



**K. Dale Koontz**

## **The One That Almost Got Away: Doyle and the Fish Story**



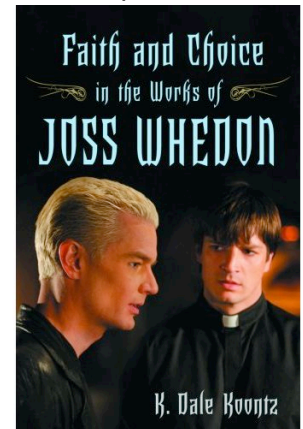
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(1) [Joss] Whedon uses the half-demon Doyle, who serves as the soul-filled Angel's conduit to The Powers That Be, to illustrate that redemption is possible for everyone, even for those who seem paralyzed by self-hate and regret. Doyle is far from being a contemplative saint. In fact, he staggers beneath a nearly crushing burden of guilt and shame. While his wrongs do not put Doyle beyond the boundary of redemption, the penitential Whedon character must go beyond simply pleading for forgiveness. Only concrete deeds serve as atonement for past actions. Or, as in Doyle's case, past *inactions*.

(2) For someone as fascinated by moral ambiguities as Whedon, it no doubt makes perfect sense to have his dark hero Angel be guided by a "good demon," the concept of which seems to be paradoxical. After all, aren't demons evil creatures bent on the absolute destruction of the human race? To Whedon, the answer is "no," for he never perceives the concepts of good and evil as being particularly clear-cut. Therefore, Whedon is able to utilize the device of such an apparently contradictory character to underscore the complexities of that position.<sup>[1]</sup> As another "good demon" explains in "Becoming, Part One:"



But I'm not a bad guy—not all demons are dedicated to the destruction of all life. Someone has to maintain balance, you know. Good and evil can't exist without each other, blah, blah, blah. I'm not like a good fairy or anything. I'm just trying to make it all balance (*Buffy*, 2.21).

Whedon's worldview is more intricate than a simple "demon bad, human good." Indeed, Whedon's view of demons borrows from H. P. Lovecraft's "Elder Gods" in that demons are a "variety of ancient, prehuman races who originally lived on earth" (Golden 2). As such, they can be terrifyingly evil, relatively benign,<sup>[2]</sup> or of uncharted depths. Such a one is Doyle, a half-Irish/half-demon who finds himself dragged into Angel's orbit by The Powers That Be.<sup>[3]</sup>

(3) As is true with all of Whedon's creations, the name of the character serves as a type of map to the inner world of the character. "Doyle" is an Irish family name meaning "dark foreigner" (Doyle). This is a perfect moniker for this character, who fits the classic "black Irish" type of black hair and light eyes, and who is also very much a stranger in the strange land of Los Angeles. In addition to being a "foreigner" in the world of full humans, Doyle is also a stranger to the ways and means of redemption. [\[4\]](#)

(4) When viewers first meet Doyle, it is quickly established that he carries his past with him as a burden. Angel is suspicious of Doyle's motives in offering to assist the vampire in his quest to "help the hopeless" and Doyle deflects the inquiry with a simple, "We all got something to atone for" ("City Of" 1.1). Angel doesn't press very hard for answers, being well acquainted with the notion of wanting to keep some sins private.

(5) In the commentary for the first episode of *Angel*, executive producer David Greenwalt refers to Doyle as a type of "unconscious conscience" for Angel, while Whedon calls the half-demon a "mentor figure" for the vampire. Doyle's role is to provide Angel with information that helps the vampire actually connect with the humans in the world, rather than Angel's preferred "hands off" approach of merely saving the helpless and then melting into the darkness. This was a deliberate choice made by Whedon, who has said of *Angel* that the show is all about loneliness and fighting that loneliness with connections to other people (Commentary "City Of" 1.1). This is an admirable goal, but in the beginning, Doyle hardly provides a good example of connecting with others. Even in the midst of his impassioned plea to Angel to reach out to others and provide the lost with a bit of love and hope in a harsh, uncaring world, he brushes aside a begging woman without so much as a pause: "Get a job, you lazy sow. It's about letting them in your heart" ("City Of" 1.1). At this point, Doyle serving as a mentor to Angel just may be a fine example of the blind leading the blind. This is a carefully-crafted choice on Whedon's part—after all, if Doyle had nowhere to grow, he wouldn't be nearly as interesting to watch.

(6) Doyle also isn't particularly interested in being an active participant in the eternal battle of good versus evil. While he is never portrayed as wanting evil to triumph, Doyle is consistently shown to prefer the wings of the stage to the center spotlight. In Doyle's worldview sticking your neck out for others is a really good way to get it broken. Although he has been selected by The Powers That Be to actively assist Angel, taking such a visible stand grates on him, focused as he is on protecting his own interests, rather than those of the wider world. This is not meant to condemn Doyle, however. Most people would prefer to remain tortoise-like within their own shells of protection rather than venture forth to protect those weaker than themselves. This is the attitude political philosopher Edmund Burke had in mind when he stated that "all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." And always in the back of Doyle's mind is the memory of what happens when good men (or good half-demons, for that matter) do nothing, for Doyle's past is a dark country, scarred by betrayal and shame.

(7) As a demon/human hybrid, Doyle is a character defined by boundaries. He is far from being at peace with his heritage and he is reluctant to share information about his past with others. Viewers learn in "The Bachelor Party" (1.7) that Doyle's Brachen demon side didn't present itself until he turned 21, by which time he was happily leading a life devoted to service to others—he taught third grade and he met his wife when they were

both volunteering at a food bank, for example. The revelation that life had never been what he had thought was simply too much for him to accept—the sudden and total loss of his identity and certainty about his place in the world caused him to drive away his wife, who was willing to stand by him. Notably, he also changes his name at this point, casting off his given (and slightly prissy) name of “Francis,” a name that calls up images of the gentle, kind St. Francis, in favor of being the one-name, more masculine-sounding “Doyle,” the dark foreigner. Far from being an active, vibrant force for good in the world by teaching children and assisting the hungry, the now angry-at-the-world Doyle retreats from human companionship. He exists on the fringes of society in squalor and lives by doing a lengthy series of slightly-illegal favors for other down-and-outs.

(8) At this point, Doyle can be equated with the Biblical Job, only without the essential quality of faith. While Job was able to survive a crushingly unfair series of burdens and trials due to his unshakable faith in the inherent goodness of the Divine, Doyle flees, devoid of purpose, conflicted and full of self-loathing. His reasoning seems to be: *Half-demon. What good can come from that? All this time, I was just being played for a fool, so I might as well be what they say I am.* The fallacy in Doyle’s reasoning is, of course, that “they” are seldom right and that, in Whedon’s world, biological markers such as blood have far less to do with who we are than what we do. Doyle’s failure to understand this principle will have lasting repercussions, both for him and for those around him.

(9) On top of his self-hatred, Doyle is also mired in guilt. In “Hero” (1.9), viewers are shown in a flashback the source of much of Doyle’s remorse. When Lucas, another mixed-blood Brachen demon, comes to Doyle for help in escaping the Scourge (a band of pureblood demons who have a fiery hatred of “impure” half-breeds such as Doyle and Lucas), Doyle refuses to assist, claiming that he has his own troubles and cannot take on those of anyone else. Lucas pleads with him to help, explaining that the Scourge is determined to exterminate every mixed heritage demon being they can hunt down, a group that includes Doyle, despite his adamant refusal to see the connection. [5] Unable to convince Doyle that he’s part of a family that is under attack, Lucas sadly leaves to fight as best he can for those he loves and wishes to protect. [6] Doyle then enters what St. John the Divine termed the “long dark night of the soul” as he resolutely stays put in his squalid apartment, unable to rest. It is at this point, with Doyle balanced precariously between angry self-interest and the desire to be part of something larger than himself, that he receives his first pain-filled vision from The Powers That Be as his mind’s eye is flooded with images of a massacre.

(10) Frightened into action, Doyle flees his bolt-hole to meet Lucas, but it is too late. Surrounded by the detritus of slaughter, including a hauntingly empty pair of child’s shoes, Doyle is stunned into stillness. Maybe his presence would have made no difference at all, but Doyle is now forever branded by the results of his inaction. With this backstory, Whedon does something unusual in his work—he actually shows viewers the *why* of Doyle’s guilt and remorse. Further, while most Whedon characters are attempting to atone for actions they have taken—Angel, for instance, massacred his way across Europe for a hundred years and bitterly remembers each instant of it—Doyle is unusual in that his desire to atone stems from *not* taking action; a sin of omission rather than commission. In short, the worst thing Doyle ever does is refuse to act and that refusal is itself coded as

an evil act, rather than merely a cowardly one. For Whedon, evil comes not just from wreaking havoc on the lives of innocents, but also from failing to help those in need.

(11) It is significant that Doyle characterizes his painful gift from The Powers That Be as “bone-crushin’, head-wrenchin’, mind-numbin’ visions” (“I Will Remember You” 1.8). These disjointed visions are the tools that enable Doyle to assist Angel in his quest to help the hopeless, yet they cause tremendous physical anguish to the bearer of the visions. The timing of Doyle’s receipt of the visions raises the question—are the visions sent as a punishment, to serve as a lash to drive Doyle from his cocoon of self-involvement into a more active role in making the world better for those who live in it? If so, it would appear that The Powers That Be are a vengeful lot who have cursed Doyle with a nasty sort of psychic hair shirt to serve as a constant reminder of his utter failure to help those who needed his assistance.

(12) While The Powers That Be are deliberately never referred to as “God,” there is a history of God talking to His creations with the experience usually described as a deeply frightening one for the human.<sup>[7]</sup> For example, in the third chapter of Exodus, God speaks to Moses through the form of a burning bush in order to issue his marching orders—a call Moses protests he is unsuitable to fulfill (3 Exod. 11). Later, the wandering Israelites are guided through the Red Sea wilderness “by a pillar of cloud during the daytime and a pillar of fire at night” (Exod. 13:21). Doyle’s visions, which cause him to feel as if his skull is on fire, seem to fit within the images of flame that are so often used to describe a visit from the Divine.

(13) Further, prophetic dreams (rather like Doyle’s visions, minus the skull-shattering pain) are often mentioned as a means of Divine communication and the gift of interpreting dreams is a common one granted to prophets. For example, Joseph interprets the dreams of members of Pharaoh’s household and Pharaoh himself in Genesis 40 and 41; Daniel has prophetic dreams in chapters 7 and 8 of that book (as well as interpreting the famed “writing on the wall” in chapter 5); and the Book of Revelation is all about visions and dreams.<sup>[8]</sup>

(14) Yet, while these Biblical communications may have startled the recipient, none of them seems to have been accompanied by the pain of Doyle’s visions. Even the conversion experience of Saul—a notorious persecutor of the newly-formed Christian faith—implies psychic surprise rather than physical pain (Acts 9:1–9). All of which raises the question—is Doyle chosen as special, or is he cursed as unworthy?

(15) Doyle is a conundrum. Clearly, he does not fit the mold of Angel’s sidekick, a role that traditionally involves a younger and less experienced individual who requires guidance from an older and wiser mentor. While Doyle is younger than Angel (who clocks in at about 250 years of age to Doyle’s mid-twenties), Doyle has his own knowledge of arcane, otherworldly items and beings. For instance, in the episode “In the Dark” (1.3), Doyle is shown to know the significance of a magical ring that renders a vampire invulnerable to stakes and sunlight. Further, Doyle’s visions enable him to serve as a guide to Angel, giving him vital information about where Angel needs to be in order to assist worthy, yet helpless, humans. However, while Doyle is not Angel’s sidekick, neither does he fit the inverse of that role, for he does not serve as Angel’s mentor. Traditionally, the role of mentor is filled by an older and wiser individual who is passing

knowledge on to the younger generation and Doyle is neither a Yoda nor a Merlin. Even The Powers That Be seem to be dismissive of Doyle. In the episode "I Will Remember You" (1.8), Angel seeks out the Oracles, who act rather like gatekeepers for the unseen Powers That Be. Doyle has the knowledge to help Angel gain access to the Oracles, but he himself is not allowed in, being only a "messenger," whereas Angel is a warrior, and therefore deemed worthy to enter their presence. Doyle has a definite role to fulfill, yet he is made to stand on the wrong side of the mystical velvet rope. Whedon therefore codes Doyle as the perpetual outsider, relegated to hanging around the servants' entrance but expected to step quickly when called to serve.<sup>[9]</sup> Considering that the tug of the bell-pull calling him to serve is accompanied by intense physical pain, Doyle's initial reluctance to become a player in the game becomes understandable.

(16) The role of pain in human existence is a topic that has fascinated philosophers for millennia. Medical doctors know that pain is an extremely useful phenomenon used by the body to indicate that something is wrong and that care should be sought. Pain, therefore, is not the natural state of being. The Christian philosopher and writer C. S. Lewis addressed this issue in his work *The Problem of Pain*, viewing pain as a means by which God communicates with people, stating that "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (406). In the view of Lewis, pain is used to get our attention, to show us that our ways are not in accordance with God's plan for our lives. In this view, Doyle's painful visions have a dual purpose. First, they provide Doyle with a way to assist Angel in helping people in need and second, they remind Doyle that he is supposed to help people in need. Far from being unworthy of God's love and attention, Lewis would say that Doyle has been chosen to receive a very precious gift, one that not just anyone could carry, as the pain would be beyond what most could bear—a fact viewers see illustrated when the fully-human Cordelia later attempts to carry the visions.<sup>[10]</sup> It is the physical strength granted to Doyle by his half-demon side that enables him to endure the pain and therefore, the very part of him that Doyle so despises becomes his greatest asset and strength.

(17) To summarize, Doyle comes to seek redemption for his past cowardice and accepts the visions (and the accompanying pain) as an integral part of that process. In Whedon's work, redemption is always possible, but it requires action on the part of the penitent—a mere "I'm really sorry," no matter how sincere, accomplish nothing. Whedon's version of redemption requires the penitent to go into the world and work to make things right, rather than remaining isolated away from the hurt and sorrow of the larger world. In this way, Whedon echoes the admonition found in James 2:17 which states that "Faith without works is dead."

(18) The Christian tradition is far from singular in the insistence that redemption requires action, in addition to sincere repentance. Christianity is rooted in the traditions of the Jewish faith, which has as one of its holiest days Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur is the culmination of the High Holy Days and under Jewish tradition, prior to making peace with God and being cleansed of sin, individuals "must make our own peace with those against whom we have sinned, make our own turning to God" (Robinson 425). Simply put, it is offensive to assume that one can go before God seeking forgiveness if one has not first sought to put things right with one's fellows. A usual part of Yom Kippur services involves reading from the Book of Jonah, a story containing the theme of God's

acceptance of man's repentance (Gross 78). Jonah's story has definite echoes with the character arc of Doyle and is worth a closer examination.

(19) The first parallel that can be seen between Jonah and Doyle is the minor status of both. Just as Jonah is considered a minor prophet, with a book that spans only four chapters and a scant couple of pages in most texts, Doyle was present in less than ten percent of all *Angel* episodes. However, a person's worth is not measured merely by the length of the tale. Both Jonah and Doyle are worthy of exploration, since they cast very long shadows over the readers (or, as in Doyle's case, the viewer) of their stories.

(20) Jonah is one of those people in the Old Testament who is the recipient of direct communication with God. He is to make a beeline for the city of Nineveh and preach that the end is well and truly nigh unless the city turns from its wicked ways. Jonah, however, is sore afraid (after all, Nineveh is the capital of Assyria, an empire distinctly unfriendly to the Jewish people) and tries to escape God's call by fleeing on a boat bound for the foreign port of Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction (Buckeley). Having purchased his ticket, he "climbed down into the dark hold of the ship" to hide (Jon. 1:3). In a similar manner, Doyle also has direct communication with the god-like Powers That Be and is told to assist Angel, a task he initially tries to escape fulfilling.

(21) God's plans for His reluctant prophet Jonah are not so easily thwarted and a storm springs up which threatens to capsize the vessel. Seeking to appease the spirits, the crew draws straws to determine who has offended the gods and Jonah the monotheist draws the short one. He admits that he is attempting to run away from God and volunteers to be thrown into the sea to end the storm, an action the sailors ultimately take. It is at this point that countless Sunday school lessons teach that Jonah is swallowed by a whale (actually, a "great fish"), in whose belly he remains for three days and three nights. As has already been discussed, Doyle refused help to those in need and suffered for his inaction, tossing and turning, unable to rest due to guilt and shame. Doyle needs no outside tormenting, for his conscience serves as the "belly of the whale" where he is forced to face his own shortcomings.

(22) Humbled by the experience, Jonah prays with humility and gratitude for all God has done for him and he is delivered from the whale by being spit up on the beach. He now agrees to go to Nineveh without any further side excursions. Nineveh is a very large city—so large that it takes three days to completely circumnavigate the city and its suburbs. Jonah begins to preach and the Ninevite people, led by their king, begin to repent of their evil ways. For forty days, the citizens wear sackcloth and ashes and not even the animals eat or drink as the entire city beseeches God to spare them, which He does. Doyle, like Jonah, accepts the task that has been set for him and is delivered from his pit of despair. Doyle is shown as being a useful ally to Angel, both in providing guidance through the information contained within the visions and in his growing willingness to stick out his own neck to be an active part of the battle against evil in which Angel is engaged.

(23) The entire Book of Jonah can be read as an extensive metaphor regarding obedience and forgiveness. However, many people get tangled up in the mechanics of whether or not a whale can swallow a human being, thus missing much of the point. At any rate, as Richard Shenkman explains, in Aramaic (the language in which the Bible was



originally written), “anyone caught in a difficult situation was said to have been swallowed by a great fish” (205). Doyle has certainly found himself in a difficult situation from which there is seemingly no good way to extract himself; exactly the situation contemplated by the phrase.

(24) Rather than getting bogged down in these details, the beauty of the story of Jonah is found between the lines. Only by engaging in a close reading does one discover that Jonah’s reluctance is based in his knowledge of God’s mercy. Jonah doesn’t particularly *want* Nineveh to be saved: “For I knew you were a gracious God, merciful, slow to get angry, and full of kindness. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people” (Jon. 4:2). The Ninevites have been the enemy of Jonah’s people who are supposedly God’s chosen and Jonah has no desire to see anything happen to them aside from a good, old-fashioned Divine smiting. In contrast, Doyle is an outsider who wishes to help those in need. As such, he echoes the overarching message of the Book of Jonah, which is one of acceptance: the love and grace of God is not reserved solely for one people but is freely available to all. God wants to construct a bigger tent, while Jonah would rather build a higher wall. In likewise fashion, Doyle has been chosen by The Powers That Be to “preach” to another type of heathen outsider; in this case, Angel, the vampire with a soul. Like Jonah, Doyle has tried mightily to escape this responsibility, although for different reasons than the narrow-minded point of view Jonah had. Lastly, like Jonah, Doyle is a very effective conduit for the higher beings, whether that is the Judeo-Christian God or The Powers That Be. This is a point about Jonah that is often lost—prophets of doom are notoriously ineffective. As one example, the Book of Nahum, which directly follows the Book of Jonah, is filled with prophecies of blood and fire for Nineveh, the same city Jonah is sent to save. In contrast to Nahum, Jonah’s preaching actually has an effect—the city listens and turns away from its destructive ways, thereby saving itself. (Well, at least until the time of Nahum). Just as Jonah’s testimony and subsequent sacrifice are enough to turn the sailors away from their pagan, polytheistic ways and begin worshipping Jonah’s one God, Doyle’s pain-wracked visions greatly assist Angel in furthering his mission to “help the hopeless.” In this way, Whedon again makes a point about the need for inclusiveness: no one is beyond redemption and, at one time or another, we all need a champion to take our side, to feel that we’re worthy even if we’re not so sure. And that champion sometimes is not who we may think it is, for the world is a large and mysterious place.

(25) The weak and outnumbered need champions far more so than the strong and numerous. This is true not only in Whedon’s world, but in ours as well. For an example, one need look no further than Billings, Montana. In 1993, the residents of Billings had to face the ugly truth that hate-based crimes were increasing in their heretofore peaceful community. Racist fliers were placed on car windshields during a Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday celebration. Tombstones in the small Jewish cemetery were upended. The home of Dawn Fast Horses was covered in racist graffiti and spray-painted swastikas. The community reacted by holding candlelight vigils and helping to paint over the offensive slogans; however, the harassment continued to escalate. One night, cowards threw a chunk of cinder block through the bedroom window of Isaac Schnitzer, a Jewish boy who had placed a menorah in his window in celebration of Hanukkah. Isaac’s parents, Tammie and Brian Schnitzer, asked *The Billings Gazette* to report the incident on the front page. The *Gazette* went further, printing a large picture of a menorah on the front page and

urging citizens to place the paper symbol in the windows of their own homes and businesses as a gesture of solidarity with the minority citizens who were being harassed. Gary Svee, the editor of the *Gazette*, likened the response to the reputed actions of the Danish king Christian X who, according to legend, donned the yellow star himself when the occupying Nazi forces ordered Danish Jews to identify themselves publicly with the wearing of the infamous yellow star.[\[11\]](#) Within a few weeks, over ten thousand residents of Billings had placed the paper menorahs in their windows in a visible symbol of support. This was not an action without risk, as there continued to be incidents of vandalism and crank telephone calls ("Not in Our Town"). However, thousands of people of good will found placing the menorah in their windows to be the right course of action. In one way, these actions serve as a direct contradiction to the lament of Pastor Martin Niemöller. While multiple versions of this quotation exist, the version inscribed on the Website of the Holocaust Survivors' Network reads:

They came first for the Communists

And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews

And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists,

And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics,

And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Catholic.

Then they came for me,

And by that time no one was left to speak up.

If we fail to act as our "brother's keeper," who can we expect to "keep" us when we are the ones who require assistance? This is a question Doyle must ask of himself when faced again with the opportunity to help the weak and oppressed. He can no longer take refuge in bystander status, for through the visions, Doyle actually sees the terror of the fearful innocents. He rejects his previous philosophy of self-absorption, choosing instead to go actively into the world and assist others, doing what he can to alleviate their despair. Of course, his motivation is partly grounded in his previous guilt over his failure to help, but that in no way lessens the impact of his decision to render assistance at this point.[\[12\]](#) To Whedon, everything hinges on choice. If humans (or half-demons, for that matter) lack free will, there is no point in having intelligence and the ability to reason, for preordained actions have no more significance than the dancing of a marionette on strings.

(26) Whedon would heartily approve of the actions of the more than eleven thousand "righteous gentiles" who are honored at the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem. These were people who, at great personal risk to themselves, defied the hellish proclamations of the Nazi command against assisting their Jewish neighbors ("Righteous").



This is the same decision Doyle is faced with making—does he continue to play it safe and keep his head down, or does he step out into the light and risk everything, not knowing the outcome of his actions?

(27) Throughout his association with Angel, Doyle becomes more engaged in the world. Doyle begins by merely slinking about on the sidelines and is even reluctant to drive Angel to his first battle, protesting, "I'm not combat-ready, man! I'm just the messenger!" ("City Of" 1.1) When Doyle hears the sharp crackle of gunfire as he waits for Angel, his first reaction is to throw the car into reverse and abandon the warrior. However, his cowardly impulses are tempered by an inherent core of decency that compels him to return and crash the car into the gate in an attempt to storm the castle.<sup>[13]</sup> This dichotomy is a hallmark of Whedon's work—the rough-edged Doyle is a rogue, but a very lovable one.<sup>[14]</sup> He is depicted as being altogether too fond of drinking and gambling. His fashion sense causes the ever-stylish Cordelia to regard him with undisguised contempt. Further, he spends much of his time searching for shortcuts that are intended to help him avoid the pitfalls of an honest living based on hard work, but often backfire and cause him additional trouble. For example, in "Rm w/a Vu" (1.5), Doyle uses his not-quite-legitimate connections to help Cordelia find an amazing rent-controlled apartment after her own attempts to find a suitable place fail. When she finally agrees to let him help, his reaction is one of relief mixed with exasperation: "Finally! What is it with you and Angel? You have to do everything the hard way" ("Rm w/a Vu" 1.5). Doyle's motivation here is not entirely altruistic, as Doyle has a crush on the unapproachable Cordelia and he fears her rejection of him. For that reason, he is careful to conceal his half-demon heritage from her. When the apartment turns out to be haunted by the malicious ghost of its previous occupant (who had walled her son up alive in the living room), Doyle uses his knowledge of magic and displays a willingness to help in cleansing the space. Later, in "The Bachelor Party" (1.7), Doyle single-handedly rescues Cordelia from a vampire attack after Cordelia's pretty-boy date has turned tail and fled. Beaten badly himself, his first question is to Cordelia—"Are you okay?" Clearly, he is closer to being the volunteering "Francis" of old than the wheeler-dealer "Doyle" of Los Angeles. He's learning from his previous mistakes and is making good use of his second chance. Whedon is willing to grant a true penitent a second chance, but rejecting that opportunity in no way guarantees that a third will be extended.

(28) By the time of "Hero" (1.9), the final episode in which Doyle appears, he has made great strides in being an active member of the team. Even so, he is reluctant to take on the threat presented by the Scourge, knowing the bloody fate of the other half-demons who futilely tried to fight the Scourge's twisted ideas of racial purity. It is at this point that Angel learns from Doyle the source of his guilt and shame, the event for which Doyle is trying to atone.

(29) The Lister half-demons who are trying to flee the Scourge are seeking the fulfillment of a prophecy that foretells the coming of a "Promised One" who will save them. The very next camera shot frames a nervous Doyle, although the assumption is that the heroic Angel must be the champion the frightened half-demons are so hopefully seeking. As previously discussed, prophecies are tricky things and in Whedon's work it is nearly always a mistake to confuse appearances with the actual article.

(30) Throughout his time on the show, Doyle hides his demonic visage if at all

possible and prefers to “pass” as human, although he is shown to be stronger (and therefore more effective in a fight) in demon form. Doyle is repeatedly shown to despise his demonic side, which he views as unnatural and therefore shameful and inferior. Similar to Buffy, Doyle longs to be “normal” and to fit in seamlessly with everybody else. Ironically, it is the very part of him he so despises that will grant Doyle the necessary physical strength to carry through with the heroic choices he will make, for choices are the defining characteristic in Whedon’s work, not blood heritage. Therefore, half-demons have the same opportunity to be heroes as petite blonde cheerleaders.

(31) Wishing to exterminate the “mixed-bloods” more quickly and efficiently, the Scourge have developed a new killing machine. This new weapon is a beacon that is very opposite of symbolizing the bright light of civilization and knowledge. Rather, this powerful weapon of mass destruction seeks out and annihilates anyone with human blood who is unfortunate enough to be within a quarter-mile of the scorching light.

(32) Even though Doyle still would prefer to stay on the sidelines, remarking to Angel at the beginning of this episode, “Tell you what. You fight, and I’ll keep score,” he has accepted the fact that this path is no longer open to him. When the half-breed demons arrive seeking the help of their supposed Promised One, Doyle involves himself to a greater degree than viewers had ever before seen. When Rieff, one of the younger members of the tribe, runs away, convinced that the plan to escape the Scourge on a freighter is foolhardy and doomed to failure, Doyle seeks out the boy and provides counsel to him rooted in his own experience:

[Your family] put their faith in something, Rieff. You don’t have to if you don’t want to . . . but the other option, losing yourself somewhere, hoping it all goes away—I *know* that never works. (“Hero,” 1.9)

Able to shore up Rieff’s rocky faith, Doyle convinces the boy that his place is with his family and the two return to the docks. Cordelia, who has learned from the leader of the half-demons of Doyle’s own mixed heritage, reveals that she can accept that and is actually a bit miffed that he thought otherwise. Well, well—things are looking up for Doyle. He’s brought the lost lamb back to the fold and his crush has let him know that she can handle his heritage if he can. The path looks promising. However, when things look happy and bright in Whedon’s world, it’s best to buckle up—rough road is likely to be ahead.

(33) The Scourge has also tracked the half-demons to the freighter and the beacon is deployed to kill anyone—human, vampire, or half-demon—who carries human blood in their veins. Angel, who has been cast as the hero from the beginning, is prepared to sacrifice himself in order to save the innocents. Doyle knows from his visions that Angel has a continuing purpose on Earth that will be thwarted by this action, even if it is calculated to save roughly two dozen people.

(34) John 15:13 states that “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Doyle is about to disprove this—the greatest love comes not from throwing yourself on a hand grenade to save your friends, but from saving strangers to whom you have no tie other than those created by simply occupying the same planet at the same time. Seeing that the time has come for a decision to be made that no one else can make for him, Doyle takes decisive action. Perhaps at some point in his life, Doyle

read John Donne and is familiar with Donne's observation that

Reason is our Soules left hand, Faith her right,  
By these we reach divinity. (149)

Having reached a balance between these two concepts, Doyle is no longer paralyzed into inaction and guilt. Shrugging off those burdens, he swings the "fist of faith" at Angel to knock him out of the way. With Angel unable to stop him (and thereby guaranteed a continued life to help others), Doyle changes into his stronger demon form and takes a literal "leap of faith" over the chasm to disconnect the beacon. [15] For once wearing his true face, he turns back to his friends who have given him the gifts of self-awareness and forgiveness and Doyle smiles, apparently at peace with his path of action. He disconnects the beacon, steadfastly maintaining his place even as the light painfully scorches away all that he is. If Doyle enters divinity as contemplated by Donne, he does it screaming.

(35) Unlike Buffy, there is no bodily resurrection for Doyle. But while he loses his life, in the larger context, Doyle doesn't lose. Redemption is possible for Whedon's characters, but it takes hard work and there is no guarantee that the work won't hurt or that you'll come back from the journey. However, one of Whedon's main points is that, despite the risks, it's still worthwhile to set out on the journey.

(36) As to how much atonement equals redemption, Whedon never answers that directly. That may be good, for if there were a definite answer, most seekers would probably stop looking. However, one answer can be found in the prayer of Thomas Merton, who reassured himself that "I believe the desire to please God does in fact please God" (qtd. in Jackowski 89). Whether or not Doyle's sacrifice balances the Divine scales is a question that cannot be answered with certainty. Regardless, Doyle leaves behind a worthy legacy, for he illustrates the idea that we all matter, even if we sometimes don't think that we do. Moreover, he reminds us that while we all deserve a second chance, it's up to us to make the most of that opportunity.

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## Notes

[1] Actually, Angel is guided by two "good demons." The first is Whistler, who seeks Angel out when the soul-filled vampire is still wandering aimlessly through his Unlife, wracked by guilt and remorse. In an effort to make Angel a force for good, Whistler takes Angel to Los Angeles to observe Buffy, who has just been called to be the Slayer. The experience causes Angel to rouse himself from his overwhelming despair and get involved in the human world ("Becoming, Part One" 2.21). In the second part of this episode, Whistler is the one who convinces Buffy to take the necessary action to halt the evil Angelus. In addition to both being "good demons," both Whistler and Doyle seem to share the same fashion sense, including an affinity for loud bowling shirts and questionable hats. The clothes hound hellgod Glorificus would probably have them both flayed for their lack of style.

[2] Think of the floppy-eared Clem who seems cuddly, but includes kittens in his diet.

[3] Attempts to equate The Powers That Be with God are met with this rather coy response from Whedon: "We keep it vague for a reason. If people want to believe it's God,

we're not going to say it's not any more than we're going to say it is" (qtd. in Golden 4).

[4] In another example of Whedon's fun with gender-based names, Doyle also has a lovely blonde wife (later his ex-wife) named "Harriet" who he consistently refers to as "Harry." She is the only one to call Doyle by his given name of Francis, who Doyle seems to regard as someone he once was, but is no longer. This is explored in greater depth further in the chapter.

[5] The parallels between the Scourge and groups devoted to so-called "ethnic cleansing" are both obvious and intentional. In particular, the portrayal of the jackbooted, militaristic Scourge has strong echoes with Nazis. This comparison grows stronger when the viewer sees the half-blood Lister demons in "Hero" (1.09) hiding in secret compartments in the basement and running desperately to escape the country, much as European Jews did during the time of the Third Reich.

[6] Although beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that the half-Irish Doyle is guilty here of violating the ancient Celtic law of hospitality, which obliged all to extend food, drink, entertainment and a bed to any who appeared on their doorstep, regardless of the guest's social status, destination, or even identity. In fact, the failure to extend suitable hospitality was considered an embarrassment and was punishable by a "blush fine." See <http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Article/617978>.

[7] Although both Joshua and the child Samuel appear to come through these encounters unscathed. See Josh. 1:1 – 9 and 4:1 – 7 as well as 1 Sam. 3:1 – 14.

[8] Fever dreams, if you ask me, but dreams in any event. Also worthy of note is the fact that Matthew recounts that the wife of Pontius Pilate has a dream about Jesus that is so vivid that she attempts to dissuade her husband from having anything to do with his trial (Matt. 27:19). Her efforts are, of course, futile

[9] Interestingly, in this way, Doyle can also be considered to be filling a traditional woman's role in a patriarchal society. Of course, as a half-demon, Doyle is a constant outsider. Humans fear the demon; demons distrust the human. Doyle's best fit comes with the other "misfit toys" like Angel, who has a foot in two worlds, but feels comfortable in neither. If only he'd met Lorne . . .

[10] The effects of the visions are bad enough for the half-demon Doyle; they will nearly kill the human Cordelia when the visions are passed on to her. Cordelia will ultimately make the choice to become part demon herself in order to withstand the pain, rationalizing that the usefulness of the information contained in the visions is worth the cost. "Cordelia" is also the name of King Lear's youngest daughter, the one who is disinherited for speaking the bald truth, instead of syrupy, sugar-coated flatteries. Whedon again shows his strong grounding in the classics by giving this name to Angel's often-tactless friend and occasional office manager.

[11] It's a lovely legend of the power of non-violence, but in fact never occurred. No order for Danish Jews to ever wear the loathsome symbol was ever issued by the Nazi command. See <http://www.snopes.com/history/govern/denmark.htm>. However, the Danes did make an organized effort to transport their Jewish citizens to the safety of Sweden, so the spirit of the legend is true, even if the specific details have been romanticized.

[12] Of course, Angel has a similar motivation, although in Angel's case, he spent a century actively causing the terror and mayhem to the sort of innocents he now seeks to protect. Again, his are sins of *commission*, as opposed to Doyle's sins of *omission*.

[13] The effort fails. Doyle, it seems, is not even a good gate-crasher. In a way,

this is another echo with the problems of the "good vampire" Angel, who cannot enter a home without the express invitation of the owner.

[\[14\]](#) Doyle has an overabundance of Irish charm. As viewers learn, it's not an unadulterated gift, as charm can often be a type of curse.

[\[15\]](#) He also gives Cordelia the kiss of a lifetime, as the power to receive the visions are transferred to her by The Powers That Be. Perhaps this is a sign that Doyle has been released from his service; that his atonement is complete.