

Buffy Goes to War: Military Themes and Images in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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[1]Throughout its existence *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was most commonly interpreted in frameworks of philosophy and mythology, of literary criticism and gender studies—all of them intellectual constructions. Yet *Buffy's* is at bottom an action format. Its inspiration was Joss Whedon's desire to tell a story "where a blonde girl walks into a dark room and kicks butt..."¹ Buffy as played by Sarah Michelle Gellar was a physical heroine, unintellectual and unreflective, consistently at her best when doing something. Even Willow, the group's "mind," was ultimately a problem-solver who acted before she thought.

[2]Most analyses developing that concept focus on the aspect of Buffy as "transgressive woman warrior," and contextualize it in an emerging "tough girl" category of popular culture.² That, however, is a perspective at once limited and limiting. In its developed form the action/adventure genre has three dominant expressions. The first is based on the questing hero. Its focus is a protagonist seeking adventure or redemption, usually voluntarily but occasionally under some form of gas or compulsion. The protagonist acts alone or at the most with one or two partners or sidekicks. The protagonist's skills, whether natural, preternatural, or supernatural, are exponentially superior to those of anyone else, and are decisive in advancing and resolving the story line. This version of the action/adventure genre also has a strong picaresque element, with the protagonist

¹ Kathleen Tracy, *The Girl's Got Bite: The Original Unauthorized Guide to Buffy's World*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles, 2003), p.2.

² Frances Early, "Staking Her Claim: Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Transgressive Woman Warrior," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 35 (Winter, 2001), 11-27.

constantly changing milieux and encountering different challenges.³ *Xena, Warrior Princess* stands as a near-perfect example of a category increasingly influential in popular culture.⁴

[3] Action/adventure incorporate a second model as well. This one might best be called the “order and law” structure. Here the story line is constructed around safeguarding a community from external and internal threats. The protector lives in, but is not fully part of the community. S/he has mundane responsibilities as well as heroic ones, and frequently develops a support group with the inner dynamics of a surrogate family. *Gunsmoke* remains a benchmark for evaluating this category of action/adventure. Carroll O’Connor’s series *In the Heat of the Night*” is an often-overlooked masterpiece, especially at balancing the claims of the internal family and the wider community.

[4] Even more than the hero/adventurer category, “order and law” lends itself to a series format. The model gives the protector legitimacy and moral authority, often by making him/her part of a larger system. It also weighs the balance of power decisively in the protector’s favor. Law breakers are depicted as ultimately parasitic, seeking ultimately to exploit the community. No matter how great the threat they pose in an individual episode or story arc, should those challenging order triumph the community will be changed for the worse, but not destroyed. The dangers of the “order and law” model. thus limited and localized, correspondingly tend to predictability The normal outcome of its

³ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structures for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (Studio City, CA, 1992), applies Joseph Campbell’s structures to the creation of fiction.

⁴ Sherrie Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, 1999)

episodes, arcs, and seasons is the reassertion and affirmation of the status quo, as Matt, Doc, and Kitty share a beer in the Long Branch.

[5]In contrast the third category of the action/adventure genre, the war story, offers ultimate challenges and generalized catastrophes. Instead of lawbreakers it features enemies, whose triumph means not the distortion but the destruction of a whole society. The war story involves constant mortal risks to its central figures. Where the “order and law” story tends towards a predictable structure, the war story is entropic, chaotic. Its balance of power is weighed in favor of the antagonist: the hosts of Mordor against the Fellowship of the Ring; the might of the German air defenses against the “Memphis Belle.” In the “order and law” story violence is secondary. In the war story it holds stage center. In the “order and law” story the adversaries often maintain relations; they may once have been on the same side. In the war story enemies are objectified; killing is impersonal. The “order and law” story is strongly relationship-driven, arguably tending towards a model of relationship dominance.⁵ The war story is just as strongly event-driven. Its relationships are evanescent, based on mission-oriented comradeship. The “order and law” story is perpetual, reflecting the maintaining of the community. The war story is finite, projected towards an end that by definition never restores things as they were, even though the community survives. Just ask Frodo.

[6]These differences make the war story an exception in series versions of the action/adventure genre. Even the successful ones, like *Black Sheep Squadron* and

⁵ For the centrality of relationships to *Buffy* specifically see Marguerite Krause, “The Meaning of *Buffy*.” In *Seven Seasons of Buffy*, ed. G. Yeffeth (Dallas, 2003), 97-108.

Combat tend to bog down in the depressing model of a war that cannot end without ending the series as well.⁶

[7]One of the reasons for *Buffy*'s success as an action/adventure series was the show's ability to combine elements of all three genre categories. If the "questing hero" theme set the basic tone, the typical episode or arc followed an "order and law" model, particularly in the first three seasons. *Buffy*'s demons and vampires are presented as parasites—literally in case of vampires: socially as well, as indicated by Spike's speech in Season 2, affirming the pleasures of dog races, Manchester United, and above all billions of "happy meals with legs." *Buffy*'s award as "class protector" epitomizes that aspect of the show, which provided the continuity and structure for the Scoobies to reemerge as the surrogate extended family particularly celebrated in Season 4. Even in Season 6, the most solipsistic, internally focused of the series, the three nerds were presented and dealt with as a threat to "order and law:" Jonathan and Andrew are behind bars when visited by "Darth Rosenberg."

[8]Seen from one perspective, "Buffy" in its first six years had correspondingly little use for the "war story" category. A series built around the concept of female empowerment was unlikely on the face of it to celebrate the most "masculine" of human activities. A female-coded story line interpreted guns as signifying "anxious masculinity,"⁷ despite the

⁶ *M.A.S.H.*, the longest-running series with a military theme, was on close analysis closer to the "order and law model:: the war was an offscreen challenge to the M.A.S.H family rather than a direct threat.

⁷ Stevie Simkin, "'You Hold Your Gun like a Sissy Girl': Firearms and Anxious Masculinity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," *Slayage*, 11-12 (April, 2004). A more pedestrian explanation for the absence of firearms is their impact on the nature of the action scenes and the body count. The story line's emphasis on slaying as a transgressive physical process may explain the series' consistent and comprehensive low-tech.ambience.

probable utility at least of a couple of twelve-gauge Mossbergs in “The Gift” or “Bargaining.” The soldier’s skills Xander acquires in “Halloween,” while useful in “Innocence,” are generally presented in comedic fashion—and even then it is Buffy who uses the rocket launcher. The series had no sympathy for, or empathy with, structured authority, especially if that authority wore uniform. Accepting wisdom passed down from on high, especially if it involved sacrificing a loved one for an alleged higher good, was arguably the most unmitigated evil in the Buffyverse (see the Dawn arc in Season 5). The Watcher’s Council was presented as a positive handicap to the slayers. The treatment of the Initiative in Season 4 lacked even the sophisticated satire applied to the high school experience in Seasons 1-3, and arguably Riley’s biggest problem as a character lay in his affirmation of his identity as a soldier. The students who fought the Mayor in “Graduation Day” did so as a community self-defense force, while Buffy herself consistently followed the heroic pattern of Errol Flynn or Bruce Willis: bouncing off bureaucracies, reacting to them with indifference or amusement..

[9]At the same time, however, the war story remained a strong element of the series story line. Its principal function was to highlight tension. The disproportion in the balance of power, one lone slayer against all the forces of the night, was emphasized at the beginning of every episode. Overall, endings play a central role on *Buffy* more appropriate to a war story than an “order and law” narrative.⁸ In particular the apocalypses that threatened the show’s community at the end of each season were presented in the war-story model of general, external catastrophes, even though at least

⁸ Cf. David Lavery, “Apocalyptic Apocalypses. The Narrative Eschatology of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” *Slayage*, 9 (August, 2003),..

two of them, the Mayor's ascension and Adam's plot, were local, susceptible of eventual neutralization by external force; and two more, those featuring Angelus/ Acatla in Season 2 and Dark Willow/Junkie Willow in Season 6, were story-line surprises.

[10]On a weekly level the series' scripts successfully resisted the temptation to blur identities between humans and creatures of the dark. The esoteric discussion on one website during Season 6, arguing that Buffy was misunderstanding her calling and had the ultimate destiny of a vampire redeemer, remained in the realm of fan speculation. Instead vamps were presented as "others" who when necessary could be subjected to "rigorous interrogation"—such as Buffy's shoving a cross in a vamp's mouth in Episode 1 of Season 2. Tara's "first kill" of a demon in Season 6, "Bargaining" is treated much as an adolescent's first deer in hunting country: a rite of passage, a subject for congratulation and joshing—in which Tara fully joins. No nonsense here about her "blood innocence." In general the series language leaned strongly military terms. Buffy "patrols" most nights, and faces a soldier's risks rather than a lawman's. In "Graduation" she describes herself as "ready for war." "Cruciamentum," where Giles tells the Council that they may be waging war, but Buffy is fighting it, is only one of the regular occasions when he reminds us that slayers are conscripts in a universal war thousands of years old.

[11]The concept of a "forever war" shapes the most telling use of war story material prior to Season 7: the development of Buffy's and Willow's characters during Seasons 5 and 6. A recent poster offered a useful insight by arguing that Joss is a liberal pacifist. He believes fighting is a bad thing, whose corrosive effect eventually destroys people unless

peace is made. But the series structure denies that possibility. The characters are therefore trapped in an eternal, violent struggle that can only break them morally and spiritually.⁹ This interpretation highlights the consequences of the presence in the series of a war story element that, by the end of Season 5, was sufficiently strong and sufficiently pervasive to establish the background of a “forever war.” The Scoobies in the final analysis can never expect to know even the relative normality of “order and law.” Small wonder that Buffy and Willow stagger under the burden—not of violence but of hopelessness.

[12]Buffy’s long-standing struggle with her destiny as a slayer was increasingly expressed in terms of Traumatic Stress Disorder: the soldier who has crossed one too many start lines, the officer who has made one decision too many. That development was enhanced by what Buffy is not. She is not a hero in the Joseph Campbell mode, who can challenge an entire cosmos as Xena does in her Season 5. Neither is she a case-hardened Matt Dillon who has seen too much to be surprised by anything. She is young—as young as the faces we saw under the helmets in Vietnam, or during the 2003 Iraq War.¹⁰ With the Master’s demise in Season 1, “Quippy Buffy” says “we saved the world; let’s party.” By the end of Season 5, her smile is replaced by a thousand-yard stare. Her increasingly erratic judgment, culminating in “Spiral’s” ill-considered flight into the desert, is

⁹ KdS, on All Things Possible on Buffy the Vampire and Angel the Series, 14/30/04. Mimi Marinucci, “Feminism and the Ethics of Violence: Why Buffy Kicks Ass,” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy. Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*, ed. J.D. South (Chicago and La Salle, 2003), pp. 61-75, argues for the ability to be violent as empowering when tempered by the awareness of that ability.

¹⁰ The Scoobies’ youth, somewhat obscured by the relatively advanced age of the actors who portrayed them, provides an underused Occam’s Razor for explaining their behavior. Its significance is enhanced by the series convention of following a real-time framework. They begin fighting on the Hellmouth in their mid-teens. By “Chosen” they are no older than the average of our own graduates—to very few of whom we would choose to trust with saving the world!

followed by catatonic withdrawal—a major symptom during World War I of what then was called shell-shock.¹¹ Her behavior in Season 6 can similarly be explained less as grief at the loss of “heaven” than reluctance to go back on the line—a reluctance so intense that she uses degrading sex as an anodyne and considers insanity, at least for one episode, as an acceptable alternative. Lieutenant Commander Queeg of the USS *Caine* and Captain Stanhope of R C Sheriff’s *Journey’s End* would, I believe, both understand Buffy’s torment.

[13]An even better example of the war story’s influence on character presentation is Willow. Whatever ME’s intentions, the redhead’s arc in Season 6 satisfied neither supporters of Power-Junkie Willow (if she is so about power and control, why didn’t she fix Buffy’s plumbing?) nor those (admittedly fewer) who came to terms with Drug-Addict Willow. As an alternate model of behavior, I invoke Fighter Pilot Willow. Willow’s approach to magic in Seasons 4/6 essentially resembles the stereotype of the undeveloped youth who during World War I or II joined an air force and discovered that he had an unusual talent for shooting down planes. This is a rare gift—about 5% or fewer of the pilots in any air force account for 90% of the kills—and the youngster frequently found himself indulged by superiors and praised by civilians, able to get away with anything as long as he scored victories. In time, with no strong emotional framework to fall back on, he came to define himself not merely *by* his skill but *as* his skill.¹²

¹¹ Buffy’s having to dig her way out of her grave merits particular consideration in the context of the British Army in World War I, which increasingly accepted burial alive by mine or shell explosion as *prima facie* evidence of shell-shock, and frequently transferred victims to training or administrative assignments. See generally Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldier of the First World War* (New York, 2002).

¹² For background see Mike Spick, *The Ace Factor* (New York, 1989); and Linda B. Robertson, *The Dream of Civilized Warfare. World War I Flying Aces and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis, 2003).

[14] Willow, like the pilot, had an extraordinary talent that she received no useful help in managing. She was warned in general against abusing magic, but whenever there was an emergency, “Willow, cast a spell!” was one of the first injunctions. There was no malice involved—just exigency, as is the case in war. At the risk of moving from scholar to ‘shipper, a strong case can be made that Willow’s use of magic as shown from the second half of season 5 until “All the Way” in Season 6 on the whole reflects the needs of the group. Her lone-hand confrontation with Glory is ill-conceived—but vengeance, especially sought for a loved one’s pain, is one of the half-dozen major themes of Western literature. Robert Graves, who knew much of war and its effects on warriors, titled his reworking of the *Iliad* *The Anger of Achilles*— why not have *The Wrath of Willow*?. In “Spiral” Willow’s magic saves the Scoobies from annihilation by the Knights of Byzantium. By restoring the phone that summons Ben, it probably saves Giles from death by shock and loss of blood (something he appears to have forgotten by “Flooded!”). With magic Willow brings Buffy out of her catatonia; restores Tara’s sanity, in the process weakening Glory enough to improve Buffy’s chances in their fight; and clears the way for Spike’s last-ditch rush to the top of the tower. As for the resurrection spell, neither the farcical patrol that opens “Bargaining” nor the Scoobies’ later confrontation with the demon bikers suggest things are going all that well without the Slayer. Buffy’s appearance, indeed, directly saves the gang from rape and presumably murder, at the hands of Razor and his crew.

[15]In each of these cases the crucial question involves the relationship between ends and means—which is the crucial question underlying war itself. Sartre, denying an objective answer, called it the “dirty hands problem.” Small wonder that Willow kept flying--or casting--until the combination of external stress and cognitive dissonance got to her and she burned out. As the pressure increased Willow clung to what made her special, whatever the prospective cost.¹³The swaths she cuts in “All the Way” and “Wrecked,” her crash in “Wrecked” and later episodes, are common features of the fighter-pilot category of war stories. Her “who would you choose” speech to Buffy in “Wrecked” replicated the words of many a fighter jock in the Realverse, who sooner or later faced the question “who was I when I couldn’t pull Gs (cast spells) any more” Willow’s behavior in Season 7 is the same as the character who sits in the officers’ mess, a half-empty whisky bottle in front of him, muttering to Errol Flynn or John Wayne. “I’m sorry to let you down, skipper, but I just can’t do it any more”

[16]Between Seasons 6 and 7, Joss promised on one hand a return to the beginning, and on the other a coming to terms with power.¹⁴ While the former is debatable, Season 7 clearly addressed power—but in contexts different from previous years. The First Evil’s universal apocalyptic intentions were from the beginning demonstrated, as opposed to being described: the case in earlier seasons. The killing of the potentials in different cities and the destruction of the Watchers’ Council building in London further established the

¹³ Willow’s issues of definition and actualization are addressed in Jess Battis, “‘She’s Not All Grown Yet’: Willow as Hybrid/Hero in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” *Slayage*, 5 (May, 2002)..

¹⁴ Elizabeth Rambo, “‘Lessons’ for Season Seven of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” *Slayage*, 11-12 (April, 2004).

threat as general. Indeed Sunnydale, of all unlikely locations, became a place of refuge and a rallying point for what remained of the slayer community to make a last stand. .

[17]In the lesser world of the Scoobies, Season 7's human/nonhuman relationships shifted to an extreme black and white. The ambivalence surrounding Spike's possible redemption in Season 5 and much of Season 6 gave way to renewed emphasis on the series' traditional equation of a soul with humanity and a conscience. Buffy's vamped classmate in "Conversations with Dead People" was the last example of an ambiguous supernatural world-view. The "uebervamps" by contrast were depersonalized targets in the tradition of combat science-fiction films like *Independence Day* and *Starship Troopers*—or even better, the imperial stormtroopers of the original Star Wars saga. The Bringers were also "others:" blind and mute, cut off from normal communication. Both uebevamps and Bringers are presented as implacable enemies whose sole purpose is killing, who cannot be reached for purposes of negotiation. The new dichotomy was best illustrated by Principal Woods's injunction as the team enters a devastated Sunnydale High for the climax of "Chosen:" "if they move, kill 'em all!"

[18]The turning point of Season 7's development as a war story, however, comes in "Showtime," with Buffy's epiphany: "we need an army." With that phrase Season 7 reaches a turning point. Jeanine Basinger, author of a standard work on Hollywood war movies, describes their standard elements as featuring a central character compelled to make one controversial decision after another. He commands a mixture of identifiable secondary characters and fillers--what *Star Trek* fans call "red shirts," after the

expendable members of the *Enterprise's* away teams. We see the unit form, go through training, and start on its mission, experiencing a mix of safety and danger including some relaxing moments. The obstacles and risks increase. Tension develops, involving the leader's decisions and focused on a rebel in the ranks. Eventually, however, the rebel is reconciled to the group and makes a significant contribution to the final fight. That fight is a small-scale Armageddon, with the unit badly outnumbered and outgunned. After a difficult struggle including the death of characters with whom the audience has come to identify, the protagonists achieve victory. A short epilogue may provide occasion for summing up the experience.¹⁵

[19]It would be difficult to find a better description of the main story arc of Season 7 after "Showtime." We see the gathering of the recruits, the "potentials," notably Kennedy, the brash and brassy newcomer eager for combat. We see their subjection to systematic collective training, and to a pattern of discipline previously foreign to the House of Scooby—though Kennedy as a drill instructor stands poor comparison with the hard-bitten sergeant-major of *Glory*, to say nothing of F. Lee Ermey's character in *Full Metal Jacket*! "General Buffy" (in functional rank actually more Captain Buffy) develops a command structure that imposes a strong authoritarian element on the consensus pattern of decision-making hitherto dominant in the series. It produced as well a significant detachment, almost an aloofness, that fitted poorly with the series's earlier years. To borrow from a song in "Once More With Feeling," Buffy "has the fire back," but it burns coldly." Her language is increasingly militarized, speaking of "regaining the

¹⁵ Jeanine Basinger, "Translating War: The Combat Film Genre and *Saving Private Ryan*," *Perspectives*, October 1998. Cf. Jeanine Basinger *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, paperback ed. (Middletown, Ct., 2003).

initiative” and using phrases like “OOD Loop.” The Buffy of Season 5 was unwilling to accept losses in her team; now she consistently refers to the inevitability of casualties. She defends her personnel policies on instrumental, pragmatic grounds. Spike is kept around because he is needed for his abilities as a fighter; Willow is kept aware of the uselessness of “ a wicca who wonta.”

[20]It does not matter that, in the words of one conference speaker, “inspirational Buffy sucks.” The use of pre-battle speeches to justify causes and legitimate sacrifices, especially those about to come, is a dominant realverse convention extending from the generals of the classical age to Dwight Eisenhower on D-Day, and beyond. It is also too useful an expository tool in the war genre story to be easily dispensed with. Nor does it matter that Buffy is uncomfortable with the authority she claims, and often fumbles in exercising it. Such discomfort is often a prerequisite for effective leadership in the war story genre. *Zulu*, generally recognized as among the best half-dozen “testosterone” war movies ever made, features a protagonist who “came here to build a bridge,” and who exercises command by the random chance of the respective dates of two officers’ commissions.

[21]As the final episode approaches, the borrowings from the war story category increasingly structure story lines. Sunnydale is destroyed as a community, the last vestiges of the “order and law” model disappearing with it, and instead becomes a devastated war zone, exploited as necessary for shelter and supplies. Buffy leads a disastrous raid, faces a mutiny, is deposed, then restored to leadership. The potentials

enjoy a stress-relieving bender at the Bronze. The night before the final battle characters seek distraction in lovemaking or aimless activity like *Dungeons and Dragons*. Some, like Anya, are even able to sleep, to the sarcastic wonder of their comrades.

[22]Overshadowing these details, however, is the looming presence of the “last stand.” The construction of a final coming together for a climactic fight against overwhelming odds, has been hard-wired into the West’s culture of war at least since Thermopylae; its roots arguably run even deeper.¹⁶ In the final episodes of Season 7 the last stand exercises a magnet effect, with Dawn defying Buffy by returning to fight and Xander involuntarily cutting short his unwilling abandonment of the field. Andrew switches sides and finds redemption in battle for his cowardice. Anya explains why she will stand with the mortals--a decision all the more heroic for being motivated neither by love nor by friendship.¹⁷ The final battle itself follows “last stand” convention precisely: a desperate, losing struggle with mounting casualties, featuring a one-on-one contest between antagonist and protagonist, whose tide turns at the last minute. In “Chosen,” the success of Willow’s empowering spell makes the difference. Spike’s charm may have more spectacular results, but at the end he tells Buffy the new slayers have won and he is just cleaning up. If it is a lie, then it is a “noble lie” in Plato’s sense, and we may let it so stand!

¹⁶ The controversial concept of a distinctive “Western way of war,” whose defining moment involves free people standing together to conquer or die in a decisive battle, is best presented in Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York, 2002); and John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, 1993). Those seeking to mainline it can refer to Aragorn’s speech to the Army of the West before the walls of Mordor in the film version of *The Return of the King*.

¹⁷ The last stand also restores the Scoobies’ outsider status, by some interpretations forfeited in the sries’ later years. Cf. Sarah Zettel, “When Did the Scoobies Become Insiders?” *Seven Seasons of Buffy*, 109-115.

[23]Were there alternatives? Given the First Evil's success as deceiver and sower of confusion, an "order and law" scenario that puts the core Scoobies through a season's worth of emotional blenders seems feasible, albeit repetitive—it had essentially been done in Season 6. It requires little imagination as well to develop a plot line built around a completed hero's quest, giving us baked Buffy instead of cookie-dough Buffy. That scenario, however, does not facilitate the sharing of power that is at the core of Season 7 as opposed to its loss, as in the Beowulf saga, or its passing down as a patriarchal legacy, usually through the hero's death. Buffy, moreover, already died twice; a third time might seem a bit much.

[24]A structural reason for following the war story model was that shared power in order to be convincing needs a direct impact on the story's events—suggested future implications are insufficient. The concept of shared power also requires a larger number than three or four—a reason for adding so many potentials to the cast despite fan complaint that these peripheral characters were a distraction. . The war story format, moreover, depends heavily on the passing and sharing of power, in the sense of *mana*, from a leader or an original group to the comrades who survive the final fight. Beginning as innocents, they now know themselves able to carry on, with or without their mentor. *Lord of the Rings*, *Dawn Patrol*, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Saving Private Ryan*—examples can be multiplied almost at will. Series fans seem on the whole pleased with Buffy's survival and "Chosen's" coda, which brings the original Scooby family together to discuss the future—and fan good will is important to a cult series.

[25]In a wider sense, the war story format facilitated Joss Whedon's final spin, his final jest. He openly prided himself on giving his audience what they needed rather than what they wanted. And a Season 7 described at taking us back to the beginning was in fact about change-- fundamental change. At its close the show's physical setting, Sunnydale, has been annihilated. Of the characters who have carried the series, Spike and Anya are dead. Dawn, the show's Pinocchia, has become a real, live girl. Xander is mutilated. Whether or not Willow is a literal goddess, she can hardly have emerged from a spell of such power and remain who she was. Even more fundamentally, the essential premise of the Buffyverse has been altered. Buffy, by her own choice and decision, is no longer the Chosen. The Buffyverse is changed utterly—though whether a beauty is born thereby must for now be left to fan imagination.

[26]As indicated earlier in the text, the war story is essentially about change. It provides ready-made ideas, images, and structures to tell a story of change. Small wonder, then, that it came to the fore in a season whose theme was ultimately not returning to beginnings, but using power to go forward, into an unknown future. This paper does not present Season 7 as a perfect war story.. A case can be made that its "war story" elements are accidental and coincidental. A case can be made that they unnecessarily complicate a season whose messages are already sufficiently complex. A case can be made that some of the season's problems were caused by ME's unfamiliarity with and uncongeniality towards the format. But the war story line of Season 7 is not imaginary. The significant number of military tropes, images, and settings employed particularly in the last dozen episodes combine to advance the story line ME developed as the series

conclusion. In Season 7, Buffy went to war—and did so for better reasons than are usually found in the realverse.