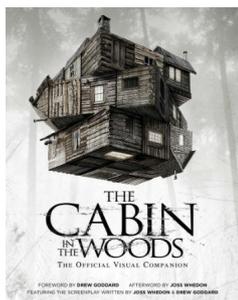


"CABIN IN THE WOODS: THE OFFICIAL VISUAL COMPANION" (Book Review)

Written by Trevor Parker
Tuesday, 08 May 2012 06:52



It's something of a chore to write anything of the topic of THE CABIN IN THE WOODS; not because the film doesn't deserve every single one of the superlatives with which critics crowned it, but because it's such a challenge to discuss CABIN's unpredictable Christmas-morning delights without letting some degree of spoiler wriggle free and rob some of the fun away for those yet to catch CABIN in theatres. So be warned, those continuing on below.



CABIN IN THE WOODS: THE OFFICIAL VISUAL COMPANION (Titan Books) is a slim paperback whose pages are dominated by hundreds of glossy stills and behind-the-scenes photos. Kicking off the book is a lengthy interview with CABIN's two creators, director/co-writer Drew Goddard and producer/co-writer Joss Whedon. The interview covers their writing process, the film's casting and production and most importantly, the duo's take on CABIN's architecture—meaning the modes and motifs of American horror over the last forty years that the film at once celebrates and deconstructs, but also the deeper and sometimes elusive appeal of horror movies themselves. It's been ages since a studio-backed teenage scare flick exuded this many brainwaves, and this rewarding chat helps readers to explore more of CABIN's contextual nooks and crannies. Most of the interview appears to have been conducted during the film's post-production period, so there is unfortunately little mention of CABIN's arduous path to wide release (shelved after original studio MGM's bankruptcy, held back for a planned and eventually-abandoned 3D conversion, and narrowly dodging a straight-to-DVD dump). CABIN's underdog agony and critical redemption would have made for a fascinating postscript to the discussion.

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The bulk of the book is taken up by the full shooting screenplay. As one might correctly assume from a project where the two screenwriters also serve as director and producer, there isn't a great deal of deviation between the recipe as written and the meal as presented. Reading a script dotted with photos of the action is kind of like reading a recap of the Super Bowl in the newspaper: you get the big hits and final score, but that only makes you feel like you really missed out by not watching it.

Seeded in the script pages are sidebars with a paragraph or two worth of comments from all of CABIN's main actors, and peeks at production designer Martin Whist's sets (including the cabin cellar, looking like Hell's garage sale). In all honesty, the majority of CABIN's production design is fairly staid and unremarkable (intentionally so; Goddard says in his interview that he wanted the control room set to "look like outdated tech, a real seventies NASA vibe."), and shots of the cast acting tense or threatened (or shots of Goddard directing the cast to act tense and threatened) aren't overly stimulating. Of course, the plum here is the material relating to the delectably chaotic madness of CABIN's third act, an unforgettable event that roars by all too quickly onscreen. The section includes interview quotes alongside sketches and finished makeup for the phenomenal creature work by AFX Studios' David LeRoy Anderson and Heather Langenkamp Anderson (who happens to know a thing or two about scary monsters). This chapter could be called the 'Where's Waldo' of horror references and should generate hours of feverish analysis and debate for fans of the genre.

Overall, CABIN IN THE WOODS: THE OFFICIAL VISUAL COMPANION, with its unnecessary screenplay inclusion padding out the page count, is not a great book; but it is a book about a great movie, so it can't help but be worthy of your attention.

