

= Welcome to the Hellmouth =

" Welcome to the Hellmouth " is the series premiere of the supernatural drama television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer . This episode and " The Harvest " were originally aired as a two @-@ part series premiere on The WB on March 10 , 1997 . The episode was written by the series creator and executive producer Joss Whedon , and directed by Charles Martin Smith . " Welcome to the Hellmouth " received a Nielsen rating of 3 @.@ 4 upon its original airing and received largely positive reviews from critics .

The narrative follows Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar) on her first day at a new school in a new town . She hopes to live as a normal teenager , but the duties and fate of the Slayer ? to fight vampires , demons , witches and other supernatural beings ? will not leave her alone ; the ancient vampire the Master (Mark Metcalf) threatens to break free , and Buffy must turn for help to her school librarian and Watcher Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head) , her new classmates , Willow and Xander (Alyson Hannigan and Nicholas Brendon) , and a benevolent stranger named Angel (David Boreanaz) .

Joss Whedon developed Buffy the Vampire Slayer to invert the Hollywood formula of " the little blonde girl who goes into a dark alley and gets killed in every horror movie . " The series was created after the 1992 movie , Buffy the Vampire Slayer , in an attempt by Whedon to stay truer to his original ideas . Many scenes were filmed on location in Los Angeles , California . The high school used for external and some internal scenes in the series is Torrance High School , the same school used for the series Beverly Hills , 90210 .

= = Plot = =

The series premiere begins at Sunnydale High School , where a boy (played by Carmine Giovinazzo) breaks into the school during the night with a seemingly reluctant girl (Julie Benz) , promising her mischief and therefore fun . Nervous and on edge , the girl says she thinks she heard something and fears someone is in the school , other than the two of them . The boy calls out but gets no response , leading him to say " it 's nothing " to the girl and assure her that they " are alone " . The girl says " ok , that 's good " , after which she turns to face the boy , revealing her facial morph into her true identity ; a vampire . She then bites the boy 's neck . She is later revealed to be Darla .

Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar) has a nightmare the morning of her first day at school . Her mother , Joyce (Kristine Sutherland) , drives her to the school and encourages her to think positive . Inside the building , Principal Bob Flutie (Ken Lerner) tells her she will start with a clean slate . He reconsiders that after realizing that Buffy burned down her previous school 's gym . Buffy starts to explain that she did so because " it was full of vampi ... " but she rapidly changes the end of her statement to " asbestos . "

Buffy exits the office and bumps into a female student , spilling the contents of her handbag on the floor . Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendon) sees this and helps Buffy repack , mainly to introduce himself to her , as it was earlier suggested that he is attracted to her . She leaves without her stake , which Xander pockets because he called out to her , but she had already walked away . In history class , Buffy is helped by popular girl Cordelia Chase (Charisma Carpenter) , who afterwards tests her " coolness factor , " skipping the written as Buffy had just moved to Sunnydale , California from Los Angeles . To Buffy 's horror , Cordelia humiliates an awkward Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan) at the water fountain . Inside the library , Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head) places a book titled Vampyr in front of Buffy after recognizing who she is . A stunned Buffy makes a hasty exit .

Buffy , Willow , Jesse McNally (Eric Balfour) , and Xander meet during a break , and Xander returns the stake . Buffy claims it is standard self @-@ defense in Los Angeles . Cordelia appears and tells Buffy that gym is cancelled due to the " extreme dead guy " in one student 's gym locker . Buffy asks whether there were marks on the body , freaking out Cordelia . Buffy forces her way into the locker room , examines the body , and finds the characteristic puncture wounds of a vampire on the neck . Buffy returns to the library and confronts Giles , who informs her that he is her Watcher .

Buffy refuses to accept her calling as a Slayer , since it had gotten her kicked out of her previous school and robbed her of a social life . After they leave the library , Xander emerges from behind the shelves , having overheard the strange conversation .

That night , en route to her first visit to The Bronze , the cool hangout in Sunnydale , Buffy meets a mysterious , handsome stranger (David Boreanaz) , who warns her that she is living on a Hellmouth that is about to open , and that " The Harvest " is coming . He also gives her a large silver cross pendant . In The Bronze , Buffy meets Willow and encourages her to seize the moment : " Because tomorrow you might be dead . " She finds Giles and tells him about the stranger . Giles tells her to learn to hone her skills to sense vampires anywhere . Buffy uses her fashion sense to pick out a vampire (J. Patrick Lawlor) in the club and is alarmed to see Willow leave with him . She loses them and is surprised by Cordelia , nearly staking her . Cordelia immediately calls her friends to tell them about it . While Buffy looks for Willow , Jesse chats up Darla at The Bronze . Buffy is stopped by Xander , whom she convinces to help search for Willow .

Meanwhile , under the streets of Sunnydale , The Master (Mark Metcalf) , an ancient and powerful vampire king , is woken by lesser vampires from a long sleep to prepare for the Harvest . He sends Luke (Brian Thompson) to fetch young blood . Willow 's new acquaintance takes her to a crypt in a cemetery , where they are joined by Darla and Jesse , whom she has bitten . Buffy and Xander arrive . Buffy kills Willow 's vampire . Xander and Willow help the weakened Jesse to flee . Luke takes Darla 's place in the fight so she can help catch the kids . Luke throws Buffy in a stone coffin and is about to move in for the kill .

= = Continuity = =

Angel speaks to Buffy as though he had never met her , but in the two @-@ part episode , " Becoming " reveals that he has fallen in love with Buffy from afar when her first Watcher reveals her destiny as a vampire slayer . Later , in the episode " Helpless , " Angel confessed that he has been in love with her before they are acquainted in this episode and followed her from Los Angeles since .

= = Production = =

= = = Background and writing = = =

Writer Joss Whedon says that " Rhonda the Immortal Waitress " was really the first incarnation of the Buffy concept , " just the idea of some woman who seems to be completely insignificant who turns out to be extraordinary " . This early , unproduced idea evolved into Buffy , an inversion of the Hollywood formula of " the little blonde girl who goes into a dark alley and gets killed in every horror movie " . Whedon wanted " to subvert that idea and create someone who was a hero " . He explained , " The very first mission statement of the show was the joy of female power : having it , using it , sharing it " .

The idea was first visited through Whedon 's script for the 1992 movie Buffy the Vampire Slayer , which featured Kristy Swanson in the title role . The director , Fran Rubel Kuzui , saw it as a " pop culture comedy about what people think about vampires " . Whedon disagreed : " I had written this scary film about an empowered woman , and they turned it into a broad comedy . It was crushing . "

Several years later , Gail Berman , a Fox executive , approached Whedon to develop his Buffy concept into a television series . Whedon explained that " They said , ' Do you want to do a show ? ' And I thought , ' High school as a horror movie ' . And so the metaphor became the central concept behind Buffy , and that 's how I sold it . " The supernatural elements in the series stood as metaphors for personal anxieties associated with adolescence and young adulthood . Early in its development , the series was going to be simply titled Slayer . Whedon went on to write and partly fund a 25 @-@ minute non @-@ broadcast pilot that was shown to networks and eventually sold to the WB Network . Buffy the Vampire Slayer first aired on March 10 , 1997 , as a mid season

replacement for the show Savannah on The WB network , and played a key role in the growth of the Warner Bros. television network in its early years .

= = = Music = = =

The episode , being the series premiere , features the first usage of the theme song by pop punk band Nerf Herder . Parry Gripp , the band 's songwriter , guitarist , and admitted fan of the show explained that the band created the theme song after " fancy pants Hollywood " failed to write a theme song that the producers approved up . Eventually , " they [the producers] asked a bunch of local , small time bands who they could pay very little money to come up with some ideas and they liked our idea and they used it . And the rest is history ! " Several songs by the band Sprung Monkey play during the episode . When Buffy is deciding what to wear , the song " Saturated " is playing faintly in the background . At The Bronze , the band plays their songs " Believe " , " Swirl " , and " Things are Changing " . All of the songs featured in the episode can be found on their 1995 album Swirl . The score for the episode , as well as all first season entries , was created by Walter Murphy .

= = = Casting and filming = = =

Joss Whedon explained that several of the characters that appeared in the series were based on real life individuals . Cordelia , for instance , was modeled after a girl whom Whedon 's wife attended high school with . Xander was based on Whedon himself . Whedon hoped to include actor Eric Balfour in the title credits to shock viewers when his character dies . Unfortunately , the show could not afford the extra set of title credits at the time . However , Whedon 's wish was granted in the season six episode " Seeing Red " , with the character Tara Maclay . Brian Thompson , who plays the vampire Luke , returns to the series in season two as a different character , the Judge , in " Surprise " and " Innocence " .

In the original , non @-@ broadcast pilot , Willow was portrayed by Riff Regan . However , network executives requested that Regan be replaced . Willow 's character demanded that she be shy and unsure of herself , and the casting department encountered some difficulty finding actresses who could portray this effectively and still be likable . After seven auditions , Alyson Hannigan was eventually chosen for the role . She was chosen for being able to spin the character 's lines with a self @-@ effacing optimism ; she stated , " I didn 't want to do Willow as someone who 's feeling sorry for herself . Especially in the first season , she couldn 't talk to guys , and nobody liked her . I was like , ' I don 't want to play somebody who 's down on herself . " Whedon conceived the character as introverted , saying " I wanted Willow to have that kind of insanely colorful interior life that truly shy people have . And Alyson has that . She definitely has a loopiness I found creeping into the way Willow talked , which was great . To an extent , all the actors conform to the way I write the character , but it really stands out in Willow 's case . "

Nicholas Brendon , who had recently been fired from his job as a waiter and was struggling financially , was attracted to the pilot script for Buffy because of how much he had hated high school . Brendon recognized that Xander was based on Joss Whedon when he had attended high school , accounting for why Xander " gets all the good lines " .

Charisma Carpenter had originally planned to read for the role of Buffy , but was late for her audition and instead tried out for Cordelia . Although she had only fifteen minutes to prepare for the character , the producers were " really responsive " to Carpenter 's audition , and she left feeling confident she had got the part . After Carpenter 's audition , Gellar , who had been offered the role of Cordelia before Carpenter , was asked to come back and audition for the part of Buffy . Bianca Lawson originally won the role of Cordelia Chase , but turned it down due to other contractual obligations . Lawson would later be cast as vampire slayer Kendra in the show 's second season . Cordelia was originally intended to serve as a dramatic foil to Buffy , and to represent the characteristics of the less mature and shallower Buffy portrayed in the original film .

Julie Benz , who portrayed Darla , originally auditioned for the role of Buffy . However , Benz was

later offered the minor role of Darla in the pilot episode . Although the character (originally an unnamed minor vampire) was supposed to die in the pilot , Whedon liked her performance so well that he named her and her character appeared in a few more episodes . Benz went on to portray Darla in several episodes of Buffy 's spin @-@ off television series , Angel . She later went on to say :

For me , I was a new actor to Los Angeles , didn't know the TV business very well so I was just excited to work and play a vampire . I had no clue what I was going to do or how I was going to be scary . Until that is , they put the vampire makeup on me and I went into the trailer and smiled , which I thought was creepy . Joss always said he was intrigued that someone who looked like me and talked like me was like the scariest vampire ever . That's what he wanted , my sweet voice and demeanour until all of a sudden I'm just this vicious vampire . "

Veteran character actor Mark Metcalf appeared in heavy prosthetic make @-@ up for the role of the Master , belying his iconic performance in the film National Lampoon 's Animal House (1978) as Douglas C. Neidermeyer . In 2011 , Metcalf recognized his role on Buffy as one of his favorites . Many actors auditioned for the part , but Whedon felt Metcalf played it with more complexity , bringing a " sly and kind of urbane " sensitivity and a charm to the villainy of the character . Kristine Sutherland was cast as Buffy 's mother Joyce . Sutherland , who disliked the horror genre , was not looking for acting jobs when her agent called her with the opportunity to play Joyce . Sutherland auditioned the same day as David Boreanaz , and was impressed with how naturally she felt at ease with the material in the scripts . Bob Flutie , Sunnydale High School 's principal , was originally played by Stephen Tobolowsky in the unaired pilot . Ken Lerner was cast as Flutie in the broadcast version .

Certain scenes , such as the argument between Giles and Buffy in the library , and Buffy 's first meeting with Angel , were re @-@ shot eight months after the first episode was recorded with both Whedon and Gellar feeling that Buffy was too angry in the original takes . Whedon subsequently teased Gellar that they were going to reshoot the scenes a third time . The high school used for external and some internal scenes in the series is Torrance High , the same school used for the series Beverly Hills , 90210 .

= = = Vampire effects = = =

Joss Whedon created the idea of " vamp faces , " which was to have vampires ' human features distort to become more demonic . Whedon wanted normal high school students that the other characters could interact with normally , only to have them turn out be vampires , therefore creating a sense of paranoia . He also wanted the vampires to be " clearly monsters , " as to not make it seem like a high school girl was killing normal (looking) people . The vampires originally appeared " very white @-@ faced , very creepy , very ghoulish " . This was toned down in later episodes as the makeup was too time @-@ consuming . Whedon claims that people thought the white faces to be " funny looking " but personally found it creepier , comparing it to the monsters in zombie movies such as Day of the Dead and The Evil Dead . The character of the Master was designed to be in vamp face permanently to highlight his age and make him appear more animalistic ; make @-@ up artist John Vulich based the Master 's appearance on a bat , reasoning that the character has devolved to a more primal , demonic state over the years . It was decided that vampires and their clothes would turn to dust after they died . This was done for practical storytelling reasons , so the characters would not have to spend time cleaning up bodies . This episode introduced with the idea that vampires ' clothes would resemble the era in which they died , with Buffy identifying one by his dated outfit . Joss Whedon felt this concept was a " charming notion " but ultimately rejected it for the most part because he believed that , if every vampire in the show was dressed in old @-@ fashioned clothes , they would cease to be scary .

= = Reception = =

" Welcome to the Hellmouth " first aired in the United States on March 10 , 1997 on The WB . On

the original airing of this episode , The WB provided a teaser advertisement briefing the history of past Slayers . It revealed horrific events in towns that were halted when a particular woman arrived . This promotional teaser does not appear in syndication or on DVD . " Welcome to the Hellmouth " earned a Nielsen rating of 3 @. @ 4 , meaning that roughly 3 @. @ 4 percent of all television @-@ equipped households were tuned in to the episode . It was the 100th most watched episode of television that aired during the week ending March 16 .

The episode received largely positive reviews from critics . Noel Murray of The A.V. Club wrote that the episode was " a good introduction to the show , establishing the characters and the premise quickly and cleanly , before ending on a cliffhanger " . Murray , however , did note that it contained a " dialogue that sounds more faux @-@ clever than actually clever " and that there was " an overall flatness to the action / horror sequences " that would continue until the second season . John Levesque , writing for the Seattle Post @-@ Intelligencer , called the fledgling series " witty , intelligent and thoroughly entertaining " and dubbed it " the best thing I 've seen on The WB " . He praised the acting of Sarah Michelle Gellar , noting that she " plays Buffy to perfection " . Phil Kloer of The Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution called the show a " kinky little mix of camp comedy , high school hi @-@ jinks and monsters " and likened its plot to the Fox sci @-@ fi series The X @-@ Files and the Nickelodeon horror @-@ themed anthology series Are You Afraid of the Dark ? . He ultimately gave the episode a B. Nikki Stafford , in her book Bite Me ! , called the first episode " excellent " and complimented the strengths of the main cast as well as the show 's unique approach . She contrasted it with the earlier movie , noting that " the movie version [...] was like Clueless , but near the end suddenly tried to be a serious film . The television show carries comedy , action , and drama simultaneously and features a far superior ensemble cast . "