

Buffering the Vampire Slayer  
Episode 0.02: An Interview with Armin Shimerman

**Jenny:** Hello and welcome to a very special bonus episode of Buffering the Vampire Slayer, a podcast where we *usually* talk about every episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, one at a time. I'm Jenny Owen Youngs...

**Kristin:** And I'm Kristin Russo, and that *usually* is because today, on today's episode—you know, we've already talked about Season 1, Episode 9, but today we have the great pleasure of bringing you our interview with Armin Shimerman. Armin Shimerman plays Principal Snyder on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and we met Principal Snyder for the very first time in this week's episode. Armin is also known for playing the Ferengi bartender Quark in the television series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*...

**Jenny:** Woo!

**Kristin:** Yes! And Armin lives now in the Los Angeles area and is the associate artistic director at the Antaeus Theatre in Glendale.

**Jenny:** Those of you who are already familiar with *Buffy* in its entirety will be delighted to learn that also on the board of the Antaeus Theatre is Harry Groener who plays, of course, Mayor Wilkins.

**Kristin:** Ahh! Buffy. Real life, fake life, you know? It all comes together in that wonderful way.

**Jenny:** That it does.

**Kristin:** That it does. So, yeah, without further chatter from us, let's get into this.

**Jenny:** Mm-hmm.

[Buffering the Vampire Slayer Theme]

**Jenny [to Armin]:** Thank you so much for talking to us, we are so pumped to be speaking with you. Today on the podcast we're talking about Season 1, Episode 9, "The Puppet Show" which of course introduces the character that

you portray, Principal Snyder. And we were just wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you came to the show, if you remember what the audition process was like...

**Armin:** Well, it is one of the mysteries of my life, actually, how I got the part of Principal Snyder because it didn't go about the way auditions, interviews normally go. I, as most people know, I was already on a show called *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. And when the show— when *Buffy* was first casting, there was the part of Principal Flutie which they called me in for and I read for. And I'm very happy to say they cast my friend Kenny in the part of Flutie. I was very happy for him, in fact, I started watching the show because Kenny was on it.

Um, so I didn't get— I didn't get Snyder from that audition. However, as I was leaving the audition for Flutie, I walked by what I assume today was a series of writers' rooms. And as I passed one, on my way back to the car, I saw that one of the writers had two *Star Trek* cardboard figures in their office. One of Worf and one of Major Kira. And I walked by the door, and then I went about three or four paces past the door, and thought "hmm." And I backed up and looked in the door and said to the two people in the room, which, I'm not sure were writers— I think they were writers. I said, "Why don't you have a cardboard figure of my character in there?"

[Laughter from Jenny and Kristin]

**Armin:** And we chatted for about 30 or 40 seconds. Kenny went on to play Flutie for a number of episodes, and then many months later, I got a phone call from my agent saying, "They want to use you as Principal Snyder on *Buffy*." I said, "I thought Kenny was the principal." And they said, "No, they've killed him off." [Jenny and Kristin laugh] And I said, "Sure, I've been watching the show, I really like it a great deal and I would be more than happy to do that." Now— and then I said to my agent, "Now they understand of course that I have a day job? That I'm pretty regular on *Star Trek*." And they said, "Yes but they're going to be killing off principals on a regular basis. So you won't be there very long." [Laughter]

**Kristin:** Let's talk about the character of Principal Snyder. So, this episode, we have all just met Principal Snyder for the first time and— you know, many of us have seen this series either once or several times, but some of our

listeners are coming to it for the very first time. They have just met you. And we get lines from you like, "That's the kind of wooly-headed liberal thinking that leads to being eaten." And "There are things I will not tolerate: students loitering on campus after school, horrible murders with hearts being removed, and also, smoking." So I just want to know, in this role, and in this episode especially, what was your favorite part about embodying this character?

**Armin:** Well, my favorite part– well, that question requires several answers, um, and I will try to give you all of them. I love the writing. Jane and Joss's writing was incredible. Again, I'm in the dark whether Jane Esperson [sic] created my character or whether Joss created my character. It doesn't really matter because whoever did it did a phenomenally good job and I'm sure both of them contributed as the years went by.

What was my favorite part? I will tell you how Snyder got created in my head. And so to me, that's one of my favorite parts, and that is, the first thing I had to do on the set– and of course, they shoot scenes out of sequence so I'm not sure if this is the first scene or not where I appear, it's possible that it is. I was walking down a slightly raked auditorium aisle...

**Kristin:** Yes, yes, that is the first scene we see, too.

**Armin:** And I had asked prior to my getting to work, "So who will I be working with?" and they said Sarah Michelle Gellar and I said, "Yes, I've seen the show, I know who she is, but who is she? What's her background?" And they said very nicely to me, "Oh, she's a 19-year-old soap opera actress." And I, being somewhat of a snob, said to myself, oh, great, I have to work with a soap opera actress and... and a 19-year-old to boot. So I had rather a bad taste in my mouth. Understand, I was rather high and mighty, I was a series regular on another show, so I was rather high and mighty.

And as I walked down the aisle for the first time, as we rehearsed it, and near these very young actors, I had this sort of attitude of superiority. And in the years that have passed since that moment, I've come to realize that first impression, bad one as it was, was what was the inspiring force for the character and my aloofness came out of that. The brilliant lines that I had to say, that you quoted, of course came out of the writers and I'm enormously grateful to them.

There was another moment during that episode that may have extended my life on the show? I've always thought perhaps it did. That moment, too, is one of my favorites from "Puppet Show" which is, later on in the episode, we're sort of backstage of the high school theatre. And I'm making an entrance and I hear all this sound from what we all call Video Village. Video Village is where the director and the DP and the script coordinator and everybody else who wants to watch, watches the monitors and sees what the actors are doing through the camera's eye.

And as I was making my entrance I heard all this noise– we were filming, the film was rolling– and I heard all this noise from Video Village and I thought, wow, that's awfully noisy over there, what are they talking about? And then we did two or three more takes and there was still quite a bit of chit-chat. Quiet, whispered, but audible to me anyway. And that was a surprise to me. So I finally went over to Video Village– you have to understand, at that point, I'm a guest, a very new guest, so I don't think I have much power at all. And I sort of say to them, "What's all the noise about?" And they said, "Oh, you have to see, you have to see!"

And for some bizarre reason, when I turned the corner, the way the DP had lit the scene, that there was a shadow on the wall that nobody had planned for, but because– the shadow made me look like Nosferatu. [Kristin and Jenny laugh] And my ears, which are round and large, became very tall and large. And, um, and to this day I believe that's one of the reasons they kept me on for as long as they did. [All laugh] Anyway, so, those are my two favorite moments from "Puppet Show".

**Jenny:** Wow.

**Armin:** I must end this anecdote with a very important point so that everybody understands. It doesn't have to do with this episode, per se. But after about four or five episodes of doing *Buffy*, I came to realize that Sarah Michelle Gellar was perhaps one of the finest actresses I had ever worked with. And I knew she only knew of me as Snyder. She– we didn't talk much because Sarah was a very busy lady, all during the time that I worked with her, she was a very busy lady. Which I understood. And after about the fourth or fifth episode, I walked over to Sarah's trailer, knocked on the door. She was enormously surprised to see me, really only knowing me as Snyder

and not as Armin. And I said, "Sarah—" and I told her the story that I told you about walking down the aisle. And I said, "I was wrong. I thought you were a 19-year-old soap opera actress and this was going to not be much fun. And I've come to realize what an enormously talented woman you are and I'm looking forward to all our future scenes together." And after that moment, I venture to say, Sarah and I became very, very good friends.

**Kristin:** That's great, that's beautiful.

**Jenny:** Wow. I grew up watching *Star Trek: Next Generation* and then of course *Deep Space Nine* and saw you as Quark. And then, you know, when I started having some control over the remote in my house—

**Armin:** Good for you.

**Jenny:** And became a massive *Buffy* fan and saw you there. And you exist in this universe that has kind of, like, a very particular fandom and a particular sort of like, other-worldliness/sci-fi/horror/fantasy mashup. And I was just wondering if you grew up a fan of sci-fi, of horror, anything—literature, film...

**Armin:** It's a very good question, thank you for that. I was never a fan of horror, but I was always a fan of science fiction.

**Jenny:** Mm-hmm.

**Armin:** And in fact, I was one of those '60s nerds who ran home to make sure that I caught every episode of the original *Star Trek*, long before it went into syndication. And I read a lot of science fiction as a young man and was always interested in, too. In fact, my being on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and eventually onto *Deep Space Nine* was because of that fandom.

I had an opportunity early on in my career to choose between two episodes. I was, at that time, recurring on another science fiction show called *Beauty and the Beast*. And I got cast in my first role on *Star Trek*, but unfortunately, the day that I was asked to shoot the *Star Trek* episode conflicted completely with a day that I was shooting on *Beauty and the Beast*. My agent highly recommended to me— more than highly recommended,

insisted– that I take the *Beauty and the Beast* because that was my paying job and I was recurring, so he didn't want to jeopardize that momentum there.

But I, being a huge science fiction fan, a huge *Star Trek* fan, said, "No, I wanna take the *Star Trek*." And we got into a little bit of a fight over that but I, being the client, eventually won. And the rest of my life, I guess, branched off from that decision. Because that original appearance on *Next Generation*, which was not a Ferengi, certainly led directly and almost immediately to playing a Ferengi, and that first Ferengi on *Next Generation* was the way I got into *Deep Space Nine*.

**Kristin:** We are recording this interview on November 9th, 2016. And for many of us, today is a day that has a lot of confusion, a lot of sadness, a lot of fear, but also a lot of mobilization. And I think that the universe that we see in *Buffy*, and the fandom behind this show and shows like it, can facilitate that kind of mobilization that we're seeing today. And I'm wondering, Armin, if you could share some of your thoughts about that parallel and about how we use tools like this in times like this.

**Armin:** Well, it's a very, very sad day for my wife and I. I've– it's probably a bad equation and forgive me if I'm insulting anybody, but I think of it as another 9/11. I believe the country has made a huge mistake, and um, and we will all be lesser because of it.

I will give you a little bit of background which is, back in September of this year, I was talking to my friends in the *Star Trek* universe and realized that all of us couldn't imagine a Trump presidency. And because of that, I went home and started emailing my friends and started a– I wouldn't call it a movement, but a website called "Trek Against Trump." And I was able to get members of every one of the Star Trek franchises, whether it was the original series, *Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager*, *Enterprise*, the J.J. Abrams movies, the novels that are written, the games that are produced... every aspect of *Trek* was represented in the 150-or-so names that signed my petition to ask fans to not vote Trump, but rather to vote Clinton, and more importantly, to register to vote. We felt that it was every American citizen's duty to vote, and part of our plea was to do that as well.

So I am living proof that fandom, and this kind of fandom, can indeed be

helpful in the political process. I also know, having gone to many conventions, both for *Star Trek* and for *Buffy*, that the fans of this particular genre are enormously charitable. That if someone needs help, the fandom of *Buffy* or *Star Trek* or, I would venture to say, every science fiction show, will reach out to help and that is an enormously kind thing. And to all the people that have helped and will help in the future, my thanks. I've seen that graciousness of heart over and over and over again and it moves me every time I see it.

**Kristin:** Yeah, we echo that sentiment from over here as well. It's a powerful thing to see and it's giving us hope today. It truly– it truly is. Um, Armin, is there anything before we, of course, ask where the best places are to continue to follow you and all that you do– is there anything else that you wanted to share with us about your work on *Buffy*, about this episode, about your character, Principal Snyder, before we get to that last bit?

**Armin:** Well, I will share something that really isn't all that important, but to me, it is and perhaps people out there will be interested. I had been working for about five years on *Star Trek*, and five years on a show is lovely, wonderful, everybody hopes to have that kind of work. But it gets– it gets a little boring. [Chuckles] You begin to think, well, I know pretty much what my character will do and it's just a matter of showing up to work and doing it. When I was lucky enough– and truly lucky, because I am the only *Star Trek* actor that I'm aware of that was able to do two shows at the same time. When I was lucky enough to get *Buffy*, I found that the work on *Buffy* gave me new energy to approach my work on *Star Trek*. And vice versa.

**Kristin:** Wow.

**Armin:** If I was away from *Buffy* for a while, my work on *Star Trek* would energize my desire to do my very best on *Buffy*. It– the two shows fed into each other for me, inspired me, and kept me enormously happy in the latter part of my *Star Trek* years and all through my *Buffy* years. Where I normally probably would've gotten a little tired, I was eager and ready to work because both shows energized each other in me. And I hope people will agree with me, they were two opposite characters! Principal Snyder hated life, hated people! And really was a very small-minded person. Whereas Quark loved people, loved life, and was eager to rub shoulders with people. Because they were total opposites, as I said, they were able to feed into

each other.

**Kristin:** We actually just stumbled upon a really magical interview that you did. We wanted to make sure we were pronoun– that we were saying your first name correctly. And so Jenny Googled some– I don't even know what she Googled to find this. But you had gone on– I think at the time, it was *Regis and Kathie Lee*, as Quark. [laughs] And then come back on as yourself, and so we took great delight watching that this morning, not knowing that you were going to come back on as Armin, especially. The first viewing, we thought, wow, did they do this entire interview with you as Quark? But we got a good laugh out of that, out of seeing an episode from, I think it was 1993?

**Jenny:** I think so.

**Kristin:** Uh, yeah.

**Armin:** Well, should you ever see that interview again, when I come back as Armin, I am higher than a kite!

[Joyous laughter from Kristin and Jenny]

**Armin:** They had to get my makeup off in about 15-20 minutes, tops. Normally, the makeup removal took a little over an hour. So in order to get it off me and for me to be orange-less and prosthetic-less, my makeup lady, Karen Westerfield, threw *buckets* of solvent at me in order to get the stuff off quickly. [laughter] And all those chemicals have vapors. So when I walk back on stage, as myself, I was surrounded by vapors and if– you'll see, my eyes are slightly watering and I'm– the smell of the vapors is just making me reel, and I don't know what I said actually in that segment. [Laughter]

**Kristin:** [laughing] Oh, we'll have to go back and re-watch this now with this new knowledge. And of course, Armin, please let us know where the best places are to find you now, what work we can find you doing and for all of our listeners, who either are meeting Principal Snyder for the first time or who are visiting with him again, where they can find other work that you're doing.

**Armin:** Great. So the easiest place to find me, online anyway, is



@ShirmermanArmin, that's Shirmerman with one M in the middle, um, ShirmermanArmin, at- that's my Twitter handle. My work primarily- I was raised as a theatre actor, and did a number of Broadway shows, did lots of regional theatre around the country. And after many, many successful years on TV, I realized that's really what I want to go back to do. So a number of years ago I became the associate artistic director of a theatre in Los Angeles called Antaeus, that's A-N-T-A-E-U-S, and you can find me and my theatre at antaeus.org.

For the *Buffy* fans, I'm sure it's delightful to know that besides myself, who is one of the leaders of that theatre, so is Harry Groener, who of course played the mayor, and the two of us and our wives, Harry's wife Dawn and my wife Kitty, plus probably another 140 people that many of the people out there will recognize. We have a great deal of very familiar faces in our company, and we do primarily classical theatre. And if anyone is ever in the city of Glendale, where we just recently moved to, if anyone is there, please come and see our work. So, you can find us there, or you can find me personally online through the addresses I've just given you.

**Kristin:** Fantastic. Well, I know Jenny and I are so excited to come and see the productions that are going on at that theatre and we are both so thankful that you took the time out to speak with us. Thank you so much, Armin.

**Armin:** It's my pleasure, thank you for having me.

[End of interview]

**Jenny:** Thanks so much for listening to this very special bonus episode.

**Kristin:** Ah! And one more thank you to Armin for sitting down and talking with us, it was such a pleasure.

**Jenny:** Such a pleasure. We hope you all enjoyed it as much as we did. I'm Jenny Owen Youngs and you can learn more about me at jennyowenyongs.com or give me a shout on Twitter at @jennyowenyongs.

**Kristin:** So many JennyOwenYoungses!

**Jenny:** Yes!

**Kristin:** I am Kristin Russo, and you can find me over on Twitter at @kristinnoeline, k-r-i-s-t-i-n n-o-e-l-i-n-e, or you can find out more about my work at everyoneisgay.com or mykidisgay.com.

**Jenny:** Buffering the Vampire Slayer is on Twitter at @bufferingcast and on facebook at facebook.com/bufferingcast. You can email us at bufferingthevampireslayer at gmail dot com.

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**Jenny:** [laughs] Well said.

**Kristin:** Thank you.

**Jenny:** Uh, thanks so much again for listening and until next time...

**Both:** AWOOOOOO!