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Horrifying clichés in the horrifying movie *The Cabin in the woods*

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Intro

On September 22, 2006, in Bannock County, Idaho, Brian Lee Draper and Torey Michael Adamcik murdered their classmate. They had dressed in costumes, used large knives they had bought, and tried to scare their victim and lure her down to the basement, additionally, they even video logged several parts of their process leading up to, and following the murder. The “clichés” they followed were inspired from the slasher movie *Scream* (1996) which they both idolized. (“The Disturbing Case of the Scream Killers” 0:15:51) Clichés in movies, and horror movies especially, are often seen as ridiculous and worthy of ridicule. This case, however, shows that the slasher genre, although being defined by its clichés, definitely has an impact on its viewers and should still hold academic interest.

Joss Whedon & Drew Goddard’s movie *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011), includes enough clichés to almost work as an encyclopaedia for the slasher genre. Instead of becoming stale and predictable however, the movie uses the clichés consciously in a refreshing and unique way. Not to glorify the genre, but to criticize and poke fun at it whilst showing love for it at the same time. Something Director Joss Whedon confirmed in an interview when he said about the movie: “it’s a serious critique of what we love and what we don’t about horror movies” (Paur). In this thesis, I will expound upon how Drew Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011) uses clichés in mainly two ways: for entertainment and for meta commentary.

Background on the slasher genre

To really understand how the movie uses genre specific clichés, it is important to know what that genre is. Professor in screenwriting, Jule Selbo writes in *Film genre for the screenwriter* that the purpose of horror movies is to be unsettling and to give the viewers an opportunity to “experience the emotions and reactions to their deep fears in a safe environment” (p. 124). Slashers are a sub-genre of the horror genre, so in addition to giving the viewers a “thrill ride” based on their emotions and fears, slashers add excessive gore, dismemberment, and high body counts (p. 127). There are several opinions on which movie was the first slasher movie, but most seem to agree that the genre first came really to life in the 1970’s with movies such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978). It has since seen a steady stream of new movies with modern remakes of older titles coming out as recently as 2022 showing that the genre is far from dead.

Clichés in general

Clichés have a plethora of negative connotations, but are, at the same time, used all the time. Lexicographer Orin Hargraves says in an article about clichés for the Irish times that they represent a paradox, as they are familiar to everyone but never seen in a positive light (Hargraves). This also holds true for movies where clichés are generally seen as something critique worthy, as seen when googling “Clichés in movies”. The top results are articles such as: *20 Movie Tropes and Cliches to Avoid in Your Next Screenplay*, *100 movie clichés that just won't die...*, and *30 Movie And TV Cliches That Drive Us Nuts*. It’s evident that clichés are viewed mostly negatively, regardless of the setting they are used in, in this thesis however, I argue that this is a short sighted and narrow view. Clichés became clichés because they were popular tropes which people liked and should therefore be, by themselves, good tropes. What makes clichés bad, is unoriginality and unawareness. When authors are aware of the clichés in the genre they are writing in, they can consciously use them to do things such as: subverting expectations by changing elements of them, making meta commentary about the genre they are writing in, or use them for their entertainment value. *The Cabin in the Woods* is riddled with clichés but was still received very well by critics and the general audience, showing that clichés do not necessitate a bad movie.

The cabin in the woods overview

The Cabin in the Woods is a horror/comedy movie that was released in 2011. It was written by Drew Goddard and Joss Whedon, also known for having written the hit tv-show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Together, they have experience creating and televising a plethora of grotesque and scary monsters. This becomes evident in the final act of the movie when just about every monster from every horror movie show up for a final bloodbath, meaning that the two writers have enough experience with the genre to play with the genre specific clichés without coming off as unoriginal. The movie was received very well among both critics and the general audience with a 92% rating from critics on rotten tomatoes, and 74% from the general audience. Compared to other slasher movies such as *Scream* (1996) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *The Cabin in the Woods* has a similar audience score, but, interestingly, a higher rating from critics showing that while the movie is entertaining for a general audience, it is also critically acclaimed.

Clichés for entertainment

By using clichés in a humoristic way for entertainment value, *The Cabin in the Woods* expands its intended audience from horror fans and slasher fans, to a wider audience. The traditional gory scenes from the slasher movies may be off-putting for an audience not that accustomed to, and therefore desensitized by, grotesque scenes. Adding elements of humour makes these scenes more palatable for that general audience. By using clichés for humour, the movie retains its identity as a slasher and consequently keeps the appeal from the horror fans. By adding the element of humour to the typically dark slasher genre, the movie subverts the expectations accompanying its genre and makes for a more interesting viewing experience. There are several examples for when *The Cabin in the Woods* uses clichés for humoristic entertainment, which I will present now.

Harbinger scene

The first example is a scene where two characters, Sitterson and Hadley, whose job is to guide the correct unfolding of the events of the story, are putting another character, Mordecai, on speaker phone to make fun of him. Sitterson and Hadley also call Mordecai *The Harbinger*, Referring to the cliché of a distinct warning, providing the characters with the choice to avoid the harm to come. Thereby showing that the movie is self-aware about the cliché used and by making fun of the character, the movie is also making fun of the cliché. The characters Sitterson and Hadley do an excellent job of breaking up the tension built by Mordecai with humour. The tense music with the over the top acting of Mordecai juxtaposed against the snickering controllers laughing at him and the role he represents make for a very comedic effect. Furthermore, several other elements add to the humour of the scene as well. Such as Hadley calling Mordecai for “Baby” and “Mordy” and nonchalantly responding to Mordecai's use of over the top and theatrical dialogue like: “their blind eyes see nothing of the horrors to come”, with “Well, that’s how it works”, and how Mordecai's serious demeanour immediately changes when he discovers that he is on speakerphone which breaks his serious and ominous character, making him easier to laugh at.

Won't leave without her scene

Another scene is when one of the characters', Jules', head is thrown into the room by a zombie. The main character Dana states that she is not leaving without Jules, whereupon another character, Marty, tells her to not open the door because the zombies are outside, only for said zombie to stand right outside the door and throw Jules' decapitated head through the

door. This scene would be only scary, had it not been for the conscious use of clichés. The cliché used here is one where a character says they aren't leaving without something or someone, just to have that thing or person appear immediately after with comedic timing. This cliché is typically used for humour, not fear. *The cabin in the Woods* on the other hand, uses this humoristic cliché in a scene that would otherwise be horrifying. This makes it not immediately clear whether the audience is intended to laugh or scream which subverts the viewers expectations and enriches the scene.

Sex scene

In one scene where the characters Jules and Curt are about to have sex outside, Curt tries to convince Jules to take her clothes off by saying they are “all alone”, which is immediately followed by showing them displayed on a big screen in the control centre being watched by a group of older men. Jules says she is chilly and walks away from Curt to the dismayed exclamations of their audience. Shifting from the dark forest with foreboding music to the bright control centre filled with a group of hopeful old perverts and their perfectly conveyed dismay highlights the different settings, one in the forest where it is serious, and one in the control centre where it is not. By shifting suddenly with no warning, it both gives the scene comedic timing with the audience being dismayed right after Jules saying it is too cold for her, and it lets the viewer experience the humour of the scene in a setting where laughing is “allowed”.

Control centre

There are several scenes where the controllers act as comic relief for the movie. For example, when they are informed that all the other countries with similar programs have failed, there is a brilliantly funny scene where Sitterson swears his heart out to a group of small Japanese schoolgirls who managed to defeat their own monster. What is a happy ending for the Japanese children, is a nightmare for the controllers. Not only is the image of a grown man swearing at children funny on its own, but it also works to reinforce the idea that the control centre is a place where reversed reactions are, not only allowed, but even expected, such as laughing at bad events and swearing at good events.

The idea that the control centre is an ‘upside down’ place outside the serious slasher setting is further reinforced in different scenes as well. For example, a later scene where the entire group, barring Dana, is seemingly dead and Dana is being dragged under water by a zombie.

Hadley is monologuing about Dana's show of heart when he is interrupted by a group entering with alcohol to celebrate, immediately shifting his demeanour from serious to his usual self by exclaiming "Tequila is my lady!" Even Hadley's death is denied gravitas as he is killed by a grotesque merman which he earlier revealed was his favourite monster and that he really wished he could get to see one. The irony of being killed by that monster is not lost on him as his last words are "Aw come on!" His final words both beautifully represent his character as a fun and light-hearted man who does not take anything seriously, even his own death, and further denies the scene any gravitas. Sitterson, having been somewhat more serious than his partner Hadley, is granted a more serious death, but only after leaving the control centre. This clear division between the control centre and the rest of the movie sets the scenes set in the control centre apart from the rest of the movie, allowing for both funny scenes, and meta commentary on the slasher genre to happen outside of the confines of the movie and thereby not breaking the narrative. These have been examples of clichés used for humoristic entertainment. In the following, I will present evidence of *The cabin in the woods* using clichés for meta commentary.

Clichés for meta commentary

By using clichés to make meta commentary, *The cabin in the woods* manages to both be a part of the genre, while still criticizing it. Author Steffan Hantke writes, while quoting film critic Mark Kermode, that Kermode argues that the 2018 remake of *Halloween* is "practically devoid of meaning on a political or even subtextual level." (p. 99) Kermode's rough criticism must resonate with Goddard as he himself says that he does not like "the devolution of the horror movie into torture porn" (qtd. In Paur). In the following, I will provide examples of how Goddard uses clichés to commentate on and criticise the slasher genre.

Harbinger scene

During the movie, the controllers explain that the point of the harbinger is for the main characters to choose to ignore him. Much like other horror movies where the characters get a warning beforehand which they ignore. By having the characters outright say what his meta purpose for the narrative is, the movie acknowledges the use of the cliché and sets the viewer up to expect conscious meta commentary.

The cliché of the harbinger who warns the main characters of their impending doom is meant to elicit tension and an ominous sense of foreboding in the viewers. Following the tense scene

of the characters ignoring his warning, the movie follows it up by having the controllers making fun of him. By breaking that tense scene with humour and laughter, the movie is telling the viewer that this typically scary cliché, is in fact ridiculous and deserves to be laughed at. It shows an inherent flaw of the horror genre, which is how often something horrible is avoidable. If the characters simply listen to the warnings and leave when they have the chance, or if they don't "go into the creepy basement alone", they can easily avoid any horror that would befall them. Additionally, Mordecai also serves as a *harbinger* for the controllers by warning them about "the fool nearly derailing the invocation", which the controllers ignore in favour of laughing at him. Showing that they themselves, with meta awareness, do not listen to the warning, on account of the cliché way they receive it.

Voyeurism

Clichés are also used to criticize audiences who want characters to die horribly and are willing to accept lazy writing that will achieve this faster. To add something for the audience that does not really fit into the story without far-fetched plot devices is called "fan service" and usually has a more sexual nature ("Definition of Fan Service"). Slashers however, give viewers a more unique fan service where, instead of only seeing characters undressing, the audience can see people getting grotesquely torn to pieces. As Selbo writes, the purpose of horror movies is to give viewers the opportunity to experience fears (p. 124). This often comes at the cost of convenient plot devices such as the road out being blocked by a convenient storm, or in the case of *The Cabin in the Woods*, the tunnel leading out being artificially collapsed by explosives from the controllers. The movie does not criticise that slashers give a thrill ride based on character's being torn to shreds, but rather that it is achieved through lazy convenience.

The Cabin in the Woods uses the sex scene with Curt and Jules to criticise this. The dismay of the audience in the movie works as a parody of the real life audience of the movie who were expecting 'a show', but didn't get it. As Jules does not undress because she is too cold, the controllers increase the temperature, this shows that the movie is aware of the fanservice cliché, suggesting that the movie is making fun of the cliché itself and other movies that uses it. However, the theme of voyeurism is central to the movie, and several other scenes show that while the movie is ridiculing the cliché, it is also aiming at ridiculing the viewers watching the movie. Probably the most obvious example of this is Hadley outright telling the audience in the control centre "your basic human needs disgust me". Furthermore, a bit later

the security guard in the control centre asks them if it really matters if they see her naked, maybe in an attempt to preserve the dignity of Jules before they sacrifice her. The controllers lack their usual carefree attitude as they tell him that “they aren’t the only ones watching” and that they “have to keep the customers satisfied”. In the movie, the costumers referred to, are the elder gods they are sacrificing to, but in a meta context, it refers to the audience of the movie.

Voyeurism and fanservice is further mocked in an earlier scene where the characters arrive at the cabin and go to their respective rooms. In his room, the character Holden finds an unsettling painting depicting a gruesome sacrifice. In the scene, an ominous tone grows in intensity as the camera zooms in on the painting. This emphasis forcibly and very obviously drags the viewer’s attentions to the painting, almost as if screaming “this is important!” Only for Holden to say “Yeah, I don’t think so” and take it down. When he looks back up, he can see the main character Dana through a one-way mirror.



Figure 1 screenshot Netflix

This still shows Holden having put the unmistakable warning and foreshadowing aside to instead look at a girl. Not only is the painting literary put aside, with the voyeuristic scene taking the centre of the screen, but it is also placed in a dimmed corner with the new focus being illuminated. The sound design also works to, consciously and very obviously, drag the viewers’ attention from the warning to the girl. The ominous music stops as Holden takes the picture down, showing that Holden perceives the threat as gone when the picture is gone. However, a cliché, loud, and jarring sting plays to make both Holden and the audience jump. The jump scare shows that although the threat is ignored, it is not gone. This message is

matched by the music that plays when the camera focuses on Dana instead of the painting. It is less ominous than the earlier music, but still definitely threatening.

This scene still shows enough awareness of the clichés used for it to be humour though, something seen partly through the use of music. As the ominous music stops, it is replaced by a more upbeat and fun version of the same music which shows a conscious change in tone from ominous and threatening foreshadowing, to the fun and semi-sexual voyeurism as Dana starts undressing. Additionally, Holden's reactions also convey the intended humour of the scene. Holden, being unsure of whether to look or not starts pacing around, looking away and then back again, and exclaiming things like "ah shit" and "ahm... this is happening" while pacing in and out of the shot. Holden's disbelief emphasises the improbability of the scenario which makes fun of the fanservice cliché and thereby reinforces the idea that the movie is aware of the clichés used and is directly commentating on them.

The fanservice is further emphasized later when Holden and Dana switch rooms to save her from staying in a room where she cannot be sure if Holden is watching her. The first thing Holden does after swapping rooms, because of the one-way mirror, is to undress right in front of the same mirror. Dana had at least the excuse of not knowing about the mirror, but Holden undresses right after switching rooms without covering up the mirror first, having seemingly forgotten all about it, or alternatively, wanting to strip for Dana. Either way, this gives fan service to the female audience as well in a much more blatant and obvious way which again shows the underlying parody in the scene.

Archetypes

The characters are also used as representations of cliché archetypes in slasher movies. In the end of the movie where it is revealed to the remaining characters, Dana and Marty, that they were being sacrificed to elder gods; the director of the organisation who are responsible for the sacrifices explains to them the archetypes they have been made to suit. "The whore" played by Jules, "the athlete" played by Curt, "the scholar" played by Holden, "the fool" played by Martin, and "the virgin" played by Dana. It is shown earlier that the organisation has a "chem department" who is responsible for altering the characters' behaviours to better suit their archetypes, for example by making Jules dumber through the use of chemicals in her hair dye, or by releasing pheromones to increase Curt and Jules' sex drive.

Tv tropes calls these archetypes: *the alpha bitch*, *the jerk jock*, *the token minority*, *the stoner*, and *the final girl*, illustrating that although going under different names, the archetypes are well established within the genre. ¹Instead of using these archetypes as a cheap copy, *The Cabin in the Woods* consciously alter the characters to fit into the roles and constantly bring attention to how these archetypes aren't the characters being natural. Instead, the characters are being artificially moulded into an archetype that can be brutally slaughtered for entertainment. Dana and Marty are the only characters left alive to react to the reveal of 'their characters' and both reactions have comedic effect showing deliberate parody from the movie. Marty looks insulted and indignant at being called *the fool* which comes off as funny when there are much bigger and more sinister things being revealed, and his only visible reaction comes from being called "the fool". When Dana is called *the virgin*, she reacts by being surprised and somewhat offended, asking the director "Me, virgin?" to which the director responds by shrugging and saying, "we work with what we have". The director's words could point at slashers forcefully making their characters fit these archetypes as a form of fanservice without it making sense in the movie otherwise, but it could also point at the archetypes themselves adapting to a changing world and audience. As the world is changing and there are less expectations for women to remain "pure virgins", the archetypes will also have to change with the times to stay relevant and as *The Cabin in the Woods* suggest, maybe the final girl of a modern slasher movie is less of a virgin and more of a "virgin".

Marty and Dana's reactions to the reveal of their allocated archetype, are both realistic in that it is believable that people would react in those ways to being called a fool and a virgin, but also unrealistic in that people would react to that at all while also being told that they and their friends have been brutally sacrificed to elder gods that would otherwise destroy the world. Their reactions diminish the severity of the situation and makes an otherwise tense and serious climax to the movie, fun and more light-hearted. The final scene proves that the movie is aware of the clichés it is littered with as the reveal from the director not only serves to inform the characters, but also the audience. As Dana and Marty work as a substitute for the real-life audience of the movie, their humoristic reactions can conceivably be synonymous with the intended humoristic reactions of the real-life audience. The intended parody of the scene can also be seen when the ominous music which has been playing throughout the director's explanation stop as Dana reacts, letting the humour act without being undermined

¹ While not an academic source, I have only used Tvtropes to establish that the archetypes are a well known and established cliché from slasher movies.

by ominous music. The relief of tension permits the audience to laugh, and it creates a 'break' in the narrative of the movie, in which meta commentary is possible.

Earlier, this paper stated that clichés themselves are not inherently bad, but that clichés used without creativity or originality is. The characters being moulded into cliché archetypes *just* for the sake of parody could be good for easy entertainment, but would very likely be another example of an unoriginal use of a cliché, despite it being done as parody. What *The Cabin in the Woods* does to elevate itself above this, is to make the cliché archetypes being used consciously and overtly as a plot device. One example of this is the scene after Jules' death where: Dana, Marty, Curt, and Holden must figure out what to do. Curt tells the group that they must "play it safe" and "stay together no matter what" to which the group agrees. Curt's archetype of *the jock* is however not supposed to make smart plans, something the controllers fix by blowing chemicals into the cabin, making Curt immediately tell the group to "split up" instead.

This scene shows yet again how clichés are used as parody and for entertainment. This can be seen through several examples, such as Hadley, the controller's simple reaction of slapping his face and exclaiming "ah fuck!", Sitterson calmly pushing two buttons to fix the problem with his mouth still full of some kind of snack, the brief instance of heroic music suddenly dying out as Curt dooms the group with the cliché and very obviously bad idea of splitting up. The scene also shows how the characterisation is used to criticise how cliché characters are often used as a deus ex machina and how audiences often blindly accept these unoriginal and cliché plot devices. Of course, *The Cabin in the Woods* also subverts the deus ex machina, instead of being used to miraculously save the characters, it instead puts them even further in peril.

In the same scene, Sitterson and Hadley can be seen as the directors of the movie. They are always in control and making sure the audience is pleased by the show, meaning both the audience in the movie, and the audience outside the movie. They control cameras (hidden cameras throughout the cabin and forest), lighting (lighting up the forest to make it romantic), and can even give their 'actors' stage directions (Marty hearing voices telling him to go for a walk).

Curt works as the actor of the scene. He has the most lines, he is dominating the screen and he looks like he is acting. Affected by the drugs, Curt's facial expressions are dumbed down, he

looks and sounds confused and speaks without emotions. Dana and Marty are in the background, as if they were extras, while Curt's 'poor acting' takes the focus of the scene. Additionally, the music turns heroic as he takes charge of the group, which helps to paint him as the hero of the story. Holden and Dana are representations of the audience who blindly accepts unoriginal and cliché plot devices, when Curt turns around and tells them to split up, Holden agrees by saying it is a "good idea" and Dana by nodding. Marty shows that the movie is aware of the clichés by being the sole rational voice and showing how ludicrous he thinks it is to split up. By showing awareness of the trope and still ignoring it, the movie shows its criticism of Dana and Holden, and through them, the blindly accepting audience. The movie establishes a precedence for comparing Dana and Holden to a blindly accepting audience earlier in the movie in the one-way mirror scene. Both Dana and Holden readily accepts that there is a convenient way for them to peep at each other undressing. Another example is when a cellar door opens abruptly, and they simply accept Curt's explanation of "it must have been the wind". Both with the cellar and with the decision to split up, Marty serves as a rational voice to point out how these plot devices does not make sense which is how the movie shows that this is conscious criticism instead of unoriginal writing.

Drugging the viewer

One of the central themes in *The Cabin in the Woods* is individual vs society. The question of whether the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few was first defined as *utilitarianism* in the 19th century by philosopher Jeremy Bentham, although the core ideas existed long before. (Driver) The philosophy of utilitarianism judges the happiness of everyone equally, and the choice that leads to the most happiness is the morally right choice, meaning that the needs of the many does outweigh the needs of the few. *The Cabin in the Woods* takes this to the extreme by creating a world where the survival of the entire human civilisation requires the sacrifice of at least four young people. The movie finishes with Dana and Marty choosing not to finish the ritual and instead let humanity die, as humanity has failed, and it is time to let someone else try. For Dana and Marty, the needs of the many do not outweigh the needs of the few, as the needs of the many are morally wrong themselves. When Dana and Marty decide to let humanity die, Marty lights a joint which he shares with Dana. Their serious and apocalyptic choice is thus dulled by the drugs.

Drugs are used extensively throughout the movie in various ways. The very first picture of the movie is a close up shot of a coffee machine with the message "Enjoy a cup of fresh coffee."

Coffee is typically drunk in the morning to wake up people, and with the message being phrased as an order, it works as a message to wake up and not be subdued by other drugs. In this scene, it is Sitterson and Hadley drinking coffee and as they know about the system of sacrifice the humanity survives by, they have already “woken up” from the illusion the rest of the world lives in. The rest of the world thinks monsters are not real and that they are safe, while they know for a fact that this is wrong.

Contrasting this, is the next scene where the group of sacrifices is introduced. Marty arrives driving his car while smoking a bong. As Marty is reproached by his friends for openly smoking weed, he tells them that the drugs allow him to see further than others. Additionally, Marty’s bong can be retracted and concealed as a coffee mug, showing that his weed has the effect of waking him up to see ‘the truth’. In conjunction, these two things show that Marty’s use of drugs wakes him up from the illusion the rest of the world is living in, something that becomes apparent later when the chemicals the controllers use to control them with does not work on Marty and he becomes the one to uncover the cameras and elevators around the cabin.

Later when the group has arrived at the cabin, they start drinking alcohol, except for Marty who still only smokes weed. The alcohol works as a sedative, dragging the group further down into the illusion of safety and a world of no monsters. When a basement door, acting as the door into a world of monsters and horrors, subsequently opens, Marty is the only one objecting to going down and touching every creepy artifact. Later on, when the controllers think everyone except Dana is dead and the ritual is complete, the controllers drink alcohol themselves, drugging themselves into the illusion that the ritual really is complete and that they are safe which they soon find out is wrong.

Ultimately, it is the weed which works to break the illusion and give the characters the free will to choose whether to let humanity continue or not. Weed is also illegal where they are, which the characters establish when Marty first appears, meaning that breaking the rules and norms society and thereby breaking with society is necessary to achieve free will. Drinking coffee and talking with co-workers around the coffee machine in the mornings is almost a ritual itself and shows the people belonging to society. Additionally, drinking alcohol in a social setting like a party is another ‘ritual’ of belonging to society. The sedative use of drugs mixed with the ritualistic societal settings shows a comparison to belonging to a society and being sedated by drugs. Marty’s illicit use of weed is one example of him breaking with

society, but there are several others. Such as: Him arriving alone while the others being introduced in pairs, him being the ‘third wheel’ of the group as he is the only one without a romantic interest, and him being the only one to “die” without being with anyone else in the group. Marty’s separation and subsequent freedom is one way the movie foreshadows the ending of the movie, but the use of drugs also provide meta commentary.

Much like the characters uses drugs to sedate themselves, the movie uses clichés to ‘sedate’ the audience by making its serious messages and themes more palatable. Director Wheeler W. Dixon argues in Hantke that youth require for a movie to be separated from reality and that they lose interest when the movie gets to real (p. 100) Sedating the audience with clichés has the effect of separating serious ethical dilemmas from reality by mixing them in with funny and, as argued before, unrealistic clichés.

With the problem of individual vs society being separated from reality, the ethical dilemma becomes both easier and more entertaining to think about. The cliché slasher movie has the characters being slaughtered as punishment for something. For example in the movie *I know what you did last summer* (1997) where the characters run over a man and dump his body in the ocean, they are punished for committing murder and breaking with society. In *The Cabin in the Woods* however, this cliché is subverted when Dana and Marty chose to break with society and thus break society. Instead of being slaughtered and dying, and thereby setting the world back in order, they survive and instead reverse the narrative by becoming the ones to punish society. The use of clichés makes the viewer assume that the inevitable ending is for society to win. However, the movie ends by breaking away from the cliché, thereby also breaking away from the assumption that society has to win. In this way, the movie poses the question of society vs individual not as a question of the merits of utilitarianism, but as a question of the merits of clichés.

Conclusion

Clichés are generally seen in a negative light but that does not necessarily make them bad. They are usually seen as indicative of uncreative and bad writing, but *The Cabin in the Woods* being received as well as it has been, shows that clichés themselves aren’t bad. Since the release of *The Cabin in the Woods* there has been a wave of modern remakes of classic slashers such as *Halloween* (2018) and *Scream* (2022). The genre is evidently not dead yet despite it very clearly being filled with clichés. We can therefore conclude that something

cliché is not inherently bad and is often something people like. Clichés can provide entertainment by making even the most horrifying movies funny at times, they can ‘drug’ down a more casual audience to help them watch more gruesome scenes than they are used to, and they can provide meta commentary necessary to evolve the genre.

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