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Evil's Not the Point – Lindsey McDonald and Power in Angel Season 5

by [Peasant](#)

Summary

An essay considering what motivated Lindsey McDonald, and what he was really planning in AtS Season 5.

Lindsey McDonald fought his way up from nothing – it was one of the first things we learnt about him.

Lindsey

I guess it's fair to say that you've never seen anything like real poverty. I'm talking dirt poor – no shoes, no toilet. Six of us kids in a room, and come flu season it was down to four. I was seven when they took the house. They just came right in and took it. And my daddy is being nice, you know? Joking with the bastards while he signs the deed. Yeah, so we had a choice. Either you got stepped on or you got to stepping and I swore to myself that I was not going to be the guy standing there with the stupid grin on my face while my life got dribbled out.

[Blind Date](#)

Now if we have any decency this should make us feel sorry for him, but the thing to bear in mind is that these early experiences did not make a victim, nor someone who feels particularly sorry for himself, they forged a man with a very high opinion of himself. He had pulled himself up from nothing and knew it. I think we can safely imagine him as the brightest kid in any company he experienced from the age of seven onwards, the one with not just the ambition but the knowledge he had the brains and the drive to pull it off. And the result was not just a success story but an extremely arrogant young man. Many characters in the Buffyverse are motivated by a desire to get others to love, like or approve of them – Angel seems to be mostly driven by such an urge. The

longing he felt for his father's approval became transformed into longing for the approval of first Darla and his fellow demons and then Buffy, Cordy and the rest of the AI team. By contrast Lindsey does not long for other people's approval – he wants people to have as high opinion of him as he does himself. Faced with such disapproval, whilst Angel would be upset and turn inwards, reflecting on his own failings, if someone cannot share and show a suitably high opinion of Lindsey McDonald then he will turn vicious on them. There is a vital difference. The first thing Angel did on meeting Lindsey was mock and ignore him, that was all he needed to do to become an enemy. Chucking a favoured client out of the window was just a minor irritation compared to that.

Unfortunately, some of the most important people to fail to value Lindsey highly enough were his own employers. The first time was when Holland chose to overlook rather than applaud Lindsey's crisis of conscience in [Blind Date](#). The second when Lilah was promoted alongside of him. But the final straw that broke Lindsey was when Wolfram and Hart gave him the hand of a murderer. From seeing himself as the favoured employee he was suddenly forced to realise he was just a piece of meat to them – a tool to be used and repaired as necessary, whose conscience could be safely ignored. That conscience – fragile and small as it is – was far too important to him for him to allow it to be unimportant to anyone else, and thus Wolfram & Hart became his enemies.

Ambition, arrogance, and a conscience combine to make up Lindsey McDonald. In that order. It is a moot point whether or not he cared for his women. If as Eve says he had spent years studying the Senior Partners can we really believe that he considered Eve – a child of the partners, their instrument on earth – as just a pretty girlfriend? She for her part was clearly actively helping him from an early stage, as witness her planting the Selminth parasites in [Soul Purpose](#) and helping with the Sirk red-herring in [Destiny](#). Maybe he did feel some sort of love for her:

Lindsey

Damn, girl, you gave up immortality for me. It's like something out of a fairy tale.

[Not Fade Away](#)

Something out of a fairytale for him maybe, but this strikes me as an unattractive, selfish sort of love – as if Eve's value in his eyes comes only from what she will do for him. Once again Lindsey is looking for others to value him as much as he values himself. I think he certainly had feelings for Darla and Eve that went beyond merely using them to further his ambition, or companionship, but ultimately it is irrelevant because there is no doubt that whatever else he was getting from the relationship he was using them both for his personal aims as well.

What then were those aims? In a word – power.

Lindsey

Evil's not the point. Power is.

[Power Play](#)

In [Underneath](#) we learn that Lindsey has dedicated years of his life to studying the Senior Partners and that while he really doesn't like Angel he is playing for something much bigger than mere revenge. Revenge in terms of beating an enemy is after all just the icing on the cake as far as Lindsey is concerned, the cake itself is winning whatever the enemy had. So while he wants revenge on both Wolfram & Hart and Angel, more than either he wants power, over them and anything else he can get. Power is the true revenge in his eyes.

He didn't want to bring down Wolfram & Hart, he wanted to run it. And his tool was to be Angel.

Eve

There was someone who could've told you everything you want to know... and you let the senior partners take him away.

Angel

Lindsey.

Eve

Lindsey's dedicated years of his life to the study of the senior partners. No one knows more about them than he does – what they've done, what they plan to do.

Angel

I thought he was after me. You're saying bringing Spike back, the fail-safe, that was all about the senior partners?

Eve

No. It's about you, too. He really doesn't like you. But he may know more about you than... well, than you do.

[Underneath](#)

This conversation, especially the last part, is distracting because it leaves the attention focused on the fact that Lindsey's dislike for Angel is important, but look at what Angel says and Eve doesn't deny – that bringing Spike back and the attempt to trigger the failsafe in [You're Welcome](#) were actions aimed mainly at the Senior Partners.

How then were Lindsey's plans intended to work?

To understand this we need to understand the Senior Partner's plans for Angel. Fortunately they never made any secret of these – Wolfram & Hart wanted their own apocalypse, as opposed to anyone else's, and they wanted Angel to be on their side in it. We even know how this particular apocalypse is to be organised – in [Underneath](#) we have confirmed what was hinted at in [Reprise](#) – that the Senior Partner's apocalypse is a slow running business of grinding out the good in the world rather than a big bang affair such as most apocalyptic types have gone for in the Jossyverse. And quite why the vampire with the soul is so important the Senior Partner's don't know, but they certainly want to make sure he is helping them not hindering. They don't want him dead they want him dark.

The Senior Partners know a lot about Angel and his associates – they have 35 filing cabinets of records with information dating right back to details about his human family. It is a fair bet that they also know quite a lot about Buffy and her character. They also must know about Spike. They know there is another souled vampire in the world. They know that if he becomes a champion the uncertainty in the Shanshu prophecy could rip the world apart. So I believe they gave the amulet to Angel taking the reasonable gamble that Buffy would reject him and the rejection would be useful fuel in adding to Angel's despair and sense of being cut off from his old 'good' associates. Meanwhile the amulet would both remove the threat of an alternative apocalypse and get rid of Spike and the threat he posed. If Buffy didn't reject him then Angel would die and the souled vampire in the prophecy would be confirmed as Spike – quite possibly an easier target to corrupt than Angel. It was a win-win situation for the partners.

Then Lindsey steps in and resurrects Spike by magical means unknown but not too implausible since he has clearly learnt some quite powerful magic in the three years since his departure in [Dead End](#), as witnessed by his magically enhanced fighting skills and the protection tattoos. But why do it at all?

Spike's presence is clearly very much part of Lindsey's plan and antithetical to the Senior Partners'. But that doesn't mean that the logic is all that different. A souled vampire is necessary to

the apocalypse since it is prophesied. If that vampire isn't Angel then it has to be Spike, so if Lindsey's plan involves a significant risk to Angel then he needs the reserve souled vamp on stand-by otherwise the apocalypse itself is at risk. Why does Lindsey care about the apocalypse – simple, because the Senior Partners do, more than they care about anything else, and thus the apocalypse is the one thing that Lindsey cannot put at risk.

He can change the method, he can tinker at the edges, but if the apocalypse itself is endangered then he can't have the thing he most wants – power. Because the route to power Lindsey has chosen is through the Circle of the Black Thorn. His aim was to join or better still replace it. It was why he came back to L.A. and why he didn't attempt to escape after Angel released him from hell.

Wesley

That's why you came back to L.A., tried to kill Angel. To get into the circle.

Lindsey

To be a Black Thorn is to be the senior partners' instrument on Earth. Doesn't get bigger than that.

[Power Play](#)

Which meant that far from gaining revenge on the Senior Partners he was still trying to impress them. Lindsey McDonald, the boy who dragged himself up out of the gutter, was just trying for promotion.

The initial problem for Lindsey, from the moment he found out about their existence, was how to become a Black Thorn. For a human, and a human who had left the firm under a cloud to boot, such a thing should have been near impossible. But in Wolfram & Hart the accepted way to win promotion was over the bodies of your colleagues, and like a good little former employee that is exactly what Lindsey set about trying to do. The failsafe device that he tried to trigger in [You're Welcome](#) makes sense if viewed in these terms. The aim was not to wreck Wolfram & Hart – a firm that has repeatedly shown its ability to rise above the small matter of employees getting massacred, besides the majority of the staff had been warned to get out – I think the aim was to eliminate some of Lindsey's competition because the only people left at risk were Angel and co.. Now while Lindsey obviously wanted revenge on Angel there should be simpler ways to do it, and he had no particular beef with Wes or Gunn, while Fred he barely knew, but by killing them all at once he could create a power vacuum at Wolfram & Hart, one which he doubtless intended to fill.

That then is what colours his whole attitude to Angel and Spike. Even though Angel is currently the Senior Partner's golden boy if Lindsey can kill him, either directly by sword or indirectly by setting Spike or the failsafe onto him, then according to the normal promotion methods of Wolfram & Hart he will have impressed the Senior Partners enough to be accepted into the Black Thorn. As he said himself, the key to elevation to the Black Thorn is killing:

Lindsey

Probably wouldn't even make it on the circle's radar until he killed one of his lieutenants.

[Power Play](#)

And so long as Spike was still around and being groomed as alternative champion for the apocalypse (with his chosen side still nicely uncertain) the Senior Partners wouldn't blink an eye. Is that why Lindsey was confined in such a reasonably light hell – a holding dimension rather than the nastiness that precedent would suggest?

Gunn

No news, but goin' off of company precedent, right about now Lindsey should be boiling in his own filth.

Why We Fight

Because he hadn't actually annoyed the Senior Partners as much as it might seem on paper. Yes he had attempted to hide from them, maybe trespassed a little and possibly damaged the failsafe device, but attempting to kill Angel needn't necessarily be the crime of crimes in their eyes since he had thoughtfully provided Spike as a spare. Maybe the Senior Partners too were growing a little tired of Angel and considering Spike as a more feasible alternative. Angel, with his tendency towards darkness, would obviously make a good first choice, but despite all that darkness and all the temptations they could throw at him he was holding up remarkably well – maybe the Senior partners were starting to let their eye stray towards the other souled vampire as shown by the hardening of their stance when they replaced Eve (a temptation – the carrot) with Hamilton (a threat – the stick).

Hamilton

Spike... Welcome to the team.

Underneath

Spike of course had other potential uses than just as an alternative souled champion to Angel. He was used by Lindsey as first a possible means of killing Angel (*Destiny*) and then to try to remove the threat of Cordelia winning Angel back to the side of the Powers so unequivocally that he left Wolfram & Hart (*You're Welcome*). But why should Lindsey care if Angel left Wolfram & Hart? Surely that should have made it easier to kill him?

Well in fact Lindsey wanted Angel in charge as much as the Senior Partners did – not like them to corrupt him, but because having Angel as the CEO served Lindsey's purpose both ways. Angel outside Wolfram & Hart could be nothing but a danger to Lindsey's plans. But with Angel as CEO, either Lindsey could kill Angel and win his position with the firm, or while Angel stayed in power he, unlike any other potential CEO, could be used to eliminate members of the Black Thorn, thus clearing the path for Lindsey.

The ironic thing is that Angel ended up offering Lindsey the one thing he wanted most.

Angel

We tear up this firm, someone's going to have to step in. I know that's what you want.

Not Fade Away

And Lindsey accepted. Of course he accepted. Did his conscience step in at least a little and tell him helping Angel was the right thing to do? Possibly. Underneath everything Lindsey did have a conscience and I am sure he would feel better about himself if he thought he was in some way on the side of right. However his stated reason was something else.

Lindsey

Everybody goes on about your soul. Vampire with a soul. Nobody ever mentions the fact that you're really a vampire with big brass testes. This is gonna be a circus. I mean, win or lose, you're about to pick the nastiest fight since mankind drop-kicked the last demon out of this dimension. And that you don't do without me. If you want me, I'm on your team.

[Not Fade Away](#)

In other words he admired Angel and wanted to be part of his team. Huh? Since when did he admire Angel? Well of course the answer is obvious – since Angel started showing Lindsey the proper respect that Lindsey considered was his due. For the first time ever Angel had flattered him, stated he was 'good in a fight', asked him to help. So for the first time ever arrogant little Lindsey could allow himself to approve of Angel. It is in fact entirely in character.

Did Angel know that? Angel isn't as dumb as he sometimes plays, and if he planned anything carefully then it was his last fight, so I think he knew exactly what he was doing and how to get Lindsey to say yes, because he did indeed need him for once – there were too many of the Black Thorn for his own people to manage alone.

But then Angel had Lindsey killed. It obviously had to be done by Lorne since Angel's resources were stretched so thin and this was one thing Lorne (not much use in a straight fight) actually could do. Hard as such a thing was for Lorne I think we can see that he acknowledged the necessity. I doubt he suggested it, indeed his last message to Angel implies he was only doing as he was asked as a final favour, and was so disgusted by what he had to do he would want nothing to do with Angel ever again, even if they did somehow survive.

Lorne

Hey, Ange, uh, I'll do this last thing for you, for us... but then I'm out, and you won't find me in the alley afterwards. Hell, you won't find me at all. Do me a favor – don't try.

[Not Fade Away](#)

But how and why did Angel persuade him – was it necessary at all? Well I would say so without a shadow of a doubt. Driven by his ambition Lindsey never once said he wanted to help harm the senior partners, nor hinder the spread of evil, and as Angel had ascertained he would be all too willing to run things instead of the Black Thorn. Bear in mind what Lindsey used to do for a living. Consider how we first saw him back in [City Of](#) helping the vampire that tried to kill Cordelia get away with his murder of Tina. This is not a nice guy. This is not someone who could be relied on to work for any good beyond himself. This is an artfully clever lawyer with strong magical abilities, who had spent the whole of his adult life trying to rise to the top in a demonic law firm. He was indeed part of the problem not the solution and as such I do not criticise Angel's decision to have him killed. But then I never liked the man.

And what about Angel's plan? Well with Lindsey dead as well as the members of the Black Thorn one can only wonder just who *was* left to take over. (I rather hope it was Ilona Costa Bianchi) Whoever it was, Angel did undoubtedly hurt the Senior Partners greatly that day. But it is just possible he did more than that. The one thing that Wolfram & Hart always insisted upon was that the vampire with a soul was vital to the apocalypse, without him the apocalypse itself couldn't happen – and the apocalypse as we know was a slow burning thing, by no means over. The prophecy required a souled vampire to play a big part, could that part really have just been killing the Black Thorn and inconveniencing the Senior Partners until they found replacements? That hardly seems the vital thing upon which the whole fate of the apocalypse must depend.

And yet... by choosing not just to attack the Senior Partners but to attack them in such a manner that both he and Spike had barely any chance of survival did Angel perhaps achieve his ultimate goal after all? By laying down the lives of the only two souled vampires in the world did he cheat the Wolf the Ram and the Hart of their apocalypse entirely? Did they not just fight well but actually win?

This essay was written for **Itsabigrock**'s [essaython](#).

The request by Tris/**Hobviously**:

Dissect the true intent of Lindsey's actions in S5, and for the love of beek explain why Angel felt it was so necessary to have him killed specifically. Or, same event, different angle: why was Lorne the assassin? This isolated him from the rest of the alley gang and he was pretty obviously upset about it, so....why? Was it his decision or Angel's?

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