

Buffering the Vampire Slayer  
Episode 0.15: James Marsters Interview

**Kristin:** Oh my gosh. Hello and welcome to the part of the podcast where Kristin talks for a very brief moment before you get to hear me and Jenny interview James fucking Marsters. Buckle up everyone. First of all, there may be some of you here with us today who are new to Buffering the Vampire Slayer. Perhaps you'll come for James and then stay for the rest of the show. If that's you, welcome to the hellmouth.

My name is Kristin Russo and I am one half of Buffering the Vampire Slayer. Myself and musician Jenny Owen Youngs are going episode by episode discussing the television series. We're just finishing season four right now and Jenny is writing an original song that recaps each episode as we go. The podcast is spoiler free for those just being introduced to the series. We know it's 20 years after the fact, but there's still new people joining the family and we do a lot of patriarchy smashing along our journey.

We're both avid fans of Buffy and kids of the 90s and we were absolutely delighted to get the chance to speak with James Marsters about all things Spike. For this week's special episode a quick but important note. Listeners, this interview is not spoiler free. It contains spoilers. If you have not seen the series, turn around, save it for when you're done. This interview is only for those of you who have seen the series. There are spoilers. I'll say it again. Spoiler spoiler spoilers. Do not listen to this if you are watching for the first time.

We met James while we were all at a Star Fury convention called The Vampire Ball in London this past December and he and Mark Divine, who works with him on a hilarious and wonderful project, I'm going to tell you about it in a second called Vidiots, were so excited about the work that we were doing over here in our buffering family. And that's how we wound up a few months later sitting down in Los Angeles to have this conversation.

Uh, if you don't already know about the fun that is Vidiots go check out Mark and James @vidiotsonline.com. Uh, it follows the adventures of James and Mark as they travel the globe with their trusty PS4. During the day they explore distant cities and foreign countries, meet with journalists and fans, and record television and movies. However, the jet setting is just an excuse to give them time at night for their favorite pursuit, playing video games. Often with their celebrity friends. It's filmed guerrilla style. It's a behind the scenes series. It's super fun and you should definitely check it out. vidiotsonline.com a couple of quick things about us before we get into what you're all here for. You can support our work and join the amazing

community that we have over here at buffering by going over to our Patreon page. It's [bufferingthevampireslayer.com](http://bufferingthevampireslayer.com) and you just click on Patreon.

You also get really cool shit on our Patreon page like advanced MP3s of the songs live Buffy watches with me and Jenny. Extra episodes like mailbags, exclusive merchandise and hem, hem. This is a new thing. Advanced tickets to our live shows. I don't want to spoil anything just yet, but there will be a few live events in season five. So Buffering the Vampire slayer.com just click on Patreon. While you're over on our website you can also, if you so desire, click on shop and deck yourself out in some patriarchy smashing Buffy themed attire.

We just added a brand new tee shirt design by Christine Tuna, which is a re-imagining of our logo with the stake and the fist and the graveyard and it is God damn gorgeous. You should get on over there and check it out. Last but certainly not least at the start of season four we launched a spinoff series called Angel on Top, hosted by the incredible Laura Zak and Brittany Ashley and this week's episode, honestly you guys, it's freaking perfect.

Special guest Ira Madison, who you might know from the podcast Keep It or from being one of my top five favorite people on the internet ever, has so much to say on this episode. He guests with Brittany and Laura. Including his opinion that Angel is a more queer show than Buffy. Controversial. You should get on over there. It's really, honestly, it's so much fun. I listened to it a couple of days ago and I'm obsessed. Okay. I know that some of you were like, "But Kristin, what about your spooky news segment that you always do in the intro?"

And to that I say there is no spooky news this week because I cannot wait any longer to get to James Marsters. We had the absolute most wonderful time chatting with him and we know you are going to love him from eyeballs to entrails. You already did, but you're going to love him from an even taller person's eyeballs to entrails. You know what I mean. Let's get into the interview.

[Intro music plays]

**Kristin:** Thank you James so much for taking time out of your day to be here and talk to us about your role.

**James:** I woke up thinking about you guys. You know, I, uh, I was looking forward to it. I met you guys in London and um, from what you were saying and describing about what you were doing on the podcast, I was so excited about what you were doing. And when you asked me to come be a part of it, I was really happy and I just, I woke up in a good mood 'cause I was coming to do this. And it's like a sunshiny day and it's not too hot and it's perfect.

**Kristin:** That's a very lovely thing to hear. We're equally as excited to get the chance to talk to you and had like sort of the inverse experience getting to meet you in London. We were like, Oh this is going to be an amazing interview. Like, we just knew from talking to you that, um, we had a good chemistry chatting and that we might get to have a really fun conversation that's a little bit different than some of the other interviews you've done—

**James:** Right on.

**Kristin:** —In the last however many years it's been since Buffy was on air.

**James:** I'm so old I don't remember... [laughter] [inaudible]

**Kristin:** I talk about coming out a lot in my work and I'm like, I came out 20 years ago. Ah, right? Like I was two [laughter]. Uh, anyhow, we thought the best place to start is kind of the beginning, right? Like who you were before this series began and how it came into your life. How, how did you audition for it?

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** Tell us the origin story.

**James:** It all started of back in Seattle. I was running a theater company and sleeping in the back, in Pioneer Square and I was, um, I was a poor theater producer/actor. So I would, I would work at the larger houses and then take all the [sarcasm] copious amounts of money that I was making and putting it into my little tiny theater company. Uh, and I think we, we produced a show for \$4,000, including \$2,500 rent. But we, we were known critically, really well, and I came to realize that you can, you can make something worthy without much money.

So anyway, I'm at the hospital and my first, uh, child is born. And they say that a man's brain rewires when he sees his first child and his is, uh, frontal cortex becomes more dominant. He becomes less impulsive. Planning ahead becomes easier. Um, I suspect just from seeing it in life, that probably a similar thing happens with mothers.

But this, the article that I read wasn't about that. So anyway, I experienced this, um, by seeing my son being wiped off the from the birthing blood. Uh, and he's in a warming table. I hear this voice that says, [deepens voice dramatically] "Go to Los Angeles. Prostitute yourself." You decided to be poor but this little human being did not make that decision and you now have to try at least try to make enough

money, uh, for stuff like health care. 'Cause this is back in the 90s. College. Diapers. You know. Uh, and I remember coming down to, uh, I was lucky to get an agent pretty quickly and I remember telling my agent like, "I am not here for statues. I don't care about awards. I don't, I'm not here to prove myself as an actor. I did that back in theater. I've done a hundred plays. I'm here for *money*. I need diaper money now. I am *poor*"

I was, well, I mean, I was a theater actor, so I was dirt poor from the time I got out of my mother's home 'til the time I met Joss Wheaton. I didn't go to a dentist for 20 years.

**Kristin:** Wow. That's a whole other story.

**James:** I was *abject*— Like one year, me and my ex, she was my wife at that point, now my ex, both of us together made \$7,000.

**Kristin:** In the year.

**James:** Yeah, it was, we, uh, we used to eat, uh, cream of wheat, breakfast, lunch and dinner until we got sick of it and we switched over to oatmeal and do that. And like, it was, it was... But I was having a great time! Uh, so anyway, I came and I told my agent, I'll do anything. Uh, I'm not— There's no low bar for me. Um, and, and, *but* they call me up one night, I think it was Tuesday, and they, they have an audition for you. And, uh, it's for this, uh, TV series of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. And I said, "Oh God, *no!*" I saw the movie, that was *so* not my thing.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** They said, "Well, you know, James, it's not the movie. The writer of it is a good writer and he's in control this time. He wasn't in the movie and everyone's on fire about it and it's Tuesday night, so why don't you check it out and call us after, you know, you watch it." And I watched the first 15 minutes and the commercial break came and I hopped on the phone. I was like, Jesus, get me on this show. This is *amazing*.

**Kristin:** Did you watch the first episode or did you?

**James:** No.

**Kristin:** You watched somewhere in where the series was at the time. I forget what it was.

**James:** I forget what it was. I forget what the, what, what the thing was because I mean, I don't even know if I finished watching it. I'd already made a— And at that point it's like study the sides because the audition is for tomorrow. You know. So it was, it was one of them. I think it might've been the episode where there's the dog boys, you know?

**Kristin:** Hyenas?

**Jenny:** Oh, the hyena possession episode?

**Kristin:** Wow. I think I—

**Jenny:** The Pack.

**James:** Yeah. And like, just the, in your face metaphor of that, of the behavior, uh, in high school of some guys.

**Kristin:** Mhmm.

**James:** Not all of us, but some guys. And I knew them. Uh, I knew of them. A friend of mine beat one up once.

**Kristin:** Nice.

**James:** Because he knew kung fu and that was all super, super sweet for the rest of this. But, um—

**Kristin:** This is where we would play the patriarchy jingle.

**James:** There we go. Yeah. And uh, I got really excited by uh, what they were willing to do and how much cover they had because of their wit. They could get the knife right in between the ribs 'cause you were laughing at the point where they get you.

**Jenny and Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** And I thought that was a great combination. So I went in and auditioned and did well I guess, uh, and got called back. And I remember they'd been looking for someone to play Spike for, Joss told me like months, and they couldn't find anyone. They were like three days away from, from filming it.

**Kristin:** Whoa!

**James:** When I went in for the final callback, and I didn't know any of this at the time, but I remember I'd just come off of a Macbeth that was really successful in Seattle, uh, where I played Macbeth. And I remember being in the corner doing soliloquies of Shakespeare, uh, just so proud of my [exaggerated posh accent] stage experience and, and so convinced that I was miles ahead of all the other actors in there.

I always used to say like, like, uh, there are actors and they're doing theater and there are people who want to be stars and they're in Hollywood. And this is not true. But that's what I came, I came down to Los Angeles with my nose in the air and very proud of my experience and I've come to realize, you know, theater is actually a drawback often in film because a lot of the tools that are necessary in theater, um, don't translate at all for film.

Like the camera will catch you acting. Like the whole point of camera acting is to, to not act, to not do anything that you are aware of, to not doing anything that you planned. To just be true and let people stare at you intimately. And, um, I didn't know any of that. And, and I, I imagine I just looked like a psychotic. Like all the other guys— I thought that I was freaking everyone out and I *was*, but they just thought a crazy had come in 'cause he's standing and like, staring at the wall doing Shakespeare. [laughter] Wow.

Uh, and so luckily Juliet Landau was from theater too. And so when I started spouting my theater stuff, uh, she responded really positively as you know, and we kind of rehearsed it before we went in, uh, to do it. And we just kind of clicked right away. She was the character that, that had a plan. They had a plan for her. She was going to go, she had a longer arc. Spike was originally just going to be Angel's first kill.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** So for those of you who haven't watched, which is very few, um, uh, Angel and Buffy finally sleep together, Angel goes evil and kills me and takes up with Drusilla. All so that Buffy can have her heart broken in the most spectacular way possible.

**Kristin:** [sighs] Joss.

**James:** So, so in Joss's universe, in order for Angel to be really powerfully horrible, he has to kill someone who is powerfully horrible.

**Kristin and Jenny:** Mhmm.

**James:** Um, and so they built me up, they built Spike up to be really cool and really powerful, uh, because they were just going to hack me off after five, five to 10 episodes. And so if, if Juliet had not responded well, like the whole reason we're sitting here right now is because Juliet liked me. I was Juliet's boy toy.

**Kristin:** [laughter] Thank you to Juliet for that. [inaudible]

**James:** [inaudible] —My whole life. Thank you Juliet.

**Jenny:** Whoa. That got you in the door. But then you were just like too charismatic and cool for them to kill off?

**Kristin:** Yeah. Like right. How did we get from five to 10 episodes?

**Jenny:** Like surely that had to be fan response and like your performance and how well everything was working.

**James:** I had a sense that it was working early on. Like I was having a blast. The primary thing when I first started looking at the sides was this thing of, a philosopher whose name escapes me, said that within all men are all men, and I'm sure if he would've been born now, he would've said within all people are all people. Uh, the idea of psychologically, being that if you have, if you're born into different circumstances, if you have different experiences, you have a different personality.

And whatever personality we think we have is just how we're kind of dealing with what we're having to deal with at any given time. And admitting that I could have a really fun time murdering innocent people. I kind of recognized right off, like, that's gonna be the trick. Um, because there's a saying in theater, which is, it's called a play for a reason. No one pays money to watch an actor work. So you have to, you to have fun.

Even if you're, even if you're doing something that's heartbreaking, even if you're doing something really serious, there's gotta be a level of fun to it or else it's, there's a lot lost. So I had just gotten off like I said, I did this Macbeth. And Macbeth is a person who doesn't necessarily enjoy killing people, but he's fine with it. It's his day job and he just, he doesn't have nightmares about it. That's just what he does.

And so when I did that, I, I, I looked into, um, soldiers' stories and how they felt about their day job. And I, and I found out that one of the things that soldiers don't talk to us about, us civilians, who've never been in a battle, um, is that when you kill someone, there is this rush of endorphins. And it springs from, and if there's any soldiers out there, my apologies, and I'm talking about something I've never

experienced, but what it said was that, you know, there's one, there's a big thing of like, I'm surviving right now.

It was either me or you and it's going to be me today and I'm glad I'm alive. There's a power thing. There's just a million year old voice, which is a, a primal, uh, kill or be killed thing. And this is one of the, the guilts that they carry back with them when they come home. And they, they, they can't reconcile that reaction. They, they normally don't expect it and they, they often judge themselves for having it when in fact it's kind of, it's very, very common.

And so I was kind of prepared to make that leap. And I think that that, you know, it was all so fast, but I was able to make that leap quickly. So I think it worked. I was ripping off Rutger Hauer from Blade Runner. [laughter] Uh, and I remember there was a scene, it was the second scene I shot. It was when, um, I tell a minion to go out of the club and, and, and make sure Buffy is in the alley or whatever. And I remember that's a, just a direct rip off of Rutger Hauer.

Police. Men. If you've ever seen... Um, and then I ripped off Malcolm McDowell's walk from Cat People, which was a really, I know no one's seen it. It's not a good movie. But Malcolm McDowell's an awesome actor. He's playing this kind of guy who's also a cat. It's scifi fantasy stuff, but he had a very feline walk—

**Kristin:** That's one of our questions.

**James:** —That I always thought was like, the coolest thing I'd ever seen in a long shot is watching Malcolm McDowell walk. And he never did it before or after. But I was like, if I ever get a chance, I'm just totally ripping that off. And I did that.

**Kristin:** So how, how does that, like, you see something you want to bring it to the role? How much? I guess really—

**James:** Oh, oh, I have one more thing.

**Kristin:** Yes. Please. That's why we're here! Not for me to talk. For you to talk.

**James:** This is I think why they didn't kill me off. Is because I did not do what Joss initially asked me to do.

**Kristin:** For the listeners, I cocked my head questioningly. They didn't see me, but...



**James:** You do exactly what the man says and you, and then you take all the credit, you know, because they're not filming him. And everyone thinks you thought of that when in fact you're just painting by numbers and they're his numbers.

Ah, thank God. Thank goodness. But, um, in one respect, he said, "You are a soulless vampire. You do not feel for anyone. You cannot love." And I said, "Right boss, cool." And he walked away. And I remember walking away and going F that. If I play it like that, they are going to kill me off quickly. You got to find the love in storytelling or in any art, you know, 'cause you write songs, you know, like, like it's gotta be, it could be love, corrupted or love stepped on or love, confused.

It doesn't have to be a flowery, wonderful, it's a beautiful day love. But it's, the love's gotta be there somewhere. And I thought, I'm not going to go for soulless. I'm going to go for love. And for me it was the love of Drusilla and just that weird dichotomy of how can it be a soulless killer but he, he really is actually quite, uh, tender with her. And I just mercilessly undercut the scripts, the initial scripts that were written, uh, before the, uh, I started playing the character. I remember there was one, there's, there's a scene where Dru is laying on a table and she's talking about the stars.

**Kristin:** Yes.

**James:** And, um, and, and I have a line, like, I forget the second half. It was like, "Also honey, that's the ceiling, not the stars." And on the page it's kind of snarky. It's kinda like, "And you're insane honey." And I was like, I got to take the bile out of that and I've just got to, I've just got to put my head on my hands and said, this is one of the reasons I love you. Because you can see the stars in the ceiling, Babe.

I'm just absolutely, I've just fallen in love with you once more. And just at every turn try, try to I guess play him as if he had a soul. And that was absolutely selfish on my part because I was poor and this was the best job I'd ever had in my life. And you know, I had a little baby at home, so, I mean, I could say I was doing it for a good purpose, but I was absolutely corrupting the theme.

Which was, how do you get, how do you get through your adolescence? How do you get from childhood to adulthood? How do you pass over this bridge where you're old enough to recognize that the world is messed up? How do you, how do you get over that without giving up on the world and on yourself.

And vampires and the demons of Buffy were really just the metaphors for the specific challenges that you, that you face. Um, and, and, and Joss had a really good reason for having the vampires be soulless and not, not people that you want

to have over for dinner. Uh, and I absolutely undercut that out of out of financial selfishness. So...

**Kristin:** But I'm sure you wouldn't have been permitted to undercut it if it wasn't working brilliantly and probably didn't go on to inform, because it's like our experience of Buffy now and, and so many of the villains in Buffy is they're not just evil. And then the people who are on the good side are not just good. It's complicated.

**James:** Yeah. He, I remember reading an article that Joss said that, that Buffy was teaching him that there are gray areas and not all villains are all bad or so, something like that. I remember thinking oh God, thank God I may have, a future on this lot. And, and uh, uh, so yeah, so, so the theme grew.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Uh, thank, thank goodness.

**Kristin:** So before we get into the physical embodiment, and you talked a little bit about like walking like a cat.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** There's so many physical aspects of Spike that are what make Spike Spike. Um, but I just want to hear a little bit, I know that we would all love to hear a little bit more, um, to tie up this, like, so you took Spike in a different direction, Spike, you know, was capable of love, Spike got extended throughout the series. How did that happen? Like, did you get to the end of season two and then you were told one more or did you know a larger, like it, was an episode at a time?

**James:** Yeah, I mean like season two ended and that was the end. That was the end of the job. That's the most I could have hoped for was to survive the season. Uh, I had saved my money and I was like, okay, it worked. You know? And, but, but the ego in me, the huge actor ego, was like, well try to do Buffy without me.

[laughter] Right? So then I tune in for season three. And I see Faith and I'm like, *Oh no*. They don't need me *at all*. Oh my God, I was lucky to be on this show. Okay. And, uh, and that was it, man. Uh, and um, and then they had me back for, you know, they had Dru and Spike back for the one episode in season three. There was no plan to bring them back any more times than that. It was, I don't know why they did it that one time, but they decided to revisit it. And that was it.

Uh, and *then* Angel spun off and they lost Cordelia. And Cordelia was the character that told Buffy, you know, "You're stupid and we're all about to die." They needed a new Cordelia. And, uh, Joss was wondering and having a conversation with Sarah about who could be that. And Sarah actually said, "What about Spike." And so they, they, they brought me in. And that's why you see in, in season four, I'm running in under a smoking blanket because they were, they were trying to figure out how do you get this guy in the room so he can tell Buffy that she's stupid. [laughter] But they're all, they're all hanging out in the daytime. So it was just, you know, I just remember just day after day, like you're in a blanket and they pumped this, it smells like frankincense, so it's nice, but it's smoke, man.

And then you're just like [coughing and gagging sounds] And go on the set, you know, and my eyes are streaming and everyone's complaining about the smoke and I'm thinking, this is not working. I don't know if I'm the new Cordelia. Uh, and at that point I thought, well, they're gonna, they're going to kill me off 'cause I can't fulfill the need that they have. And then Anya came in and I think she, she functioned much better as that character. In a very different way than Cordelia.

**Kristin:** Sure.

**James:** But she kind of took the, like Joss has this wonderful need to, to take, can I say piss?

**Kristin:** You can say anything.

**James:** The piss out of the lead. You know, like he's a subversive artist. And so, you know, just the fact that you're a lead on a show by Joss means that you're going to be undercut a lot—

**Jenny:** Uh huh.

**James:** Which I really respect. Because everyone's equal, you know? So yeah, a lot of the credit for Spike continuing actually is with Joss who was willing to, uh, investigate a character, uh, that was during directly opposed to his theme. And, and yeah, I think that it was working.

I was at the right time in my life. I had the right experience level. All of that stuff was working, but the fact— Like if it was me, I'd have killed, I'd have killed Spike off immediately. Like the moment, the moment that, that, that I started getting feedback from fans that they liked this character—

**Kristin:** Wow.

**James:** —And that they think he's sexy, uh, gone. Out. That, I would not, I wouldn't have let him catch fire. The moment I saw a spark like that, he'd be out.

**Kristin:** Talk more about that. Like you, during the role, during your portrayal of Spike, it was upsetting to you that people found the character as appealing as they did and as sexy as they did?

**James:** Yeah. Well, I mean, God. On the one hand there's the ego. [laughter]

**Kristin:** I mean.

**James:** Because I was like a total nerd in high school, right? And I, and I came down to Los Angeles playing nerds and I'm like, [high pitched voice] "I'm hot. Oh my God." Meanwhile I'm wearing more makeup than Buffy. So like there's a reason that I'm hot, you know? But I am hot. You know, like I'm looking at the show and it's, it's wonderful. So yeah, so on the one hand it's ego. On the other hand it's really being respectful of what Joss is trying to do.

And that was, that was what drew me to it in the beginning with the hyena episode and realizing that in some extent I'm undercutting that. And I, I remember going to conventions when the show was still on and just going, "Guys." to the audience. Like, "If you meet a Spike, don't date him. If he's mean to other people, he will be mean to you." And running into kind of a wall. And then not wanting to hear that.

**Kristin:** Right. I was going to say, are you listening everyone, because we all have this problem with Spike and I think, you know, Jenny and I have been having a lot of fun with exploring it this time around because you know, I'm asking myself and a lot of our listeners are asking ourselves like what, what does it say about us that like this character is the most appealing character to us and like investigating that and looking at that. So I think there's more to it also, right? Then just killing off the character because we didn't kill off, you didn't kill off the character. And now a lot of us are like, let's investigate why we have these feelings that we have, which is also powerful.

**James:** Yeah. Why do you think that is?

**Kristin:** I don't know. I think that for, especially in the nineties and before the nineties, I think like the bad boy was just a thing that for, especially for women, we were told like this is sexy. Right? You can't reach him. You can't— I'm speaking as a queer woman too, but it got in. Like you can't reach him. Yeah. Oh, Jenny's doing a thinking face. What do you got?

**Jenny:** No, please. I also was just going to say, um, as Spike gets expanded across the series, especially in season four when he's like starting to ha— He's been chipped, which like also, you know, he comes in as a substitute for Cordelia. Uh, is supplanted by Anya, but then kind of becomes like the post Angel Angel in terms of looking at a vampire that's not killing people. It's for different reasons.

Like there are different questions and morality that come in. But like, Spike also is significantly more emotionally intelligent than like anyone else in the room. In season four when he's around like socially, like Willow is destroyed and nobody knows it. Everyone's like, "Oh, she's getting over Oz great. She seems fine." And like, Spike is the only character who's like, "Are you all blind?"

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Mhmm.

**Jenny:** You know, and we see that over and over again. So I think there's something to be said— And also like the, the tenderness that we've seen him display for Drusilla. Like there's, there's more than just one thing going on.

**Kristin:** Of course. Right. And it's not, it's not just, I mean, I don't even think that the like trope of the bad boy is simple. It's like, you know, he always, or they always have like a soft side and like that's kind of what's appealing. That's what's intriguing is sort of like, well this is the exterior, but like, can I get to the interior and like really find out what makes this person tick, which I think is a huge part of what makes Spike's character so attractive and so attractive to so many, is that we get to see both, or not both, but all sides of the character, especially as the series goes on.

**James:** Yeah. Yeah. I, uh, I've asked myself that many times. What is it? Uh, and this is, I, this is just a hypothesis on my part, but I wonder, what do you guys think about. That the, the bad boy or the rebel character is someone who's not just following orders. He's not just going along with the template provided. He's showing some intelligence or some, um, I don't know if leadership is the right quality...

**Kristin:** But like, independence.

**James:** He's not a sheep, you know? Yeah. Independence, you know, and there's a strength to that potentially. It's just when he's ripping people apart, you know, that's—

**Kristin:** Yeah. We've—

**James:** —A red flag.

**Kristin:** We forgive Spike a lot. We forgive Spike a lot for a lot.

**James:** This is it! It's right in the, um, what was it, the poet, poetics, uh, that Sophocles wrote, that is, "Part of performance is the joy of watching someone have fun." And I was having a blast, you know? Yeah.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** It's so obscene.

**Kristin:** It is, but it's fascinating.

**James:** Potentially obscene if not for Joss Whedon, who, who really, he made the decision to, to include Spike in the series, and then he immediately started undercutting him and taking him down off that high ladder of cool. You know, 'til we get to the Hawaiian shirt. [laughter] Just constantly uh, getting him down to a level where he, where you could actually start to work with him. And of course me, like if you ask any actor what, you know, what do you think should be done with your character? There always, it's some version of make me look cool. [laughter] That's it, that's all we've got. And uh, and so I hated the Hawaiian shirt.

I thought, you're turning me into a clown. You know? It's not working. You're going to, you're going to turn me into a clown and flush me off. And, uh, that was just my fear. You know, when they, when we went back and, and, and met Spike before he became a vampire, I, I was surprised, like, I thought a character this bad ass has got to have been bad ass before he was a vampire. That's just how I thought it.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Because that's as far as my imagination takes me. Um, but Joss is way, way better than I am, you know? He, he went the opposite way. Joss described Spike as the ultimate poser when the script came out. Um, he was made into a vampire. Like we all pose, we all, uh, we try to look tough sometimes when we're scared. We try to look cool fairly constantly. And he can get away with it.

He can, he can put up this front because he can actually live up to it because he's a vampire. He can beat people in fights. He looks really cool. Um, and uh, but that's not the original him. It's the Spike persona is something that he put on like a coat. It's the, it's the, it's the Oz that Joss always wanted it to be Oz in high school, but he's in fact Xander and I'm sure that William always wanted to be like Spike and

always dreamt of it when no one was looking and became a vampire and decided to give it a whirl and people bought it. So he went with it.

**Kristin:** And I think you, you, you know, you mentioned Faith and I think that's such a similar thing that we see with Faith. The armor. We see, we see her armor, we see Spike's armor, and we see their vulnerability. And maybe the universality of that is that we are always trying to look cool and be cool. So when we can see the transparency of somebody who is like trying to be cool, it's effective, but we see like, Oh, they doubt themselves too. They're confused too. There's power there.

**James:** With any character to be successful, the audience has to say, "Oh, I've felt that way. I've tried to do that."

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** And that's why, that's why Joss started taking me down that, that ladder of cool. So that that could happen. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Go ahead, Jenny. Take us somewhere. Where do you want to go?

**Jenny:** Well, since you mentioned that vampires can beat people in fights, can we talk about fights a little bit?

**James:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** Uh, and stunts? And I'm like, I feel like we've read that you did a lot of your own stunt work. Actually, Kristin was just interviewing Jeff Pruitt.

**Kristin:** I just talked to Jeff Pruitt and Sophia.

**James:** Oh really?

**Kristin:** Yeah. I just, I was in Atlanta—

**James:** Awesome!

**Kristin:** —And I talked to them and I actually asked, I was like, "So how many stunts did James do?" And they said, you could do the, there's a name for it that I forgot where you can flip off your back onto your feet.

**James:** A kip. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Yeah. Uh, I, so I did learn that, but yeah—

**James:** I remember, when they let me do the most heinous gag. I mean for a non-stuntman. So Sophia. Yeah, right? She like, she was priceless. She made the show work on such a deep level that it was just like, you're doing fights with Sophia and it's like, "Don't hurt Sophia." I'm like, what's the point of a stunt person? Like, "You don't get it, you know, just don't mess up because we need her so bad." You know? And so there was an episode where Buffy leaps—

She's above Spike, she leaps down on him. Spike grabs her and turns her over and crashes her into a glass table and the glass table shatters. And the glass table is a, um, uh, is a metal frame. It's a heavy metal frame. And, um, and they wanted me to do the gag. And I was like, guys, I'm, I'm steering her down here. If I miss the mark and her head, gets on the metal frame, or if I don't put her right down where her pads are, we're, this is bad.

**Kristin:** You can say we're fucked.

**James:** Yeah, we're fucked. Plus I liked Sophia a lot, you know, like, she was awesome. So, um, I was really nervous, you know, and, and, but they, they try, by that time they trusted me to do it. And, uh, and I remember feeling very honored that they would trust me with a gag like that and also just scared shitless. Uh, and they, and I remember I did it once and it was, they got a good shot and they said, "Great, let's go again." I'm like, "*What?!*"

**Kristin:** I didn't hurt her the first time!

**James:** I'm an *actor*! Like, that was really good, but guys! You know, they did it. We did it twice. Just insane. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Were you like, coming into the series were you already like an athletic person or did you pick up a lot of that on set and for the role?

**James:** I, uh, well, you know, I, I'm trained in judo and, um, on stage you don't get a stunt man.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** So, and also, uh, you know, when you do a lot of, when you do regional theaters, you do a lot of classics cause you don't have to pay rights to dead guys. So there's a lot of, you know, like in Shakespeare there's always people flying around and swords and fights and stuff like that. And, um, and so it behooves one to, to be able to do that stuff. And I, and I, um, I got good at it.



I got good at a stage. In fact, I started to do a little small time choreography on stage. Like they'd hire me if you had a play that, that had a few stunts but not a lot, and you wanted to save money, you'd hire James to come in, you know, put the moves around so that the actors wouldn't hurt each other. You know, uh, when it wasn't— It wasn't a fight show, but there might be one scene where something happened, you'd have me in. But, uh, I remember, um, John Medlin was another one of our stunt coordinators for Buffy. And, uh, I, I was working on Runaways, uh, and this is last, season one. And there was a scene where my character Victor, um, chokes a teenager, uh, to death.

And I came to the set and I, and I just told the person, I said, "It's, it's, it's really important for me. I'm going to be checking with you. You're probably going to get annoyed 'cause I'm going to be checking with you constantly that, that you're okay, that you're comfortable. Because I have to, as an actor, I have to have fun. And I can't have fun if I think that you're uncomfortable, so that, so hopefully this is going to look really gnarly on, on screen, but hopefully we're going to have fun."

And, um, uh, and we go to do the first take and it looks horrible. It looks really, really good. [laughter] Really really horrifying on the screen. And they'd yell cut. And I'd check with the person, I'm not sure if I can remember her name. Um, and she says she's fine and we've got to kind of laugh and I hear John Medlin who's, who's the stunt coordinator for the season and he's like, "Oh my God. It's Marsters! Why was I worried? Oh, we're going to be fine. I'm going home now."

Uh, so, uh, so yeah, I brought, I brought some of that with me, but I used to say, uh, I still do, to stunt coordinators. If I got any stunts coming up, I always, it's hard to do this on a podcast. I put a frame around my face and I say "Black belt." And I put a frame around me from the waist up and I say "Green belt." And then I put a frame around my entire body and I say, "Bullshit!" [laughter] So... If you have me in close up I can look like Bruce Lee.

Like I'm acting and like, I got all the sneers down and I can shake off my sweat in a manly way or whatever. If you have me in what we call a cowboy, which is mid thigh up to head, then I can do meat and potatoes very proficiently. But if you want a full body shot of me doing triple flips and you know, banging off walls and stuff, get a professional, 'cause that's not, well I'm not that good. Yeah. But I, uh, I did too many of my own stunts and I, by the end, by the time Angel came down, I couldn't walk.

**Kristin:** Wow.

**Jenny:** Whoa.

**James:** My body, my back just seized up, like cut! Wrap! And the body just goes, "And now you're screwed." And, and I, for like three or four months, I would crawl from my bed to my apartment elevator down to the car, drive to Acutonics. You ever need a chiropractor, Acutonics.

**Kristin:** It's like acupuncture and...

**James:** Both, both. There's two guys. And, uh, and they, they share practice and the, and they, they practice together. And uh, I went two or three times a week for six or nine months and, uh, they got me back. Uh, and I'm fine now as, as I do the exercises that they, that they gave me.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** Uh, but yeah, I had a, a disc, one of the discs bulged out. It was horrible. And so now, you know, now I'm like, you know, "Stunt people!" I will [inaudible] [laughter] as you fly through the candy glass. But part of me is— It's so fun. The, the fight days were always my most fun.

Uh, 'cause you're moving, stunt people are, they're black belts in general, uh, are humble and happy and they don't have anything to prove and they're not, there's no, they don't have fear of a physical assault or anything. And people tend to act weird when they get fearful. And that's just erased for someone who's really, really good at taking people apart.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** And so in my experience, stunt crews have always been some of my favorite people to hang out with, so I always love doing stunts. I remember when I worked with John, uh, Behrman, uh, and we both come from theater and we conspired to not let the stunt crook, we did a big fight in a bar. And, uh, and we, it was like, how, how few shots can we get this done? They got in for two shots. And, uh, I had learned by that point that, um, you need to let the stunt crew in for at least one shot.

I remember Steve Tartalia, who was the other Spike, the stunt Spike. He came up to me one day and he goes, "You know, James, we're all so impressed you can do all these stunts. Good job, really. But just so you know, if I get on camera, my pay doubles. So if you could keep that in mind." And so we would, when the script came out, we would meet together and we would identify the shot where I could say, uh, I don't want to do that. Or, or, or failing that maybe, you know, your ankle could be sprained today or something like that.

**Kristin:** Incredible. Talk to us a little bit, if you will, about some of Spike's physicality and like the bleached hair, the black nails, the cigarette smoking, the accent. Uh, you can pick one or all of those. Maybe just tell us a little bit more. How did you come to the accent? Did they paint your nails every day? Like whatever stories come to mind about those, like—

**James:** The nails, um, I actually did like— They wanted to paint the nails black and I was like, that's great, but this is a character that sleeps in alleyways. This is a character who fights a lot, so it should be messed up. And so they would paint it on and then I would just go and find a bit of metal on the ground. There's a screw or some bit of metal everywhere on a set. And so, uh, and I would scrape them, but I would want them to look like shattered glass so that it would be a really long scrape and that the, the points would be really long.

**Kristin:** So you did this? It was like, James' nail salon onset. [laughter]

**James:** But you had to catch the nail before it really dried. It had to be semi dried and then it was really easy. Just took a couple of seconds to get, get that done.

**Kristin:** See, it's these little things that just will delight, right? And now every time we see your nails on screen, we're going to think about you.

**James:** Yeah, but it wasn't HD, so no one, you can't even tell.

**Kristin:** But we'll all appreciate it now.

**James:** It's the extra effort, man. I used, to the coat I used to, I used to ask them politely every night, please don't clean the coat, please leave it filthy. And every night they would clean it so that every morning I had to roll around in the dirt. Because the camera actually likes things to look dirty. They liked, the camera likes things stressed and it likes things scratched, it's just more interesting than a, than a perfectly clean thing. I think sometimes that's why television can look a little cheesy because things are perfected a little too much. Whereas in movies like hair looks askew sometimes and coats look used and it just kind of reads more real.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** And I, I would, I would wad the coat up, especially in the beginning when it was new, I would wad it up and ask transpo to just roll over it a few times. Just to try to get it, you know, like beat it up a little. This isn't, he didn't just buy the coat. It's been through something already.

**Kristin:** It's like what I used to do with my converse sneakers.

**James:** Yeah!

**Kristin:** Couldn't be shiny. Gotta scuff them up.

**James:** And I remember in the beginning, I used to offer my coat to Sarah, uh, on cold nights and it was the gentlemanly thing to do. 'Cause she's often, you know, dressed as Buffy you're not dressed for warm. But then, there was only one coat the entire time. So, so by the end, like season seven, that coat's been through hundreds of fights and James sweating like— I'm a sweater. And demon pus and blood—

**Jenny:** Sure, sure.

**James:** And all of this stuff that's flying around. And I would go, "Would you like my coat?" Sarah's like, [grossed out noise] "No, get that away from me. No way, no."

**Jenny:** So wait, there's like no double of the coat? There's just one code that they like kept around for the entire series. Wow.

**Kristin:** One coat in all the world.

**James:** One coat. And then Steve had a coat. So there was, there was a stunt coat and there was the Spike coat. Um...

**Kristin:** And you don't have that coat is what I've read. Right? Somebody has that coat. Did you get to keep anything from set?

**James:** They offered that I could— Well, costume said, "If you want to steal the coat, we won't tell on you." [laughter] But, uh, running a theater, one of my least favorite things was actors who stole costumes and I was, I was bare bones. And so that really was a problem for me. For 20th Century Fox it probably wouldn't have been, but I— Again, this is ego. No, I don't do that.

**Kristin:** Yeah. [laughter]

**James:** And then I heard that it got sold for \$250,000 three days later. And I was just like, why did you come down to LA? For college money, right? You could've gotten all the college money right there. One coat. But you didn't do it. So...

**Kristin:** If it sold for \$250,000 in 2002, whatever it was—

**James:** God, I could just buy Apple stock and I'd be like... Oh my God. Anyway.

**Kristin:** Anyway.

**James:** It wasn't meant to be. The one thing that I did keep was the t-shirt that I auditioned in and the one we used initially. Um, it, for me it was just the only black t-shirt that I had. It had, uh, the back of it says Bernard movers on it. [laughter] Um, and uh, uh, it was like all my other t-shirts. You know, like a t-shirt, like if you keep it around a really long time, all the cotton goes and it's just the, the whatever's left—

**Kristin:** Yes! [crosstalk]

**James:** And it's really kind of soft and cool and nice. And so that was my wardrobe 'cause I was that poor. Um, but they loved the way that shirt hung on me 'cause it was messed up and different, but they could not find another t-shirt in Los Angeles that messed up.

**Kristin:** So did that shirt get used in the show too?

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** Wow!

**James:** I think the funny thing is, is that it— They couldn't double it. Like usually you don't film anything that you don't have another one of, in case something happens you could switch out quickly and you don't lose time. Um, but they couldn't double it. They did nothing, nothing would double that shirt. So this, this, this old rag that I used to really just clean up spilled sauce on the kitchen floor with, suddenly became like the shroud of Turin. Oh, the t-shirt. You have the t-shirt on, be very careful at lunch. [laughter] Wow.

**Kristin:** Before we, before we round the bend into more conversation, uh, that's deeper and more nuanced. Since we're talking about things like your coat, your nails, your hair, I would love to, to Jenny's complete embarrassment, play you the Spike jingle.

**Jenny:** Wow.

**Kristin:** All of our listeners really want you to hear it. If that's okay with you, James.

**James:** Yeah!

**Jenny:** I would also be fine if you plug your ears. As long as we can say we technically played it in the same room, that would be fine.

**Kristin:** Okay. Here it goes, it's very— Twelve seconds long.

[SPIKE jingle plays]  
Spike! I love you  
Spike! So dreamy  
Spike! Your trench coat  
Spike! I love you  
Spike! Your black nails  
Spike! Peroxide

**James:** Yeah!

**Jenny:** Well, you know—

**James:** It kicks ass!

**Jenny:** You know when you're— You know. Because you make music as well, that when you're writing a song, sometimes you just have to sum up a very universal theme. And in our sub universe, uh, the, you know, one of the biggest themes is Spike is cool. So that is the Spike is cool jingle.

**James:** I just, I love your vocals, man.

**Jenny:** Oh, thank you. Thanks.

**James:** I'm sorry. You should never tell a singer they're [inaudible]

**Jenny:** Oh, that's fine.

**James:** Really. That's, that's a good punk sound.

**Jenny:** Oh, thank you. Well, we try to tailor the sound of the jingles too to the characters. So obviously that's—

**James:** Yeah! There's another one that if they were talking about putting, making a Spike, TV show, Not for a long time—

**Kristin:** You're like, "Calm down, everybody."

**James:** Joss goes, "Hmm. A male vampire spin off of Buffy, what should we call that? How about Angel?" [laughter] So it didn't really get off the ground... But, for a little while there was, there was this and I was like, "Joss, if we go, then this should be the theme song."

[Song about Spike plays]

**James:** And it goes on, but—

**Jenny:** Dude! How do you not just build a show around that?!

**Kristin:** That is worthy of a show!

**James:** And he was like, "Well, what about the thing about, she's got him by the balls. Like do we want to use that?" I'm like, "Yes! It's the whole character right there!"

**Kristin:** Right. Yeah. Wow. Okay.

**Jenny:** Wow.

**James:** But yours is just—

**Jenny:** A lot to think about.

**James:** I like that.

**Kristin:** I feel like we're in kind of a sexy space. We just heard a lot of punk music. So maybe now's a great time to talk about like Spike's sexuality and vampire sexuality.

**James:** Oh wow. Yeah.

**Kristin:** So let's start with Spike specifically and maybe just Spike's relationships, right? We see at least in the course of of Buffy the series; Spike with Dru, Spike with Harmony, Spike with Buffy. There's that Spike with Faith in Buffy's body thing that we just, that's the episode we're just on right now. But uh—

**James:** My first screen kiss was that.

**Kristin:** Wait, what?

**James:** Yeah, that was, yeah, I remember we had to have 14 takes, and Sarah was just like, "James, we get that you're an actor. We get that you're passionate and we all appreciate that very much. But this is, this is, this is a glamour shot and they've got to do it by the numbers. Glamour's, hard to make. So, so you just got to come in at the right speed. Don't press too much or our lips are going to go like that. Don't get into it or we're never going to get the shot. Think of it like a stunt. Stop acting."

And I kept trying to stop acting, but like Spike was in love with Buffy. He thought that finally he's getting a kiss from Buffy and it was so hard to turn that off. And finally after, you know, 10, 11, 12 takes, I finally got beaten down and it just doing it by the numbers and that's what's on the, she was trying to help me out.

**Kristin:** Well the translation, I'm sure, from all the theater background you had to screen.

**James:** It was just, it's just that glamour is not real. Something that's glamorous. Like the word glamour actually means illusion. So the more glamorous an image is, the more the more divorced it is from reality. And so it is and therefore is, is, is harder to capture on film.

It's harder to create an event that looks that way and there's nothing less sexy for me than doing a love scene or anything glamorous because there's just like, "No, no, just a little tiny more to your left as you go into kiss her. Nope. Nope. Back up. Now tilt your head. Too much. Go back. Okay, that's perfect. Now go in. And action." So it's a very technical process, just like stunts. I was just, I was like that actor who was trying to *act* in stunts and hurting someone. You know, I was hurting Sarah because she wanted to go home and rest. [laughter] Never got any sleep. They burned her to a crisp.

**Kristin:** Did, did you approach your— Spike's relationships to those three women different, like intentionally differently? Like were there things that informed your love for Dru in a way that— I mean, Harmony was a whole other thing, but—

**James:** Oh yeah. Oh no, they got very different, very different. Spike and Dru were kind of soulmates. Buffy was the unattainable and Harmony was the revenge. You know, 'cause she was a revenge on Buffy.

**Kristin:** What are the, Ariana Grande's, Thank U Next? There's the one that taught this, the one that taught that, you know that song? Anyway.

**Jenny:** Oh, you know, patience, other stuff, love.



**Kristin:** Right. I just, I'm wondering if Dru, Harmony and Buffy fit into Ariana Grande's song. I'm sure you thought that's where this interview was gonna go.

**James:** Dru is the one that, that, that saw him as he was and loved him anyway and or was willing to be with him anyway. She's, she knew who William was and what, how he transformed. And so she saw behind the mask and still dug him. So there was a, there's a connection there that if she hadn't known, I was going to say if she hadn't broken it up, but she didn't, did she, because she recognized I was already falling for Buffy.

Buffy was, um, was William within Spike calling out for something good, you know? And knowing that it could never be attained. That he would never really be able to get back to actually being good. Yeah. And then poor Harmony who had, who had to suffer the abuse meted out by a frustrated Spike who couldn't have Buffy. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Do you think with, with what you just said, do you think that like Spike ultimately belonged with Dru?

**James:** No, because he got a soul, you know? Once he decided to do that and, and Dru didn't, uh, no. I think that Buffy pulled him to be good again and saved him. Yeah.

**Jenny:** Are there other moments across the course of the series that come to mind when you think about William's sort of surfacing within the context of Spike?

**James:** Well, I guess constantly because I mean, um, the reason that I was so uncomfortable with, with, with showing William as being this nerd before he became a vampire is because that's me. You know, I was the overweight, fuzzy haired junior high school kid who couldn't get anyone to dance with him. And loved Star Trek above all things.

And who, who wanted to be an actor in Modesto, California, where if you weren't a football player, you were nothing. And if you were an actor, you were below slime, you know? And here I was fronting like, I was like this cool vampire like, like directors would always say, "You are *nothing* like your character." [laughter] Thank God! But like, you know, action. [in British accent] "Hello, Buffy. How you doing? I'm so cool. All right, yeah. I don't care about anyone."

Cut. [exaggerated nerdy voice] "Hey guys!" [laughter] So, so there was, the William in me is alive and well, and I never tried to really cover that up. Certainly not on set and hopefully not in interviews. Hopefully I don't try to cover that up in life, you know, but that he's there. Definitely. And so he was— In ways, thankfully that I wasn't planning, might not have been aware of, but all the vulnerability and

probably all the truth came from that. Yeah. And I just, I didn't, I feel like Joss was pulling my covers and telling everybody what the real deal was and that I wasn't as cool as everyone thought I was. Damn you! [laughter] Hey, I mean, it's like I'm going to make you *interesting* kid. It's better than being cool.

**Kristin:** Correct. He was correct.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** Um, before we jump completely out of the, I mean, we can, we can go back and forth as much as we please, but I do want to talk a little bit about vampire sexuality and desire.

**James:** Yes. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Because we see, I mean obviously like we talked about the relationships that Spike has onscreen, but there's also like sexual tension, I think, we think, I don't want to put words in your mouth, Jenny, but between Spike and Angel and between like Spike, Dru and Angel, and we often look at vampires as sort of inherently bisexual. Just wondering like, what your view on that is and at the time if that was part of the motivation.

**James:** Yeah. You know, I, um, I always thought that vampires are a metaphor for different kinds of hunger. Could be physical hunger, could be psychological hunger, sexual hunger, um, emptiness, uh, that is seeking to be filled and destructive and how it's trying to fill a hole that can't be filled.

And that in, in that way, it kind of mirrors how human beings can become destructive when they, when we feel a hole, when I feel a hole in myself that I'm not willing to really deal with. I could try to fill that hole by buying something or by trying to dominate another person or, uh, by trying to act cooler than I am and have people buy it or whatever, whatever that is. Or start a sexual relationship with someone to fill that hole.

And there's also the thing about the empires that it is a, you know, they're on the hunt. There's prey and predator kind of psychology going on at all times. And that's carried into sexuality as well.

**Kristin:** Mhmm.

**James:** And then there's, you know, there's also the thing about vampires have kind of thrown off our norms. They're not constrained by our social norms. They're too old for that, you know?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** And so, uh, the idea that, that— I remember we, you know, Angel and Spike, like I remember filming the scene with David and I think it was on Angel, where, where that's alluded to. And we took, do the cut and they're about to move on. And I'm like, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. David, does that mean we slept together?" And Dave was like, "I don't know man. Just move on." [laughter] [inaudible] I was just like, "Wow. Okay. Alright."

**Kristin:** But the show plays both those— The universe plays with that so much. I mean, anything that, that deals in vampires is sort of like, the feeding is often sexualized. It's like you're watching a feeding, but what are we really talking about here, you know?

**James:** Seduction. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Uh, so, yeah, and that's, uh, another great thing about Buffy. You know, like it, it could have probably, I dunno, Joss alluded to it. There were a few times about threesomes, I think with Dru and Angel and I that we talked about, and, and it could have actually gone further. Um, but we were freaking out people just, just on the fact that women can kick ass. People were freaking out about it.

**Kristin:** Totally. I mean it took, right, it took until season four to have Willow and Tara in a, in a real substantive way and that—

**James:** So awesome!

**Kristin:** So great.

**James:** I remember coming out of my trailer and a beautiful sunshiny day like, "We made it!" Like, 'cause I told you I'm a Star Trek fan and one of the, like if you ask any Star Trek fan about what you're proud about Star Trek, they always go to the first interracial kiss on network television. And I remember coming out of my trailer, "We got our kiss!" [laughter] "And it's teenagers!" Yeah.

**Kristin:** It's revolutionary. Truly!

**James:** Sadly revolutionary. Revolutionary nonetheless. But that is, that's my proud moment. I wasn't there when it happened. I didn't write it, but I was on the

show that day. I was just, Oh my God. And then, and then the musical took it to a beautiful metaphor as well.

**Kristin:** Yeah. So many of us felt so *seen* with that and, and you know, I mean I bring it up in the context of what we're talking about because, probably if the show was made today we would see Spike and Angel and Dru more directly, you know, being sexual with each other or what have you. But we were a different time and things were not as easily talked about.

**James:** Yeah, we were pushing as far as we could, I guess. Yeah.

**Jenny:** When we were chatting in London, you were telling us about your theater company, you described it as subversive and you were talking about some ideas that you were like, uh, trying to explore. Like, challenging social norms like, old people are boring, buying things can make you happy. Like that really like stuck in my head and like I was just thinking about that so much in relation to Buffy. Like we see in genre shows fantasy, scifi, uh, they're always like leading the charge because it is sort of like, it's the world we make. It's the world whoever is making this show is making, right?

So there's like more leeway and like things seem to be more fluid. So there, there's often like more representation. Like we were just talking about the first interracial kiss, the first, uh, two women kissing, uh, first trans characters. Um, you know, uh, and I, I just feel like there's like so much overlap, at least from my perception—

**James:** Big time.

**Jenny:** —Between the kind of theater you were making and what a show like Buffy was able to accomplish.

**James:** Yep. Because there's plausible deniability.

**Jenny:** [laughs] Yeah. I mean, we've watched Willow and Tara like “do spells” together for half a season before anything happens.

**James:** Right! [inaudible]

**Jenny:** They're very sweaty spells.

**James:** And at the end of the day we can just claim, oh, it's just a vampire show.

**Jenny:** Yeah, yeah.

**James:** Why are you so serious about it? Whereas if it was a, if it was a cop show and really looked more like real life, uh, there'd be so much more pushback.

**Jenny:** Mhmm.

**James:** Um, I dunno if we talked about it in London, but one of my favorite films is the original Star Wars, uh, which is the most successful bit of subversion that I think has ever been. Um, uh, George Lucas actually came up with the idea for Apocalypse Now to take the Conrad, uh, Heart of Darkness, a novel and put it in Vietnam. And the, Apocalypse Now is basically why America lost the war. Why the Vietcong were actually much tougher than we were. Why? Uh, our decadence had made us too soft for that kind of war. And we were not able to use our, uh, air power, our technological advantage. We were forced down into, into the jungle where they had the advantage because they were just tougher than we were.

They were the kind of, there's a scene at the end of Apocalypse Now, where a community has dinner and they're having cow tonight. And instead of going and buying a burger at Burger King or buying a slab of meat at the Safeway or whatever, um, they have a cow. They anoint the cow, they pray to the cow, they dance around the cow, and then they hack it with machetes and it's in the beginning. Beautiful and then horrific to the Western mind.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** But it's, it is actually much more respectful than, than what we do. And, um, so anyway, this is the mind that came up with this idea of Star Wars. In which the, the, it was a metaphor. The evil empire is America. And the, uh, the Vietcong are all the, ewoks and the people down in the jungle who are getting bombed. And the, and there's a superior, a technologically superior, uh, force that is using air power to try to quell native populations.

And, and how the idea of empire is unstable. And as soon as, uh, as a culture defines itself as an empire, they're doomed. You're on an inexorable path toward destruction when you, as soon as you do that. And, and he got that message out to the world in no uncertain terms. And it's not even, I think it's not even important that he, that people understand that specific, you know, who he was criticizing. Because the point was made so clearly, uh, and, and so I agree with you.

I think scifi and fantasy, we can say it and say it very directly and, and, and we can bypass everyone's prejudices and everyone's, uh, whatever they think their worldview might be. And when you say the truth, man, it's the truth. You know, when Gandhi said, "If you give people clear water and muddy water, they'll, they'll choose clear water every time." And so you give them clear water, even if they

disagree with it, but you dress it up with, you know, with fangs or spaceships and you can get that knife right up in the, you know, right into the inner organs before they even know you're in there. Uh, and for that reason, I absolutely love science fiction and fantasy, you know, artists, storytellers, the intelligentsia, we've been, a lot of forces try to, um, to silence us because I think that we push back effectively on authoritarian impulses. Uh, and, Hollywood is much maligned, but I think it's nothing new. You know, artists are the first people to get strung up a lot of times when authoritarians take power.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** Just thinking about it. So often—

**James:** Did I go off topic?

**Kristin:** No, not at all. It's just, and that's what happens with this show. Talking about this show or really, a lot of the shows that fall in the genres that you, you're talking about the show, but then all of a sudden you're like, "Oh, we're talking about what's happening *right now*." You know that like, and I wonder, I mean, you know, it's, it's, we're in Buffy now, Jenny and I, because we're going through it with our Buffering audience. Um, but you're working on, you know, The Runaways and, and things that are still in this, this genre of fantasy and, um, scifi. I don't know, Jenny always yells at me when I call the wrong genre by the wrong thing. This is not scifi. This is fantasy.

**James:** Yeah. Star Wars was fantasy. It wasn't actually scifi.

**Kristin:** No I know I'm outnumbered here. I definitely [inaudible] [laughter]. Um, but I wonder if in your work now and in the past on Buffy and Angel, uh, if it's politics, if, um, social consciousness has wormed its way into the roles that you play. Or if your portrayal of the roles has been to echo specifically things that are happening around us right now.

**James:** I never tried to inject that into a script. I mean, I always feel like the writer is the chef and the actor is the waiter and all that I'm being asked to do is to get the plate from the kitchen to the table without dropping it. You know? Maybe with a little style, but if I start twirling around, the plate goes everywhere, it doesn't really get delivered very well. So that being said, uh, because I do a lot of genre, I have been able, there've been a few times I've been been equally—

It's just really one time that I was as proud to be on a show that I was on the pride level that, that Buffy gave me. And that was on Torchwood, which was a spinoff of Doctor Who, and I went out, Russell T. Davis was the executive producer and he took me out to dinner before we started filming. He said, "This is my Buffy." And I didn't understand what he meant by that. I thought he was just a Buffy fan. And this is, I thought, you know, it's a fantasy show.

And, um, and then I was doing an interview with the BBC in the rain. We were in a, in a van in Wales. And, um, and they go [in British accent], "So what do you think about the homophobic backlash against Torchwood?" Put the microphone in my face and I go, "We have a backlash? [yells excitedly] We have a backlash! Yes! This is awesome! We're offending all the right people. Oh my God." Uh, and I started and John like screams over, "We know we have a backlash. Get back to the interview." [laughter]

But Torchwood, Torchwood has a, a main character who is, uh, unapologetically bisexual. And it's right up in your face and he's a hero. He is a full blown hero. And, you know, it seems one of the central themes of Buffy is that women can kick ass. Uh, I have the bruises to prove it. [laughter] If you're trained, uh, in, LG...

**Kristin:** That's alright. We can't even get it right. Yeah. LGBT.

**James:** LGBT people can be heroes. Um, and, uh, in my little way I was able to be part of that.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Yeah. Um, and then the other, the only other thing is that constant— I played a lot of villains and, uh, I think that the truth is that there are no villains in the world. There are people who are in pain for different reasons. And some of them unfortunately, are spreading that pain, uh, to others. Um, my favorite playwright is Shakespeare and he only wrote one villain.

Yeah. He wrote one. It was Iago, who took after, um, Othello and, um, they ask Iago, "Why did you, why did you destroy this man?" And Iago just goes, "There's no reason." There's a pause. "There's no real reason." Uh, and that's interesting to me. But, um, in the, in general, he wrote a lot of plays and it's, he's, he never writes villains.

He just writes people who are causing chaos because they're in pain. And I tried to make that point when I play a villain and not— You know, sometimes the director will give me direction that I think is toward just be villainous for no reason. And I'll be like, "Oh, that's great. Oh, I got an idea. I'll do it. I'll just go like, I'll just twirl

the mustache in the closeup. That'd help that, that'd go right to that, right?" Kind of laughing. Um, but, yeah, I try to, I try to always motivate the character and try to find him and try to not judge them and realize that I have in my life been villainous.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** Uh, and I've also been a hero, you know, and it's, uh, it depends on which day.

**Kristin:** I don't know if this, if this segue is going to work or not, but I'm going to try it anyway. Because I think— So, you know, we, we talked even a little bit before we started taping about, um, Spike's arc, um, and specifically about Seeing Red. It's a moment that when Jenny and I began the series, we were like, "Oh boy, what are we going to do when we get there?"

That's just two girls who like to watch the show. And so, you know, your experience in this, um, in the arc as a Spike, um, through that episode, I'm sure, I know from having read in other interviews that you've done, it was really complicated. And since we're talking about something that I think is portrayed so beautifully in Buffy, which is that, um, we are not the worst of us. Right? That we see are our most beloved characters, we see their darkest parts.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And this show allows those people to be more than just that one thing or just those dark things. Spike in Seeing Red— Yeah, that's the darkest moment.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And I would love to, I mean, maybe I'll just start in a general sense of like, I would love to, we would love to talk to you about that. Because for some people, we, I'm sure you hear way more than we hear it, but for some people it's like, well that's it. That's it for Spike.

**James:** Dealbreaker.

**Kristin:** That's no more Spike for me. Right? But that's not what the show does. Spike's not done. Spike has more. And I think that there's something really powerful about the fact that this happens, but we continue to see Spike.

**James:** Yeah.



**Kristin:** I guess I wonder what it tells us or what it can tell us about the darkness inside of people and what we do with that. What we, what we can do with that. Do we just take that person and their actions, put them in a room, close them and shut the door? That's it. No more talking to you. Or do we investigate it? Do we try to heal? Do we try to work? So that was not—

**James:** Yeah. If that was true, no one would ever— I'd be in the closet.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** You know, I've gone, I have done things that if I had to watch them back on film, I would not forgive myself for.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** You know, I would, I'm sure that I have rewritten those moments to let myself off the hook in some small way, so that I can go to sleep at night. That I've— I mean, I'm 57 years old. I've, I've lived long enough to make some huge mistakes.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Uh, I, but, but you know what? Like I'm one of those people who would be like, game over Spike. If I saw that. Like if I ever am watching a TV show and there's, there's a rape, I turn it off right away. I can't deal with it. If there's a movie and I know that's happening, I don't go see that film. Because of my childhood. Uh, that's just a hot button issue for me. And I know it's a personal thing for me, but I just, uh, I can't, I can't deal with it.

**Kristin:** Mhmm. And that's why it was so, I mean, you know, it was so personal, I think for so many people at the time too, right? Like, yeah.

**James:** Yeah. I, but I, I mean the, the larger point that, uh, I love how you put it, that, that we are not just our mistakes. Uh, uh, we're all a mixed bag. Every one of us I think. And I know I am. You know, the thing— That, that episode came from two places, I think. One was Joss' frustration that he was trying to remind the audience that Spike was bad. The whole season arc was that Buffy did the most heroic thing, died, went to heaven, got pulled back to earth, which is now comparatively hell for her.

She has, she's now a mom effectively, because, uh, um, Dawn is in the picture. She, you know, she's working in a frickin' burger joint with a chicken on her head, you know? Um, and, and she makes the mistake of reaching out to the spicy guy.

To reaching out to the bad boy so that she can feel alive in some way, uh, or excited by something. Uh, and how, how much of a mistake that is and how badly it can hurt you.

And they were progressing to this storyline, and the feedback they're getting is like, "Yes! We've been waiting for this. Oh, this is the best thing! Oh, we love this!" And Joss is just like, what do I have to do to make this point? How far do we have to go before people are going to open their eyes to what, the way that I want them to see this thing? So there was that.

Um, the other thing is, is that, um, and this is one of the secrets of the Buffy writing that I think is why it was so good. It's not a bunch of adults writing about their teenage years, telling teenagers how they should feel about things. It's a bunch of adults *remembering* their teenage years and saying, this sucked for me. Am I alone? Does it, does, did anyone else go through anything like this?

Because this is what hurt for me. And the way that that's they did that, is, it was, it's called the themeny, and it's the theme of the show along with the enemy combined. Um, and what Joss was doing was asking his writers to come up with their worst day, the day that they don't talk about or the day that hurts so bad that they can't talk about or the day that they hurt someone. Uh, and, and the guilt of that keeps them up at night and then slap fangs on top of that dark secret and tell the entire world about it. And so it was an act of sustained vulnerability and bravery from the writing crew.

Uh, they would come down to the set, first day of filming, shoulders, hunched, eyes down, afraid that someone was going to find out what they really had said. And, and, uh, I'm so thankful that they're as brave as they were. Um, uh, but in this case, the script came from, from one of the female writers. Uh, in college her boyfriend broke up with her and she went back to his place, uh, convinced that if they made love one more time, everything would be fixed.

And she really threw herself on him in a very physical way, and he had to physically push her off and get her out of the apartment. And that was a very painful day for her. Uh, and I think the thinking was that since Buffy is a superhero and she's, she's super strong and she can push Spike back to the point where he almost goes through the wall, that they could flip the sexes of that.

I remember when I saw the script, I was like, "Guys. Everyone who watches Buffy *is* Buffy. When I watch Buffy, I'm Buffy and I'm not a superhero." So like it's true for the character, but for the audience experiencing this in the vicarious experience that we're, that we make our bread and butter in—

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** That's going to land in a different way, guys. And I, I think it does.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Uh, but yeah, that was, uh, like I said, I don't like to watch scenes like that, I don't take characters that do that. I don't want to go through that. I don't want to put myself through it. But I was at that point contracted to do whatever they told me to do.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** Uh, I remember going into the set and telling the writer, "You don't understand what you put us through sometimes." And I remember, um, I remember like, I would do a take with Sarah and then I would go crouch in the corner of the set. And I remember thinking, if I just slam my head hard enough on the stage floor, I would just fly through it and escape. And it set me into a depression. Uh, and ultimately I got a really good therapist, which is one of the reasons that I'm happy today. You know, so it's like, I don't take anything back.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** I'm glad for all of it, but it had an effect on those of us who made the scene too.

**Kristin:** I'm sure. I mean to explore anything like that is traumatic for various reasons and you're talking about some of the silver lining of it, right? That you went to therapy and discovered things and that's really powerful. But it's, it's so difficult for so many people to look at for so many different reasons. And you know, flipping gender is complicated and that happens in the show a lot, but it's like ultimately at the end of the day, can we do that? Maybe not, maybe not yet anyway.

**James:** Yeah. Um, like I said, I think some of it was born of frustration of Joss not being able to find that thing that is going to make the point of, "Oh, she shouldn't be with Spike. I get it now."

**Kristin:** And isn't *that* something to be examined? That for that entire season we all were like, "Yes! This!" That like, you know, like there's so much to be examined in this episode, but also, and we talked a little bit about it at the beginning of the interview. It's just like, what is happening? Why do we need to get to that point to say, "I am now traumatized and this is someone who is bad. Or this person is doing something bad." Um, and I wonder, and that's part of the thing that Jenny and I

were talking about earlier too, is wondering your thoughts on if, if Buffy were being made right now—

**James:** And it is.

**Kristin:** We'll talk about it, we'll talk about the reboot in a second. If you can call it that. Um, but if *this* Buffy were being made now, do you think that that scene would happen? Or do you think that the conversation that we're having around survivors of sexual assault and things like this would have informed that choice differently?

**James:** I don't know, man. Joss is a fiery guy. He wanted people to hate Spike. He might've gone there even more because of this.

**Jenny:** Hmmm.

**James:** Yeah. I don't know. I'm not Joss, I don't know. He's not afraid of offending his audience. He's not afraid of hurting his audience. He's not, he's not after a painless experience. When you watch his stuff, he wants the full rollercoaster.

**Kristin:** Yeah:

**James:** Uh, and I don't know, like it, I just keep thinking like if I was Joss and I'm trying to write this, and the audience is just absolutely not, just refusing to see the truth that I see, which is, if a boyfriend's mean to other people, he's going to be mean to you. This is true.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** And he's putting his, he's making something that's seen by young people and he's feeling a responsibility to put out what he thinks is the truth about this. And, he keeps— And it just descends and Spike just keeps doing worse and worse things and nothing is working until finally, he just pulls out all the stops and does the absolute worst thing that anyone can think of.

**Kristin:** Mhmm.

**James:** Uh, on the flip side, you know, that, you know, Joss has got a big game plan and he's going to be redeeming Spike, so Spike's got to do something that he himself recoils at so completely that he, that it gets him to go seek, uh, help. Get a soul, you know, and certainly, uh, that's a very painful, uh, firewalk for him.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** And, uh, um...

**Kristin:** Do you want to ask here?

**Jenny:** No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

**James:** Oh no, now ask. I will—

**Jenny:** Well there's, there's, I feel like you just kind of like, answered, answered it by virtue of talking about, um, what you just said. Uh, which is there's the, there's a interpretive divide in the viewership of um, whether or not regaining his soul was intentional. Whether it was get the chip out or restore my soul.

**James:** Mhmm.

**Jenny:** Um, and I feel like I've encountered people who viewed it both ways.

**James:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** I, we're in season four now, so it'll be like a minute before we get back to season six. I always, and maybe I'm just like, uh, just a very so, such a gullible TV viewer that, uh, I just like the, they like, create the misdirect and then do the reveal but I'm like *the misdirect!* You know, like I always have viewed it as, Oh, uh, he didn't expect to regain his soul. He just thought he was going to get his chip out so he could be, uh, a proper vampire again. But I feel like what you just indicated is definitely intentional. Definitely soul restoration.

**James:** Yeah. And, you are, uh, you are also right because the way that Joss writes is he keeps his options open. He, he likes things to be a little confusing as well. Uh, but he did tell me that like, like when we were, when we were doing it, no one would tell me, 'cause it was, it was really important for me as an actor to know what is my objective, what am I trying to do? [laughter] That's my job. You know?

And they were like, "Well, we don't know yet. You know, like, so play it both ways. Sometimes one way, sometimes the other." And I'm like, "Oh my God, like guys, this is like a central thing of the, of the character, please." But, uh, by the time the arc was finishing up, he said, "No, we're, we're coming down on that. This is definitely something he chose." Okay. You're, you wind up the universe. So that's what it is. Okay. But yeah, he was trying to misdirect. Definitely. Yeah. But yeah.

**Kristin:** So let's maybe talk for just a hot second about the reboot since we're all here. And did you know that this was happening or did it, did it arrive on your social media dashboard—

**James:** Social media.

**Kristin:** —Just like everybody else? [laughter] Do you have thoughts and feelings? Opinions?

**James:** I think the world needs another slayer. I think there are some demons and some vampires around and I think that we can metaphorically go rip their throats out. I think that would be—

**Jenny:** Wouldn't that be nice?

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** That would be lovely.

**James:** Yeah. The time is, the time has never, it is. There's always a time. Uh, sadly, probably in my lifetime there will always be a need for a slayer. I hope someday that those demons are gone, but not yet. So, uh, well I think I'm hungering for it.

Uh, I think that, um, from what I know, and I probably know about as much as you guys know, that the writer of it is a really good writer for television. And you know, being a television writer is a specific kind of ability because you are writing in long form. It's not writing a movie, it's not writing a novel. Novels and movies are like a poem to a television writer. They really have to think in long arcs.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Um, um, so apparently she, you know, she cut her teeth and she decided to become a writer while watching Buffy. So it's deep in her DNA as a writer. Uh, and I think that's really good. Uh, there's, there's a passion there, uh, that I think, uh, hopefully I think it will be expressed. And I think the fact that Joss is onboard, Joss is going to be involved with it. Uh, it means that it's going to have the special sauce on the burger. You know? [laughter]

I'm glad that a woman is going to be helming at this time, 'cause that was always a little bit dodgy, uh, that we're writing about this. But the lead on it is a man. Who's trying his best and he was an ardent feminist. All good. You know, there's some things that he doesn't really, hasn't lived through.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Uh, and, and for a long time, Marti Noxon actually was a show runner on, uh, on Buffy. And, uh, so for a long time, uh, it had female stewardship, but I think that having a, uh, a woman be the creator of the new universe is going to have its own good thing. Um, and uh, obviously having it be a new slayer with a new name and a new group and not trying to retread what it's done been done before is probably the definitely the best way to go.

**Kristin:** Yeah. By the internet lost its mind at first. We were like, "What are you, what do you mean?"

**James:** And then they find out what the deal was like. Oh, well then that's cool. Okay. Yeah. So I have high hopes for it, you know?

**Kristin:** Yeah. Well, you know, um, yeah, I think we all, we all do. We're pretty excited.

**James:** Yeah. In my, in my little fantasy world, I would love to play the new watcher. But not Spike, but like, you know, like kick ass guy and sound a bit [doing British accent] like Tony Head of course. But not be polite at all.

**Jenny:** Hell yes!

**James:** Do it again.

**Kristin:** People did ask us to try to get you to do the accent.

**James:** [still in British accent] No, don't do it anymore. Stop talking about it. It's a long time ago. I can't do it anymore. I haven't practiced. [laughter]

**Kristin:** I think my actual personal favorite Spike accent is Spike doing an American accent. I love it so much. Uh...

**James:** [Doing exaggerated American accent] I'm really with Xander.

**Kristin:** Yes. The Xander's a great word to chew on in that Spike American accent. Um, alright. Is there anything, I have, I have one question from one of our listeners that I think will tie things up nicely when we get to the end. But is there anything that we haven't asked you that you want to talk about? I mean, we've talked about some broad things, some specific things. Are there any stories or, um, fun things you would like to share with us?

**James:** It's so weird, you know, because, um, memory's a funny thing. Uh, I don't remember a lot.

**Kristin:** Hmm.

**James:** Like, I'll watch a show sometimes. I'm like, I don't remember filming that at all. Or it'll be embarrassing. Someone will ask me about a specific scene and a specific line and I'll be like, "I don't know." And the perception is that, that I'm just one of those actors who don't care. But the truth is, is that we were, we were working 12 to 20 hours a day—

**Kristin:** Jesus.

**James:** —Five days a week, um, 80 or a hundred hours a week. Uh, and then every other weekend I would go drive 500 miles to visit my son.

**Kristin:** Wow.

**James:** Uh, and so we were all tired. Like we used to play a game of like, "Quick, what did we film this morning?" And everyone would be like, "I got nothing. We're doing *this* now."

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** I know my lines for this now. Um, and the short term memory just evaporates at that point when you're *that* tired. Like I went to levels of, of tired. There were people that would refuse to work on Buffy because they knew what the hours— All over L.A, everyone knew that Buffy just doesn't say no. Uh, so, God. Specific memories, it's like... But then you say something and something is triggered—

**Kristin:** Yes.

**James:** —And then, then I, then it comes back. But I would like to give a shout out to James Cotner, who directed more episodes than anyone for Buffy. Um, he, it was just, uh, it was said that if you can direct an episode of Buffy, you can direct anything. Because Buffy has all the different elements go, romance, horror, humor, stunts, makeup effects, special effects, it's got everything going on at all times. And he directed about a third to half of the shows, of... I mean, he's all over the place.

**Kristin:** I was going to say. We say his name a lot.



**James:** And he, he was such a steady hand and a kind man and a loving man and just, I can't say enough good about him because we were all very passionate about trying to make this show good. We were all pressured trying to live— Like all of us were feeling like, I'm going to, I'm going to be the bad one. I'm going to be the one that doesn't live up to this script.

I've got to try harder and, and, uh, and I can make you crazy. Um, and then you get really tired. And it was, uh, like I, I love all the people that I shot with on Buffy. I've seen the best and worst of them. Um, I feel like they're family and I've, and I know them in a full way and I love them in the full way. Um, but like any family, there was, there were times that we needed a steady hand and he was always that.

**Kristin:** Wow.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** We have spoken, we have gotten the chance to speak to several people who have worked on the show and you can feel it as a person who wasn't there. And speaking to literally from some of like, monster of the week actors who are on set to, to you, you know? That there was an energy, something there that many people say it was not on other sets that they were on. That, that it was very special.

**James:** It's the writing, you know? I remember I was doing my first Shakespeare, uh, my first professional Shakespeare was at the Goodman. We were doing the Tempest and I was freaked out, I was a young actor. And I remember asking this guy, Bob Scoggins, this wonderful character actor, uh, horrible teeth but great character. He played villains and I'm like, "Bob." We're over beers at the Goodman bar and I'm like, "Bob, what's the secret to doing professional Shakespeare?" And he just sits back and takes a sip of his beer and goes, "Kid. Stand up straight, say your lines clearly and get the hell off stage." [laughter]

And, and that was probably the best advice I've ever been given. A lot of the fact that I was able to make this transition from stage to film is Anthony Head. Uh, I remember when I first shot with him, uh, I remember thinking, 'cause I on stage, you're trained to, to express, well let's see. On stage, your head is a millimeter large to the audience and your eyes are invisible and your body is just like four millimeters big to like the audience.

So you're trying to express the workings of the inner mind to people who can't see your eyes. So it's all about getting that, like pushing it out and expressing it in the larger way. And on film, the, the camera is as close as a lover. Uh, even your best friend doesn't get that close to you. So you can see everything going on. And so it's

so important to stop acting. And I remember thinking with Tony, I hadn't learned any of this yet. And I, I remember thinking with Tony like, "Old man, would you wake up?" Like, I'm going to mop the floor with you. [laughter] Give you a cup of coffee, you're not doing anything. And then I saw, I saw our scene and he ruled me! He just mopped the floor with me, like, don't even care about Spike, you know, uh, just want to cut back to, to the, to someone who's not lying to me. Who's real.

And, and it was that moment that got through to me and got through my pride and I realized that I had to go back to school. I had to dump everything I thought I knew about acting and go back to the beginning and learn it all over again for this new medium. And I went back to the school of Tony Head.

**Kristin:** Sounds like a great school.

**James:** Oh yeah. I would go and sit on an apple box, uh, even when I wasn't in the scene, I would go and watch him film. Just mostly to see what he was *not* doing. And it was a big mystery in the beginning because he has, I'm not the camera, and I'm not looking through, you know, at the monitor. I'm just looking at him almost like I'm in a small stage and again, he's just kind of talking really soft. I can barely hear him and it looks boring. You know? [laughter] But that was, that was the first lesson. Like don't, don't act, just mumble a little bit.

**Kristin:** This interview has been so different than the other interviews we've done. 'Cause I'm like, oh, we have to just pick some directions. 'Cause we could sit and talk for a week with you about, you know what I mean? There's just so much. There's, there's so many different places to go, but I, um, I'm certainly not going to keep you here in this room for a week. [laughter] As much as we would all love that.

**James:** Well let's do it again then.

**Kristin:** Yes. Gladly. Happily. Um, we got got a, we got a bunch of of list—

**James:** We never talked about the patriarchy.

**Kristin:** Right.

**James:** So I've got to come back for that at some point.

**Kristin:** I'm like, so what do you feel about the patriarchy? Go?

**James:** [sarcasm] Oh, it's just wonderful. [inaudible]

**Jenny:** It's working out for you, right?

**Kristin:** See, that's the thing about the patriarchy. We talked about it so many times.

**Jenny:** It's been in everything.

**Kristin:** Yeah, we didn't call it out, but we got it.

**James:** It's a bad thing.

**Kristin:** We've, I mean we've, and you did you, I mean you spoke about the fact that like this was a show with a feminist character at its center. It was being written, you know, by— Joss is a man, but there were some female show runners. There's so many layers and talking about the sexuality, talking about, it's all—

**James:** It's so important to talk about too, because like, I, uh, I remembered there was a speech that Martin Luther King gave, and I forget which one it was, but he was talking about the, the cost of, uh, racism to white people and how it stunted the white people as well. And I think that sexism is, it's the same deal. Uh, it cuts both ways. Uh, it stunts everyone. And I often feel like my, my kids don't want to hear it when I say this. So I'm kinda, I don't, I don't wanna I guess I'll offend, maybe I'll offend people, but I feel like the way to progress is to make the point that this is hurting everyone. That we, we *all* need to climb out of these restrictive roles that we've been born into.

**Kristin:** Yes.

**James:** Um, so that we can all be incentivized to try a new way. My daughter was saying, you know, "Men just need to wake up. They need to, they need to give, they need to share the power." And I'm like, "Well, they need to be convinced that they're being hurt. They need— it's gotta be something in it for them as well." Or just, you know, they're not going to just— Take it. Like they're not going to give it to you. Take it.

**Kristin:** Yeah. Well, but I think that's, we talk about that all the time. And before we started recording, we were talking a little bit about like, the character of Xander and the conversations we've had. [laughs] Poor Xander really carries the—

**James:** What is, yeah. Please tell me like, like, 'cause I have the memory thing, so—

**Kristin:** Right. And I mean Xander, especially in the early seasons is sort of, you know, he slut shames Buffy a bunch—

**Jenny:** It's like he invented the friend zone. Like all of the misogynistic like stuff you would expect from a high school boy, kind of like funnels through Xander because he is the available conduit for that.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And in the 90s—

**Jenny:** It was totally normal.

**Kristin:** We were, yeah, we w—

**James:** Educate me. Like, what is? The friend zone is when, when you, when you want a woman and she wants to be friends but doesn't want anything else and it's painful.

**Kristin:** Right. Which is his sort of his journey with Buffy.

**Jenny:** With Buffy. Right. But his approach to it is sort of that he's like entitled and when he can't have what he thinks he deserves, he's just mean.

**James:** Oh! Okay, so he's immature.

**Kristin:** Right. And so—

**James:** It's like [whiny voice] "Give me what I want for Christmas!"

**Kristin:** Exactly.

**James:** [whiny voice] "I hate you!"

**Kristin:** But we, we talk about that and also like how in the 90s we all watched it and we were like, "We love Xander!" Like we didn't even have an awareness of what was happening. Now we get to watch it with some new goggles on of being a little bit more aware. But also as we've progressed, we've talked about the fact that again, this can be applied to Spike. It can be applied to any of the characters, but it, for us it has been a lot of Xander.

That Xander is also a product of social constructs. That it's not like Xander is a bad human hard stop. It's similar to what we were even talking about before. Um, that,

that there is a system of power in place that elevates men over women or white people over people of color or straight people over, you know, whatever the dyad is or whatever the multifaceted thing is. Um, but that right, exactly what you're saying, that the, that the elevated aren't just having a blast up there. Like they have the power, sure.

**Jenny:** But it's not emotionally or psychologically nurturing—

**Kristin:** No!

**Jenny:** —To partake in any side of that.

**James:** Joss and company, when they're writing this show back in the 90s in the early two thousands, they're still, they're in a fog of awareness and they can, they can see a little further toward truth than maybe your average bear, you know? And they're calling out to a more inclusive awareness, but they're still born into that fog. And because of people like Joss and Marti and the other writers, the fog has lifted a little bit and we can all see a little further and then we go back and see Buffy and like, "Well that was terrible! They're in a fog!" Well, yeah.

**Kristin:** Right! But no, and that's, yeah, but, but it's also really powerful 'cause it's not, I mean that's certainly, there are, I'm sure plenty of people who do look at it that way, but that's not how, how we view it at all. It's sort of like we, I mean, Jenny and I are, are of the same class practically as Buffy, right? Like I graduated in '98. What'd you graduate in?

**Jenny:** 2000.

**Kristin:** So we're like, we're right there. So we were, we were that age. We, we lived through that time. And so we're very aware of the fact that we were not aware of certain things then. It wasn't part of the conversation. Um, and it's been really cool and really powerful to use that as a way to have a conversation about like, where we once were, where we are, what we can learn from characters *now* that we couldn't learn from them then.

**James:** I do a mental experiment sometimes of what are people gonna say about us today, 20 or 40 years—

**Kristin:** Oh my God.

**James:** What are going to be the things where they say, "How could they have done this?!"

**Jenny and Kristin:** Oh Yeah!

**James:** And I think of the treatment of animals and the treatment of the environment, obviously. Everyone knows that one. But there's probably other ones that we're not even, we would never even think to question.

**Kristin:** Absolutely.

**Jenny:** Yeah.

**James:** And that they're going to look back at us like, "Those idiots!"

**Kristin:** Right, right.

**Jenny:** Barbarians!

**Kristin:** But hopefully, hopefully they'll bring you some measure of, of understanding that we were doing our best, man.

**James:** Don't make a TV show that lasts, 'cause you're just going to get—  
[inaudible] [laughter]

**Kristin:** So, um, I chose one of the listener submitted questions because I thought it was a nice, um, way to bring us back to the listenership and to the fans of the show. Um, McKayla from Twitter wrote in and said, "A lot of young people watched Buffy the Vampire Slayer as an escape from their personal lives and the TV show got people through a lot of hard times. I was one of them. Spike always put a smile on people's faces and I'd like to know if you could tell us fans anything, what would it be?"

**James:** Vote.

**Jenny:** Hell yeah!

**James:** You can't change the world on your own but you can be part of a group that does. And we have found out, uh, what happened in 2016 when people felt like voting didn't matter and we found out in 2018 when people believed in themselves enough to show up and vote and big change can happen when we all work together to do that.

**Kristin:** Hell yeah. That is, and that's what the show teaches us everyday. It's right there.

**James:** I'm just sitting there going, boy, that's a lot of power. Anything that I want to say?

**Kristin:** James, will you tell us, I mean, I think most people who are listening to that, to this know sort of where to find you in terms of you're on The Runaways and we're watching you on that. But is there, are there other things you want to share about your work right now? I know that you work with, um, you know, on Vidiots, maybe.

**James:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And I don't know if you want to talk about that. 'Cause that's really fun. Whatever you, I'm not trying to corral you.

**James:** And so, yeah. Um, uh, yeah, Vidiots is an awesome project that I do with Mark Devine, uh, about two guys that travel the world and understand nothing. [laughter] We were, uh, he comes with me to conventions to help with the table and he is the funniest man I've ever hung out with. And uh, he's never funnier than when we're playing video games and he's losing, he's so hard on himself.

And, um, and I thought, you know, we should start filming this and I, and so I got a video capture and we just turned an iPhone around on ourselves and combined them. And it was working really well. And then we were in Paris and, uh, we were playing Assassin's Creed, the one that takes place in Paris. And it was a beautiful day, but we had the blinds drawn and we're clicking away.

Finally I peek out the window, I'm like, "Dude, this is obscene. Like, we're *in* Paris pretending we're in Paris. Let's just go down the street and be in Paris!" You know? And so we decided to do that, but we kept our phones on us and we just went around and adopted our characters who are slightly more stupid than we are in real life, and just played the clueless Americans in a foreign land. You know, like, uh, one of my favorite, uh, reality. quote reality shows is An Idiot Abroad, uh, the Ricky Gervais show that falls Carl Pilkington around and Carl is, Carl's apparently lot smarter than he appears on the show.

Uh, but he's a very good clown and he, and he goes around the world and understands nothing. So, um, we can, we combine, uh, us playing video games, uh, with kind of being tourists, uh, wherever we are. Uh, and then sometimes we, we do stuff like, the reason we'll be out on the road is that I am voicing a cartoon somewhere, or I'm doing a movie. Uh, and then we try to work that in. Like we were doing, um, a really good independent film. Um, that I did, oh, pressure's on, James! [laughter] Called A Bread Factory with Time Daily, uh, about a community arts center.

Uh, it's true story about a community arts center in Hudson, New York that, uh, has floated a community through a lot of hardship and just like, it's the, it's the wonderful artistic liberal heartbeat that keeps pumping in this town that just really got hit by a lot of unemployment. Um, and it's a two parter film that is winning all sorts of awards.

**Kristin:** That's out now?

**James:** It's out now, just came out and they're doing, they're doing screenings and I'm sure it's going to have a long life 'cause like the critic are just like gaga over it.

**Kristin:** That's awesome.

**James:** But we, so for Vidiots, uh, we did a thing where I hit my head on like, um— We get there for filming. I'm very excited to do it. And I hit my head really, really hard and I wake up and I think I'm Ian McKellan. And Mark, Mark has decided to do, he wants to be a documentary filmmaker. And so he's doing a life of James Marsters and now his project is ruined because now it's, you know, Ian McKellan he's got to figure out what to do with that.

And he's also got to try to figure out how to get me on the set and play my role when I'm, I'm, you know, [imitating Ian McKellan] "I shall practice my lines, Mark. Of course. You shall not pass! That was good wasn't it? Very good." [imitating bored Mark Devine] "Yeah, very good, champ [inaudible]" [laughter] We always try to come up with something like that.

**Kristin:** God! You talked at the beginning of the interview about, um, having fun and I just feel like you're still doing it, you know? What's the secret? How do you keep just having fun?

**James:** Put on makeup for work.

**Kristin:** Cool.

**James:** Shave your nipples. Apparently. Don't take yourself seriously. I think, I read somewhere that if I'm taking myself seriously— If I'm not having fun, I'm taking myself too seriously. And, uh, I'm very lucky because I've always loved acting. I've always, I've always loved this idea that we're conmen, actors and, uh, and the audiences are rubes, they're the marks. They're not in on the gag. But the good thing is, is we're not conning someone out of something. We're conning them into accepting a gift. And, uh, so it's, it's wonderful to be in on the joke when no one else gets, like, [whispers] "We're not really going to cut Macbeth's head off



tonight. It's a watermelon, but it's going to spray red and you're all going to gasp 'cause you do every night and we love it. But it's not really [inaudible]" [laughter] You know, it's just something really delicious about like—

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** Oh, they really love the watermelon this time. Like, [clapping] Oh, this is great. And so I always, I love being in on the gag in that way. Um, but yeah, I can really have fun.

**Kristin:** Gosh, yeah. Thank you so much for talking to us.

**Jenny:** Truly.

**James:** Yeah, it's been really fun. You guys are smart.

**Kristin:** Well hey, right back at you.

**James:** I like to be around smart people and I feel smart.

**Kristin:** It really is, it's such a delight and it's just been so fun to re-explore this, you know, 20 years later, however many years later. It's, it's still— I'm being as I think any good art does it's just going to give and give and give forever. Just wherever we are, there's going to be relevance there, and something to talk about...

**James:** Yeah, because it's about, it's not just about teenage years anymore. It's about everyone. How do you get out of bed in the morning?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**James:** How do you not give up today?

**Kristin:** Exactly.

**James:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** Hell yeah.

**Kristin:** Thank you, again. I feel like I'm waiting for like the, our audience to applaud. Like, come on, guys, give us some support. Wasn't this great? Did we do a good job?