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Reboot Camp

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Reboot Camp

Abstract

This is a film review of *Reboot Camp* (2020), directed by Ivo Raza.

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Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film and is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. He is also the editor of the *Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (2009).

This movie starts with the following quote:

“You can make anyone believe anything,
as long as you are wearing the right costume.”

This is the point in the film where I started laughing and I didn’t stop laughing until the movie turned serious and sad.

Two brothers, Seymour and Danny, and a filmmaker friend (Cooper Johnson) decide to make a documentary film. The film is designed to show the absurdity of what people are willing to believe, not from an outside perspective, but from the inside. Seymour and Danny will bring together a group of people and get them to participate in all sorts of silly and absurd activities.

At the end of the film there will be a “big reveal” where the participants will discover that Reboot Camp has been a con all along and they will realize their behavior and beliefs have been foolish. What they thought was a process of healing and re-creation was, instead, an intentionally misleading program designed to show how silly people can be. All of this will be caught on camera. The purpose of the documentary is to keep other people from going down the same path as the participants in Reboot Camp.

Seymour adopts the name, Gordon St. Pierre, affects an accent, wears a skirt over his shorts (“the right costume”) and becomes the leader of Reboot Camp. And now the laughs begin. Participants are put in blow-up coffins so they can experience rebirth and they are each given their own porcelain toilet to symbolically rid themselves of negative vibes. And so it goes and the laughter continues.

The one rule of Reboot Camp is that the Camp takes no money from the participants. This is not a case of duping people for their money: the participants are already being used in the making of the documentary.

Later in the film, Cooper insists that the brothers hire his niece, Claire. The brothers are reluctant to let anyone else have a say in the making of the film, but they need the continued financial support of Cooper, so they hire Claire.

Of course, Claire has different ideas for Reboot Camp. She sees this as a great opportunity to con people out of their money. She even collects a bunch of the meaningless sayings from the Camp and puts them in a book which the Camp can sell not only to participants but to the public at large. Yes, for Claire the green is queen.

Things have changed. Claire convinces Seymour to follow her down the money path, renaming him “Sherpa.” Seymour, the con artist, has become the conned. Danny, unable to abandon the original purpose of the film, refuses to follow Claire who has become the new leader of Reboot Camp.

Six months later Danny returns to the camp and the brothers reconcile. Claire brings all of the participants together for a big event and this is when Seymour makes the “big reveal.” Instead of the participants realizing that they have been conned and feeling shame for their foolishness, Claire turns the reveal into an affirmation of Reboot Camp. The “big reveal” is lost on the participants, many of whom now turn on Seymour and Danny for disloyalty to the Reboot Camp program. Claire renames the camp the Reboot Collective and at the end of the film she has increased the size of the Collective to over 300 members, all following the person in the right costume.

The point of the movie is to show how susceptible we all are to believing nonsense, especially when the nonsense makes us feel better. Beware the guru! Beware the cult! But maybe the movie is not just about gurus and cults. Maybe it is a statement about religions in general. Are the beliefs of ordinary religion silly and absurd? Do we follow religions, not because they make

sense, but because they make us feel good? If that's the message of the movie, it is a much larger and more profound message.

Finally, if we expand the message of the movie beyond religion and apply it to politics as well, the message would be: be wary of making politics all about following only one person. Be wary of the conspiracy theories that make us feel better about ourselves. Beware the tribe. Maybe the film has something important to tell us about our very human nature.