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Los Alamos is the Hellmouth

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[1] The concept of the Hellmouth is central to Buffy and the Buffyverse and a significant amendment from the film. Described as a "focal point of mystical energy," and as "boca del Infierno," the setting for Buffy is not just a place among others where human life is threatened by supernatural forces and occurrences, but the place itself is a magnet for such phenomena. And, the term, as we know, is meant literally: it is the mouth of hell which threatens to be thrown open, with concomitant human destruction, a number of times throughout the run of the show. The urgency of the ongoing struggle in Buffy and its tragic dimension of continual strife come from being located on such a site, where the yawning chasm of hell is just below them. Los Alamos, where the atomic bomb was invented and which has been a site of U.S. nuclear and national security research ever since, is likewise a place where contact with supernatural forces is made, and where destruction also threatens.

[2] In both of these small, Western U.S. towns, everyday life is set alongside the possibility of annihilation. This paper explores the productive, reflective dialogue about these two distinctive social spaces, considering some of the myriad strong parallels between Sunnydale and Los Alamos, and argues for some ways in which these parallels are useful in terms of scholarship and, beyond that, in terms of life and survival. In addition to general concerns about the Hellmouth, it takes up the similarities between the enterprise of the Initiative from Season 4 and the business of Los Alamos since 1943. Here I would like to argue that Buffy helps us to think about situations such as those we find in Los Alamos and that, as such, it is a philosophical text. Incidentally, Buffy writer Drew Goddard is a Los Alamos native, and I have my suspicions that his portrayals of Caleb and the First Evil in Season 7 were influenced by the culture of our hometown, but I'll save those explorations for a later paper until I've had more chance to talk to him about the matter.

Los Alamos is the Hellmouth

[3] There are a number of ways in which Sunnydale and Los Alamos are intimately related to one another. Both towns are small, out of the way, "safe" towns which harbor extreme danger. Not just any danger, but danger itself: the fate and the survival of the world as we know it. As sleepy towns off the beaten track, both places have a sense of being forgotten by the world at large. Both have downtowns which seem more reminiscent of the 1950s than the 1990s. People don't go to these places without a purpose—demons, occultists, scientists—so newcomers are always deemed a bit suspicious. Los Alamos is frequently held by its residents to be "idyllic" or "a great place to raise kids," notwithstanding the evident threat. This town self-identity doesn't seem so far off from Sunnydale: although everyone is well aware of the danger, nonetheless they stay and construct a picture of an ideal small town.

[4] As of a few years ago, Los Alamos and Sunnydale are similar in that they are both "one Starbucks towns," as Xander describes Sunnydale to newcomer Buffy in the very

first episode of the series ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001). Los Alamosans are now able to share that feeling of keeping up with the fashion of the outside world which Starbucks represents for the residents of Sunnydale. Peculiarly, there are also an equal number of churches in the two towns. We learn in the episode "What's my Line?" (2009-2010) from Season 2 that there are 43 churches in Sunnydale. Just so there are 43 churches and religious congregations in Los Alamos, and in both locales we's find everything from vestiges of Spanish-Catholic outposts to protestant churches, fundamentalist congregations, Jewish temples, and Wicca circles. Although I am not sure if we ever know how many people live in Sunnydale (fewer all the time, apparently), it wouldn't be too surprising if it were around Los Alamos' perennial size of about 18,000. In any case, 43 churches in each small town is an abnormally high concentration indeed. For both Los Alamos and Sunnydale, the number of churches is not accidental or merely an index of faith, but indicative of a far more menacing underlying reality. Even though the danger in both places is ever-present, it is sometimes acknowledged and discussed, sometimes ignored and denied. Nonetheless, the residents of both places *know* and *feel* the danger, and the presence of so many houses of worship seems tied into the effort to come to terms with such horrifying danger. In light of the apocalyptic and the deadly, people often cling to religion. Of course, the fact that Buffy and the Scoobies are so very agnostic or atheistic is instructive: even in light of the threats they face, they refuse the easy call to religion. In a sense, they have seen too much for standard organized religion to explain and encompass it.

[5] Residents of both Los Alamos and Sunnydale are killed and harmed by their respective demons. Just as certain streets of Sunnydale are particularly dangerous if vampires or other threats happen to take up residence nearby, some areas of Los Alamos seem also to be danger zones. Manhattan loop was the site of a cluster of brain tumors that suggests that something evil was lurking nearby. Workers in Los Alamos have been suddenly stricken mortally ill by lethal doses of radiation just as those from Sunnydale have been struck dead or ill by witchcraft or magic: Buffy is almost killed by a bloodstone vengeance spell in "Witch" (1003), and Xander is infected by a host of diseases after digging into the old Sunnydale Mission ruins in "Pangs" (4008). Among the serene forests of Los Alamos, children have lost limbs or been killed by explosives they happened upon, like the boy Adam encounters in "Goodbye Iowa" (4014).

[6] A similar analysis of living with destruction and possible doom is taken up by Mike Davis in *Ecology of Fear*, where he addresses the imagination of disaster in Los Angeles. Undoubtedly, many of his themes of Southern Californian calamity resonate with Joss Whedon's story of Sunnydale. So-cal combines both an apotheosis of the American dream and the tale of how, as Davis describes it in one of his chapters, "Eden lost its garden." Both Sunnydale and Los Angeles share in this promise and this dread. Davis describes how the residents of Los Angeles are subjected to the risks of earthquakes, fires, and intense floods. In addition to earthquakes, Sunnydale denizens risk death at the hands of demons, just as Los Alamosans are endangered by dangerous substances and dangerous work. Something that characterizes the imagination of all three places is ongoing risk of catastrophe. Not just that one could die at any moment because of being hit by a car or struck by lightning, but the notion that one could at any moment perish in an eruption of tremendous demonic forces.

[7] In fact, in one section of his book, Davis describes "election day demons" in the form of tornadoes which struck Southern California. A particularly destructive family of tornadoes ravaged Los Angeles on election day, November 7, 1966. These storms caused miles of carnage and they destroyed hundreds of homes. Davis describes how, "houses 'virtually exploded,' trailers were blown over, and scores of fires were ignited when flying debris collided with power lines" (Davis, 177). Storms like these slashed people with flying debris, picked up buses, shattered windows, and wrenched off roofs. This is not so far off from scenes of pandemonium we see enacted on Buffy, as when especially the Hellmouth threatens to open. These aspects of Buffy have been discussed in the essay by Boyd Tonkin on "Entropy as Demon: Buffy in Southern California," in Roz Kaveny's *Reading the*

Vampire Slayer. Tonkin considers the hellishness of Southern California as the crucial context for Buffy.

[8] Sunnydale and Los Alamos resemble each other as well in that human life *in toto*, and maybe life altogether on this planet, is in danger from the forces, dynamics and events afoot there. If the Hellmouth opens or if the Bomb goes off, humanity in general is doomed, and perhaps all life that we recognize is as well. Giles spells it out directly for Buffy, Willow, and Xander in "The Harvest" (1002) when he explains to them, "We're at the center of a mystical convergence here. We may, in fact, stand between the Earth and its total destruction." Of course, he goes on to conclude that "the Earth is doomed" after the three students amble off to class. We can recall here the lingering fear among some Manhattan Project scientists, including Nobel Laureate Enrico Fermi, that the first Trinity test of the atomic bomb on July 16, 1945 would ignite the atmosphere and kill all life on Earth. Certainly radioactive contamination or a nuclear winter would be a demonic world. In both Sunnydale and in Los Alamos one is faced with the possibility—the near presence—of the apocalypse (and not just once, but time and again).

[9] In both towns the crux of the danger and the fear is that the human comes into contact with the inhuman, whether it be the supernatural, the unearthly, or what have you. While one meaning of the supernatural is certainly that most commonly seen in Buffy: the realm of demons and magic, the term also has another sense which is natural processes and phenomena of a grand scale or force, such as stellar processes or universal events. Clearly this second kind of supernatural is the business of Los Alamos, and Los Alamos and Buffy share an interest in multiple universes, cosmology, time, space, and the like. In both settings the scale of the human being (both temporally and in terms of physical size and strength) is overwhelmed by supernatural forces.

[10] The inhumanity in Los Alamos and Sunnydale is not merely a form of nature on a different scale from the human; it is also a destructive Nature. The idea of a destructive Nature was the avowed fundamental philosophy of the Marquis de Sade. Sade called himself a student of nature and has been called a rationalist (something which will hold importance for us when we consider aspects of the Initiative in the next section). He recognized a principle of generation and creation in nature but subordinated it to another aspect of Nature which he exalted and which he thought to be primary: destructive Nature. He devoted himself to the service of this destructive Nature which finds ready parallel in Buffy.

[11] In Buffy the Earth is older than we know and was once inhabited exclusively by demons who eventually lost their purchase on this reality and were killed off or forced into other dimensions. Yet, the recapturing and the destruction of this reality remains a high priority for a number of the shows evil agents including the Master, Angelus (with Acathla), and Evil Willow (who wants to destroy the Earth and humanity to end all suffering—Nietzsche would call this an "ethic of genocide motivated by pity" and oppose it at all costs [96]).

[12] The Big Bang theory and astrophysics, which also date the world much older than the "popular mythology" that Giles gibes in "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001) are intimately concerned with the same forces that are unleashed in atomic bombs, the stellar processes of fission and fusion. Simone de Beauvoir points out in Faut-il brûler Sade, that, via his character Jêrome, Sade expressed his greatest dream as "To attack the sun, to snatch it out of the universe and use it to burn the world, those would be crimes!" (45/32). This is precisely the enterprise that was achieved through the Manhattan Project. Reactions usually at work only inside of stars themselves, fueling their intense burning, are made to take place on the surface of the Earth.

[13] In light of the inhuman, the supernatural, and the *destructive*—that which poses a danger to human existence—Buffy provides a set of reflections and a model of resoluteness for existing in such a space of danger and facing it. Is this not all-too-germane for us today, regardless of whether we live in Los Alamos, Sunnydale, Madrid,

New York, Baghdad, New Orleans, or any place on the globe? Aren't we all faced by the danger of the supernatural and the destructive? Nietzscheans are fond of discussing whether there is any art form in our age which could possibly fulfill the vital cultural functions of Nietzsche's beloved tragedy. I submit that Buffy is that art form. In the face of a destructive Nature, Buffy and the Scoobies persist in fighting for this world and they affirm living in it. Joss Whedon, as quoted on the cover of *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, has said that "I think of Buffy as life and I don't like to think about the end of that. Life doesn't stop until it does completely. That's the whole point of the show, that we're always changing and growing." Indeed, Toby Daspit, in his essay "Buffy Goes to College" in the *BtVS and Philosophy* collection, notes that for him Buffy is significant because it highlights "an approach to knowledge and education that may be essential for survival in the new millennium" (126). We certainly have a preponderance of violent and destructive demons loosed upon the world now, so perhaps Buffy isn't so far divorced from everyday life after all.

[14] Los Alamos is as the Hellmouth in the immediate contact with evil and the imminence of destruction. Here the fragile network of human society threatens to be overwhelmed by older and more elemental forces. If Buffy portrays the ongoing battle with evil and possible death then it also depicts the ongoing *living* in the space of the Hellmouth, it addresses the *vie quotidienne* and the mundane aspects of life on the Hellmouth, in proximity to danger. As such, as a work of art, Buffy undertakes the question of life in proximity to mortal danger as one of its central elements. Is this not both exemplary of the tragic worldview and an all-too-apropos reflection for many dimensions of contemporary existence, not to mention finite existence in general? Furthermore, the mortal danger in Buffy comes from supernatural and inhuman sources which are powerful and often destructive. So it is with Los Alamos as well, where both ultimate questions about weapons of mass destruction and everyday concerns about radioactivity and accident coincide. Otherworldly and inhuman materials and forces are present in both towns. The fabric of the universe itself is at issue in the Buffyverse and Los Alamos.

The Initiative

[15] In both Sunnydale of Season 4 and in Los Alamos from 1943 until today, the clandestine elements of the National Security State have set up massive projects to attempt scientifically to investigate and control supernatural forces. In both cases the enterprise is ambiguous, Janus-faced, presenting one side which emphasizes basic research knowledge and public good, and another, darker side which aims at developing the most dastardly and powerful weapons possible. Also in each case complex ethical questions are raised: does scientific practice somehow push toward destructive ends like this as part of its method, or is the science devoted to such ends corrupted by the contact with the "evil" forces involved?

[16] The Initiative and the Los Alamos National Laboratory—operated by the University of California such that the scientists and engineers are UC staff members—present in similar ways. Both at first glance seem to be made up of university researchers who are engaged in the usual academic pursuits. But, within the outside frame of disinterested research there is another secret frame of reference and research. Muntersbjorn notes that "The Initiative is an underground complex of laboratories and holding cells for vampires and other demons drawn to the Hellmouth under Sunnydale. This massive covert operation is funded by the U.S. government and run by scientists and soldiers who masquerade as professors and students" (92). A similar set-up and masquerade obtains in both the Initiative and in Los Alamos. The Laboratory in Los Alamos is also a distributed complex (43 square miles among forest and town), some of it underground, of laboratories and holding cells for plutonium, uranium, neptunium, and other demons. It is a massive covert operation funded by the U.S. government and run by scientists and soldiers who masquerade as professors and students. Not surprisingly, we

learn from the DVD commentary that the Initiative set was in fact the facilities of an operation known as Skunk Works in southern California which made stealth bombers. As the backdrop for the story of a covert operation building demon soldiers, the Buffy team used a site not dissimilar from Los Alamos where the work of National Security had taken place. Many of the facilities in Los Alamos (nuclear accelerators, plutonium metallurgy research labs, space science labs) do in fact bear a striking resemblance to the particular architecture of the Initiative.

[17] But in both cases the masquerade and the deeper purpose are in tension with one another. While the scientific interest may originate in disinterested pursuit of knowledge and be presented as socially beneficial, stepping onto the uncertain ground of investigating supernatural forces reveals the problematic aspects of this interest. As Toby Daspit describes it:

> This principle of mastery, of negation, of desire to *know*, manifests itself in Season Four especially through introduction of the Initiative, the secret U.S. military sponsored program supposedly aimed at removing the demon threat through research and rehabilitation. In *knowing* the "true" nature of demons, the Initiative's goal appears to be to "solve" the demon problem. (121)

The Initiative is distinctive not primarily because it is a military operation, but because it is a scientific project charged with *knowing* about demon threat. While clearly the Initiative hopes to control the demon threat and make use of it for strategic purposes, these objectives can only be approached through discovering the nature of the demon realm.

[18] Just so, Los Alamos is distinctive because it is an ongoing project to understand the *atomic* threat. It was the focal point of the Manhattan Project and it saw the emergence of atomic weapons—much like demons slipping from the Hellmouth. While the government hopes to control the atomic threat and use it for military purposes, this can only be done by studying the nature of the atomic realm and the possibilities to unleash tremendous power there. Los Alamos has remained in the grip of this deadly situation ever since. The Cold War saw the growth and boom of the town as more and more weapons were being researched and designed. Even after the Cold War Los Alamos has remained in the business of maintaining and experimenting on old weapons and building and designing new ones. Even more dangerous material is there now than during the height of the Cold War, and Los Alamos stands to inherit even more if it becomes the sole site for the construction, as opposed to merely the design, of American nuclear weapons. All of this, of course, leads to the storage and accumulation of radioactive material and waste which sit like demons in the vaults, crypts, and forests of Los Alamos. Often the materials and forces exceed their containment, as when a charged particle beam from a nuclear accelerator was found to be cascading onto a public roadway that was the route for the town's school buses, or when tritium was found in the town's water.

[19] Nietzsche elaborates Daspit's line of thought about science and its relationship to being and to knowledge. He is concerned with the relationship between science and life and art throughout his writing. In a section from *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* that bears heavily on our considerations here, Nietzsche is troubled by:

> A profound illusion that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakeable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is not only capable of knowing being but even of *correcting* it. This sublime metaphysical illusion accompanies science as an instinct and leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into *art—which is really the aim of this mechanism.* (96)

According to Nietzsche the quest for understanding the deepest abysses of nature will only bring us again and again to the awareness of our need for art and myth to be able to understand and to withstand being. On the one hand there is the issue of survival which

Daspit and Muntersbjorn have raised, and which is certainly relevant for existence in Los Alamos and the nuclear age. On the other hand there is an "epistemological" question. Some questions, some topics of inquiry, are too bracing and too large for us to be able to think directly, and for taking them into consideration we require art and myth. Nietzsche uses truth as an example of something that it is very difficult to think directly. Certainly intense destruction and the survival of the world are such problems as well. For opening them up to reflection artistic and mythological sources like Buffy are crucial. For how does one think the reality of a nuclear war itself?

[20] Nietzsche's reflections are not outright repudiations of science by any means, but considerations of ground that realize that even in science and alongside science there is a crucial ground for art which serves functions of knowledge and of protection. He was already wary of the kind of enterprise the Initiative represents when he was writing. He could have been describing the Initiative when he noted that:

> Science, spurred along by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, it suffers shipwreck. . . . When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy. (98)

Adam is logic at the point where it coils and bites its tail. It suffers shipwreck and it can no longer support a coherent meaning of life for him. Or, perhaps better stated, in trying to figure his consistent logical existence, Adam happens upon the premise of destructive Nature. He shares Professor Walsh's vision of constructing an army of hybrid soldiers, but his plan to generate the components and compel participation is even more ruthless than hers. In this respect we might think also about Dr. Strangelove in the film by Stanley Kubrick, who is obsessed by the power of nuclear weapons.

[21] The Manhattan Project is decisive historically both because it was sustained by the same impulse—the use of science and technology to solve all ills—and because in its aftermath this faith was troubled by serious doubts about whether science and reason might themselves give rise to or intensify social ills. The "logic" that Daspit describes, and that ostensibly undergirds the Initiative, is startlingly close to the deterrence "logic" which has guided research and strategy throughout the nuclear age—that there are evil actors out there who have, or might be developing, ghastly abilities in destruction, so it is imperative for *our own protection* that *we* develop and make use of such abilities. This turn of reason puts us in the uncomfortable position of participating in the same evil that we nonetheless at the same time ostensibly denounce. Clearly, notions of right and wrong and good and evil soon become deeply confused and confounded in this situation. Just as the United States hoped to "defend" against the Soviet Union, so the Initiative seeks to "defend" against the demon threat. The more troubling imperative behind both projects is to develop the implements of U.S. state power, for which the pretense of research and defense provides a ready cover-story.

[22] The history of Los Alamos contains examples of a reckless faith in scientific solutions for dastardly problems that have themselves been created by nuclear enterprise. In one of the most shocking, some Los Alamos scientists suggested burying tons of nuclear waste in a cavern where a hydrogen bomb would be exploded. Theoretically, the neutrons from the explosion would transmute the waste into a more stable and less radioactive form—perhaps in the same way that the chip would render a fierce demon docile. In both cases, demon and waste-bomb, the casual, person-on-the-street observer would instantly see a grave threat which seems to be overlooked by the scientists.

[23] Another obvious problem with the kind of policies pursued by the Initiative and Los Alamos is that they are predicated on the need for active deception of the populous. While this is hardly new in history, it is an evident problem in a would-be democratic society. We will have more occasion to consider this in a few paragraphs, when we

compare the roles of secrecy in the Scooby gang, the Watcher's Council, and the Initiative.

[24] Buffy, via the Initiative, allows us to consider one of the more vexing questions of the nuclear age, whether science itself contains destructive tendencies or whether it has taken on destructive practices as a result of the priorities which have guided it. Daspit describes a moment of existential doubt about science when Riley confronts Adam and tells him "She (Professor Walsh) made you *because* she was a scientist." For Daspit, "That is, the will to mastery intrinsic in modernist scientific inquiry is itself dangerous. Adam simply personifies the danger" (122). One could hardly help being struck by the same impression vis-à-vis Los Alamos, that the drive to understand natural and supernatural forces in the physical sciences is, itself, dangerous. Here we can think of Goethe's Faust and a host of such tales about nature, limits, and human knowledge.

[25] What might it be that characterizes and drives this danger? Beyond the inhumanity of the frame of reference of the forces at hand, issues of method as well may intensify the danger. Daspit describes a "new mathematical and mechanistic cosmology—a scientific one—that came to characterize modernity" which is exemplified especially by Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton (118). This cosmology, as exemplified by these thinkers, casts nature in terms of machines that can be broken down and understood in terms of their constituent parts—we are all familiar with Descartes' clock metaphor for the universe and his belabored discussions of animals (non-human) as no more than machines. It is precisely this reductive, machine model which proves dangerous, according to Daspit, since the drive to understand nature is soon caught up in the desire to imitate it then improve upon it:

> When Romantic poet William Wordsworth wrote in "The Tables Turned," "Our meddling intellect/Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;/We murder to dissect," he undoubtedly could not have predicted the excesses that human attempts to understand, and control, "nature" would bring.[. . .] Indeed, in creating her Frankenstein's monster from demon, human, and mechanical parts, (Maggie) Walsh exemplifies the modernist reductionism to which Wordsworth alludes. That is, by "dissecting" demons, then putting together pieces as if solving some jigsaw puzzle, she believes that science can not only understand reality better, but in fact supersede that reality. Walsh and the "powers that be" behind the Initiative intend Adam to be a prototype of a slew of super-soldiers. (122)

In fact, as Muntersbjorn notes, there is no informed consent inside the Initiative—for demons or for humans: Spike and other demons are subject to behavior modification, Riley and the other soldiers are subjected to performance enhancement technologies (technological and drug supplements) and to behavioral modification as well. This is very similar to the now emerging, and sadly ongoing story of uninformed experimentation that is the legacy of the nuclear age and the drive to national security. Eileen Welsome's book *The Plutonium Files* documents thousands of experiments, often carried out by Los Alamos Health Physicists, conducted on prisoners, mental patients, routine hospital visitors, and soldiers as part of our nation's nuclear "Initiative." Valerie Kuletz and Ward Churchill have documented how Native American Indian populations have oftentimes served as other human guinea pigs for such "research." The goal behind such research? Supposedly to "protect the U.S. and its citizens" through understanding and controlling the nuclear threat, but, like the Initiative, more fundamentally motivated by the drive to obtain military strategic superiority at all costs.

[26] The litany of crazy experiments that were thought up and performed in the Cold War includes many which seem no more far-fetched than the workings of the Initiative on Buffy. As just two of many examples, we can here think of the attempts to use atomic bombs to mine natural gas (the explosions did in fact release the gas from deep underground, but unfortunately it was far too radioactive to be used) and the proposals that hydrogen bomb explosions above the desert could render it into arable land. Buffy even comments explicitly on this legacy, as Muntersbjorn again points out so well:

> Buffy saves the world—a lot. But she doesn't do it alone. In "Primeval" the metaphorical reliance of Buffy on her friends becomes literal. Adam's power source is a radioactive uranium core. Willow suggests a "uranium extracting spell," a reach we can measure by considering the cost of this particular "spell" as part of the Manhattan Project. We have yet to experience the full blowback from that Initiative's monster. (100)

Buffy, as an art form, directly portrays and grapples with the demonic aspects of technology, and here Muntersbjorn points out that that aspect, in concert with the show's tragic ethics of perduring a risk-laden life, makes it a source of philosophical reflections about situations that are everyday conditions for us as we live in the world.

Secrecy

[27] The Initiative and Los Alamos share similar uses of secrecy to control and compartmentalize information about their work. Both, as noted before, employ cover stories, and within both there are multiple levels of secrecy and of access. There is no such thing as free-reign in either place. Both are spatially controlled by armed guards, physical security measures, and high-technology devices like retinal scanners and hand-print identification. Access to the different areas and levels depends upon rank and upon need-to-know, which is the general rule of compartmentalization in both sites. There is a general security perimeter at Los Alamos that requires a Q-Clearance to pass, yet even within that enclosure there are a number of areas and groups that are need-to-know and restricted. Just so, general access to the Initiative obviously requires high-level clearance and the passing of retinal and voice scan, yet within the secure area there are restricted locations where only certain persons are allowed. The most secret and dastardly, yet also most obvious, business of the Initiative is contained in 314 (that is, at least until it gets out—it exceeds the laboratory, we might say), where only a few scientists can enter. Monster manufacturing is hidden within the core of the Initiative the way that X-Division (bomb design) is hidden within the core of Los Alamos, behind handprint gates within the already tight security of the first cordon.

[28] Both the Scoobies and the Initiative have a general rule of secrecy about matters demonic. There is the memorable exchange with Willow when, after finding out about Buffy's role as the Slayer, Xander exclaims that "it's like we have this big secret" ("The Harvest," 1002). Yet the forms of the rules of secrecy are quite different between them. While there is also a kind of need-to-know with the Scoobies, exigency and chance have admitted a wide number of actors into the realm of knowledge about and participation in the demon world—hence Riley's incredulity at the number of people who know about Buffy's role as the Slayer, and the Initiative's inability to understand the role of good or morally ambiguous demons on Buffy's side or in Buffy's contact. For Riley and the commandos, it is a clear matter of classification where only those with clearances can legally know about demons, and where demons are always and inherently bad.

[29] A major contrast in the use of secrecy between the Initiative and the Scoobies is that the access to information in the Initiative is strictly controlled hierarchically and Dr. Walsh is the only one with certain key information. Except for some notable exceptions, such as Buffy's "test" at the hands of the Watcher's Council on her eighteenth birthday ("Helpless," 3012) and the mind-job that Spike initially pulls on the Scoobies in "The Yoko Factor" (4020), for Buffy and the Scoobies information is generally shared and this is often vital to their success. In their sharing of information, discussion, and cooperation, the Scoobies enact the kind of participatory democracy that was in the air at the time of Season 4. During that season antiglobalization protests took place in Seattle in November and in Washington DC in April, with their anarchist emphasis on autonomous decision-making and cooperative action. Recall that Riley tells his commanding officer that he is defecting from the Initiative because, "I'm an anarchist" ("New Moon Rising," 4015). It is noteworthy that the politics of the antiglobalization/global justice movement are critical of exactly the kind

of state-based, hierarchical, and military politics that motivates the Initiative, and Los Alamos.

[30] The Scoobies delegate tasks according to ability and according to a standard of voluntary participation in light of full knowledge about the situation. And, whereas the fighting and the research are strictly divided in the Initiative, Buffy will do research, and all of the Scoobies participate in battle at some turn or other. The bureaucracy and the security of the Initiative are predicated upon the notion of restricting information and assigning duties based on limited information—the soldiers and Riley never ask Dr. Walsh the kind of vital questions and details that Buffy does. Buffy's asking of those questions only serves to indicate the gulf between their respective positions on authority and knowledge, and as we know it causes Walsh to see Buffy as a threat to the Project and to turn on her.

[31] It bears noting that the Watcher's Council's philosophy on knowledge and secrecy is essentially parallel to that of the Initiative: a strictly hierarchical organization where knowledge is controlled by rank and where fighting is separated from research. The Council sees the Slayers as the soldiers of their ongoing battle against demons. Sometimes, key knowledges or aspects of information are withheld by the Watcher's Council, leaving the Scoobies in Sunnydale at a disadvantage and in danger. Likewise we might say that the residents of Los Alamos are also withheld critical information that bears on their situation, putting them in danger (tritium in the water, lots of plutonium nearby, the nuclear threat in general).

[32] The Watcher's Council and the Initiative demand loyalty based on laws and backed up by violence. For both of them the soldiers are obligated to follow orders and carry out missions devised by the researchers. The conflict between this outlook and that of the Scoobies causes Buffy to quit the Council. Needless to say, the cooperative techniques of the Sunnydale group around Buffy are anathema to both the Council and the Initiative. As we know, the Council harbors doubts about Giles and Sunnydale from the beginning, and the Initiative only makes a brief overture to Buffy and Giles before turning against them. Buffy and gang's reflective and cooperative approach stands as a counterpoint to these more authority-centered models.

[33] For the Scoobies loyalty is motivated by shared respect, and generally no one's participation is compelled or deceived. While of course there are considerations about authority and leadership in Sunnydale that persist throughout Buffy ("The Witch's" "And you'll be stopping me how?" [1003] to Season 7's protracted overture by Buffy that she must be the one in control and responsible for everyone), the Sunnydale crew has for the most part rejected the military and hierarchical form of action and decision-making for one that is more distributed and organic. Their secrets are not based on laws and rules, but pragmatism and ethics. Buffy doesn't initially tell her mom Joyce that she is the Slayer not out of obedience to the rules of the Council, but because the difficulty from the disclosure would be onerous for mother and daughter alike. And the Scoobies don't go to the police because the police *can't* know what it is they do, not because the police *shouldn't* know based on some regulations. The activities of the Scoobies are simply outside of the ken and consciousness of most people in their daily lives. As Giles remarks at the end of "The Harvest" (1002), "People have a tendency to rationalize what they can and forget what they can't." They function outside the notice of most people, yet their actions affect the survival and fate of humanity at large. And, although their outlooks are different, it is the same for scientists in Los Alamos, who also function largely outside of notice, but whose work affects the survival and fate of the planet at large.

Conclusion

[34] The startling resemblance between Sunnydale and Los Alamos makes Buffy's ethics and philosophy of life relevant to reflection on the nuclear age and its ongoing threat to

us. Even though some might see Buffy as an empty fantasy, we are living in the same kind of recurring danger that she and the Scoobies are. We live side by side with the inhuman as well and it gives to us a permanent risk and reminder of fatality. It is not just the prospect of individual death, but also that of mass death or destruction of the world—the Apocalypse. As such this seems the stuff of theology, but if so it is not otherworldly theology, but that which pertains to the life in this world. How to live in the face of this risk, how to avoid exhaustion and despair and how to maintain touch with joy? This joy is not some hollow emphasis on distraction or titillation, but the deep question, most forthrightly considered by Baruch Spinoza in his *Ethics*, of how to avoid succumbing to fear and despair in our lives. Joy for him is not merely enjoyment, but is deeply tied to our pursuit of knowledge, our constructive social relations, and our ongoing existence in the world.

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