

Magical Humanism: Joss Whedon's Rewriting of Lovecraft

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This paper examines the thematic continuities between H.P. Lovecraft's figurations of the "Old Ones"—ancient gods who walked the earth millennia before the appearance of humanity, and who now slumber hidden beneath the earth—and Joss Whedon's re-imagination of this trope in his film *The Cabin in the Woods*. Whedon's mythos is specifically humanist in the way it rewrites Lovecraft. In particular, the persistent trope of *conspiracy* (of both the malevolent and benevolent varieties) functions in *Cabin* as a rationalizing gesture, mapping onto Lovecraftian unreason the logic of plot and narrative continuity.

The presence of ancient magical or mystical power and its (often dialectical) relationship with modernity constitutes the most basic foundation of Whedon's mythos in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spinoff *Angel*. *Cabin* arguably comprises a refinement of the collision between magic and technology as represented by the "Initiative" in season four of *Buffy* (in which the U.S. military constructs a secret facility to study and weaponize magical and demonic forces); *Cabin* is more overtly indebted to Lovecraft, insofar as its "Old Gods" represent vast and overawing destructive power. However, where figures like Lovecraft's Cthulhu are manifestations of irrationality, madness, and the limits of reason, *Cabin* imposes a systematized structure of archetypes and iterative narrative. The most obvious and overt representation of this rationalized structure is the extensive underground military base (again, starkly reminiscent of The Initiative in *Buffy*), from which the unwary college students are manipulated into acting out a horror film. Similarly, the presence of a hyper-secret military operation serves to unequivocally establish the trope of conspiracy, as "it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our own minds to grasp" (Jameson 37-38).

Works Cited

Jameson, Fredric *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.