cluster of neurons dissolved at someone else’s whim. If that technology exists, it’ll be used. It’ll be abused. It’ll be global. And we will be over as a species. We will cease to matter. I don’t know. Maybe we should” (“Man on the Street”).

Consent, in this light, becomes merely a formality; the Dollhouse will get us all in the end. The immediate suggestion of the episode, however, is that this professor is importantly and chillingly wrong: the technology already exists in the real world in the form of the narcotizing spectacle of the entertainment industry, especially television itself. The next and final interviewee in “Man on the Street,” who appears immediately following a commercial break, drives this point home: “You think it’s not happening? You think they’re *not* controlling you? Don’t worry about it. Just sit back and wait for them to tell you what to buy.” The question is not, from this perspective, whether you might somehow be turned into a Doll, unknowingly operating according the whims of corporate interests that own both your labor power and your free time; the question is whether it’s happened already, without your even noticing, without anyone even bothering to complain.

As the series goes on Whedon pushes these questions of consent and control to one side to focus instead on a more traditional sci-fi complication. The imprinting technology turns out in the end to be fundamentally and fatally flawed; in its efforts to produce perfect slaves—to produce a zombie lack that can be filled with the sexual pliability the Dollhouse sells—the Dollhouse technology produces instead more excess in the form of a entirely new type of consciousness, one that (like the folkloric Haitian *zombi*) is capable of resisting and subverting the imprinting technology and repurposing it towards its own ends. Over time, the amnesiac Dolls begin to *remember*. And through this power of memory the Dolls slowly gain control over their unique situation; the characters portrayed by the show’s starring cast become increasingly autonomous actors, ultimately becoming protectors of both each other and the society of large. Their hybrid status—no longer

their original unitary selves, but each containing a new multiplicity—gives these characters an entirely new sort of human agency. This is especially true in the case of Eliza Dushku’s Echo and Alan Tudyk’s Alpha, both of whom slowly patch together new composite personalities that are the sum of all the imprints who have been uploaded into their minds. Alpha, whose original personality already contained strongly violent tendencies, is driven mad by multiple personality disorder, becoming a brilliant but murderous sociopath in his quest for revenge against the Dollhouse (in fairness he eventually gets better). Echo is more successfully able to organize all her Dolls inside a new, multitudinous personality and, driven by an urgent empathy, seeks to awaken and liberate the other Dolls and bring down the Dollhouse that enslaves them.

In much the same way as his original vision for *Buffy*, in *Dollhouse* Whedon creates an unexpected heroine out of a character who would traditionally be figured as a passive victim in need of rescuing. Despite the clichés of the genre and the hopelessness of her situation, Echo rescues herself. And in the process the very formlessness of the Doll state, its malleable plasticity, becomes her greatest strength; the living death of the *zombi*, in essence, gives her a twenty-first century superpower: the ability to reprogram herself however she likes.

In “Epitaph One,” the episode originally intended to serve as a possible series finale before the show was unexpectedly renewed, we see our first glimpse of the unexpected way this story ends. The episode skips ahead ten years to a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles; the ruined city is in flames. What has happened is never made precisely clear—but Los Angeles is now divided between “actuals” (unmodified humans), “dumbshows” (pacified wanderers in the base Doll state), and “butchers” (berserk killers suggestive of nothing so much as Romero’s ghouls or *Firefly*’s Reavers). Finally, our two species of zombies get to meet—and the results are not pretty. As the episode proceeds we discover that the Dollhouse technology has somehow gotten loose, broadcasting “signals” of varying kinds across all communications media that transform actuals into either dumbshows or butchers. Civilization has been destroyed in an ongoing orgy of universal zombification—TV finally and forever turning all our brains to mush.

In Season 2’s series-concluding follow-up, “Epitaph Two”—continuing the plot thread begun in “Epitaph One”—we discover that the 2019 versions of the series’ regular cast are still alive, hidden from the apocalypse in an agricultural enclave in the deserts of Arizona. In a sense they’re partially responsible for what has happened to the world; not only did Topher and Adelle selfishly abet the Rossum Corporation’s drive for better and better

technologies of control, but the rebelling Dolls' victories over Rossum ironically introduced the unstable power vacuum that made the global Dollpocalypse possible in the first place. Echo and the others are still fighting the remnants of Rossum as well as periodic hordes of butchers, but things are not going well; this is not a war which can be won.

Finally Topher announces that he has come up with a miraculous plan to “bring back the world”; bouncing blanket signals off the atmosphere, he believes he can simultaneously return *every* imprinted person to his/her original, actual state. It gives nothing away to tell you the plan is ultimately successful; this is, in the end, television, and happy endings are always the order of the day. At the end of “Epitaph Two” confused dumbshows and former butchers begin to wake from their fog into a completely transformed world. We see nothing of what they’re thinking, or of what sort of world they might actually construct from the ruins of ours. The focus instead is on our Doll heroes, most of whom have chosen to remain inside the Dollhouse for a year until the de-imprinting signal fades and it’s safe for them to reemerge. Completely unexpectedly—and, given that the show began with the Dollhouse as an obvious metaphor for human trafficking and the sex industry, somewhat disturbingly—most of our Doll heroes decide they don’t *want* to be restored to their original, actual selves. They’ve become something new, something powerful, something posthuman; in becoming Dolls, they’ve gained much more than they’ve lost, and they don’t want to go back.

Note: *Portions of this essay also appeared in Science Fiction Film and Television 4.2 (Fall 2011) from the University of Liverpool Press.*

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