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The Cabin in the Woods

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The Cabin in the Woods

Abstract

This is a film review of *The Cabin the Woods* (2011), directed by Drew Goddard.

The Cabin in the Woods is a thrilling voyage into the realms of the supernatural and the human mind, created by director Drew Goddard. To the casual viewer, it presents itself as a fairly typical example of the horror genre; a group of college students venture out to a remote cabin to get away from the stresses of student life. Soon they discover the cabin's basement, filled with random memorabilia. Upon reading a diary of a young girl who was a member of a sadistic, masochistic family unit, the group unwittingly raise the family from the dead, who then seek to kill them all. Surrounding this cliché setting and storyline, is a far more complex wider theme: the group have been lured to the cabin by a mysterious organization. The entire setting, including the forest and landscape, is fabricated by this organization which via an invisible shield, which allows the students to enter onto the "set" but does not allow any escape. As the film evolves, two of the teens, Dana (Kristen Connolly) and Marty (Fran Kranz), escape through a safety hatch from which the zombies emerged. There they find themselves in one of thousands of small glass boxes, each containing a creature of the horror genre. The purpose of this entire creation, as they discover, is that they are sacrificial victims to ancient gods that constantly threaten humanity; that their deaths are required to keep these gods sleeping and therefore, preserve the human race. However, the two survivors eventually decide not to sacrifice themselves and, instead of preserving the human race, they bring about its destruction.

The film is not explicitly religious, but it is fascinating on the grounds that it comments philosophically upon the question of human nature through a critique of the genre of horror. It is a remarkable critique that hides itself within the genre only to expose itself to reveal the darker aspect of the functions of the horror genre within humanity. Horror is a genre that features bloodshed and the suffering of others for us as neutral observers to watch. This is often done by making the characters in these

films as superficial as possible; for example, a motley group of carefree teens whose lives are a dedication to base pleasures. What this film does differently is it takes this aspect of watching a horror and slaps the audience in the face with it. It critiques this characteristic of the genre by drawing our attention to the archetypal characters that exist within many typical horror movies; the slut, the hero, the intellectual, the virgin and the nerd. The film is an attack at this enjoyment we feel at watching horror and the chief method by which it initiates this critique is through the insertion of the ominous, overseeing organization to the narrative.

Our main gateway into the organization is through two men, Hadley (Bradley Whitford) and Sitterson (Richard Jenkins) who oversee the sacrifice of the five students. However, they do not only oversee this, but also run a game of bets over which horrible creature the group will un-wittingly summon to kill them. They also watch perversely as two of the victims engage in sex. What the organization does is it removes the audience from their position as spectators of a horror movie and wakes us up to the fact that this is exactly how the majority of an audience react when watching horror. It creates a strong sense of empathy for the students and a rather disconcerting feeling regarding our mind-set having entered the cinema to watch what we assumed would be a typical horror. What the organization is, with its shocking lack of moral substance, is an analysis of the darker side of the human sub-conscious. Possibly what Freud called the 'id'; the raw and untamed desires that exist within the human mind. Therefore, the film brings this element of our minds to the surface before us and shocks us in a way we had not expected. John C. Lyden theorises in his book *Film as Religion Myths, Morals and Rituals*, that film can transfer to its audience messages which the audience receive because they can relate to the characters or some other element of the film. But in *The Cabin in the Woods* those characters that it presents

for us to relate to are those involved in the operations of the organization; the film even begins with the two operators discussing personal matters of their private lives, such as Hadley's wife's pregnancy.

All this is an analysis of the philosophical quality of the bulk of the film. However, the film actually does make a rather bold and shocking, religiously explicit assertion. This is done when, at the end of the film, there is a slight shift in genre; from horror to apocalyptic film.

In many films concerning the demise of the human race, the cause of our destruction is a natural disaster. Sometimes, like in *The Cabin in the Woods* our end is at the hand of monsters, titans or gods. However, there are certain key differences between this film and others of the genre, specifically the idea of redemption of humanity and the nature by which the apocalypse is brought about. In many of these films, a portion of humanity will survive and even move on to continue the species. This leaves the audience with a feeling of optimism for humanity. *The Cabin in the Woods* leaves us with no such comfort. Its turning of the horror genre as a method by which it philosophically critiques humanity, is finalised with a pessimistic vision of our apocalypse which offers us no redemption. The apocalypse is brought about by two human beings themselves, who choose to end the existence of the species on the grounds that humanity exists solely to cause suffering. This, as the earlier section of the film shows, is revelled in by fellow human beings, watching from afar. In other words, the film condemns humanity as a species that willingly brings about death in order to continue.

The Cabin in the Woods is a remarkable film in that it both manages to scare in the typical ways that horror does and to shock on a very different level. It satisfies the purpose of a horror in bringing to life the supernatural to terrify and shock. But it

also holds in store for viewers a far more complex, satirical shock that moves the audience from the safety of their seats. It throws before its audience a particularly pessimistic message that is distinctly intrusive and condemning. However, amongst all the satire, the film still entertains as well as scares. Amongst the dark ending, paradoxically is comedy. Though perhaps this may be simply a continuation of the critique through creating a mockery out of the horror genre, it still helps to soothe the wound created by the shock of the film's revelations. Overall the film at times may appear to be a little silly, but don't be fooled. It's actually an exceedingly clever and enjoyable film that can be appreciated by a varied audience.