

## **“We’re Not the Only Ones Watching”: Spectacle, Surveillance, and Foucauldian Power Structures in *The Cabin in the Woods***

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When Buffy explains that “It’s about power” (“Lessons” 7.1), she not only articulates her show’s thesis, but points to a motif in many of Joss Whedon’s works. As critics, like Julie Sloan Brannon, Linda Jean Jencson, and Taylor Boulware (to name but a few), have explained, *Buffy*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse* examine the ways in which individuals collide with structures of power and how that power is constructed, resisted, and reclaimed.

Whedon and Drew Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods* likewise investigates the systemic establishment and exercise of power. Using Michel Foucault’s seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*, as a theoretical guide, this paper will explore the multiplicity of power (the technicians, the gods, the audience), visible and invisible, physical and ideological, in *Cabin*.

The most visible layer of power is the subjection of the teenagers by the members of an unnamed organization. Through their constant surveillance and manipulative intervention, the technicians control the teens, altering their personalities and priming them for “punishment.” This makes manifest the mechanisms of power described by Foucault, allowing the viewer to see how observation, categorization, and the body are used to control the individual.

Less visible, but more prevailing, is the power the old gods exercise over the technicians. Although we do not see these gods until the final frames of the films, the knowledge of their observation, “the ancient ones see everything” (*Cabin*), determines the actions of the technicians. The ancient ones demonstrate effectiveness of surveillance and the threat of retribution as a source of power.

The films suggests that we are the old gods, the observers, who, if not paid a tribute of blood and boobs, will punish filmmakers and studios by giving movies a low CinemaScore and withholding our box office dollars. This paper will conclude by looking at how audience reaction to this film (and Whedon’s other work) demonstrates this power and explains why so many horror films follow the formula and incorporate the clichés that *Cabin* critiques.