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A Black Rift Begins to Yawn

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A Black Rift Begins to Yawn

Abstract

This is a film review of *A Black Rift Begins to Yawn* (2021), directed by Matthew Wade.

Keywords

Lovecraft, Elder Gods, Great Old Ones, Cosmic Horror

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A Black Rift Begins to Yawn (2021), dir. Matthew Wade

Credited with creating the literary genre known as “cosmic horror,” early 20th century author H.P. Lovecraft and his voluminous body of work continue to serve as popular source material to translate into television, film, and other popular media. From comic books, video games, and roleplaying games to movies like *The Dunwich Horror*, *From Beyond*, *Dagon*, *Banshee Chapter* and more recent offerings like *Color Out of Space* and the HBO series *Lovecraft Country*, Lovecraft’s ideas remain an enduring source of inspiration for creators across multiple entertainment genres.

Amidst this rich creative backdrop, director/script writer Matthew Wade’s *A Black Rift Begins to Yawn* is among the newest cinematic adaptations of a Lovecraftian focus on ordinary reality slowly being invaded and eclipsed by a “wholly other” order of reality—one entirely alien and inimical to this world. Without the budget and the resources of prior films in the genre, Wade focuses instead almost entirely on instilling a haunting atmosphere, eerie musical score, and

ominous mood in lieu of a large cast and setting. Set mostly in a cabin in the forest, the film centers on two university classmates, Lara (Saratops McDonald) and Laura (Sara Lynch) reading their missing professor's journals and listening to tape recordings he made of mysterious signals emitting from an unknown location.

As Lara and Laura delve deeper into their former professor's writings, his psychological decline over time becomes apparent. Listening to the bizarre audio recordings also begins to encroach upon Lara and Laura's psyches, as their own grasp of reality starts to unravel and disintegrate. This touches on a central tenet of Lovecraftian cosmic horror, which posits an unfathomably ancient race of entities interchangeably known as "The Great Old Ones" or "The Elder Gods" who predate all of existence throughout the galaxy and are currently in hibernation and prevented from physically entering this reality. To awaken from their slumber and return to this world, they telepathically manipulate lonely and isolated people into seeking the true history of the cosmos and the Elder Gods' role in it. Discovery of this forbidden truth usually coincides with the person(s) going insane as well as overturning all of the comfortable certainties of ordinary reality, including the basis of human knowledge and religious truth. Lara and Laura's psychological tribulations are alluded to by way of cuts to haunting scenery and music, all of which lends a fever dream, otherworldly ambiance to the movie as it unfolds. The aesthetics symbolize descent into possible madness as well as leaving the viewer feeling that a hellscape lay beneath the veneer of ordinary reality, slowly seeping into this world.

While *A Black Rift Begins to Yawn* is not particularly scary, it is to be commended for its dreamlike cinematography, strong soundtrack, and an overall disorienting atmosphere of creeping dread, important characteristics in cosmic horror. Some shortcomings of the film concern a fairly bare plot that causes the storyline to meander in parts as a result. The characters, while played well

by McDonald and Lynch respectively, could have benefited from further elaboration. Overall, despite these issues, *A Black Rift Begins to Yawn* is a welcome addition to the cinematic cosmic horror genre.