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Like SCREAM, THE CABIN IN THE WOODS is going to be mistaken by some people for a spoof of the genre. It’s not; like the Wes Craven film, it’s a straightforward horror feature that happens to have a good, satirical sense of humor about itself. This one goes beyond honoring just one subspecies of fright to become a wildly entertaining catch-all homage to the cinema of fear as a whole—it’s like all your favorite horror movies wrapped up in one.

The central reference is, of course, the EVIL DEAD films, and this specific cabin in the woods bears a remarkable resemblance to the one in EVIL DEAD II. (They even got that movie’s cinematographer, Peter Deming—who also, perhaps not coincidentally, shot the SCREAM sequels—to shoot this one.) A few more visual touchstones from the Sam Raimi series show up as well, and eventually, so do scary characters clearly modeled on other popular franchises. (There’s even a bit that suggests a visual homage to distributor Lionsgate’s grinding-gears logo, though the company only got involved with CABIN after its completion.)

But first, we meet our five college kids in an RV, who are even more of a Scooby Gang than the one producer/co-writer Joss Whedon showcased in BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER. There’s a smart, redheaded good girl (well, maybe not entirely so good; she’s just coming off an affair with a teacher) named Dana, played by the instantly lovable Kristen Connolly; handsome jock Curt (Chris Hemsworth, demonstrating the good-natured macho charisma that served him well in THOR); his bubbly blonde girlfriend Jules (Anna Hutchison); brainy nice guy Holden (Jesse Williams), with whom Jules wants to set up Dana; and shaggy burnout Marty (Fran Kranz, stealing the movie), whose brains may not be as fried as they first appear.

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