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EPISODE 68

Joss Whedon: Separating Creator from Creation

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Welcome back to the podcast, everybody. This week I have a very special kind of episode. It's a little bit different from what we would normally do, because this week I really wanted to talk about the difference between understanding a creation versus its creator and part of The reason why this came up is having to do with the implosion of my writerly idol, Joss Whedon. Now, for those of you who don't know who Joe Sweden is, he is the creator of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly.

He's also been instrumental with The Avengers and so many more, really powerful stories that include very powerful female characters and, overall, just a really good sense of ironic sense of humor, which is something that I really resonate with I love and ironic sense of humor. I like when things are funny because you don't expect them.

Unfortunately, the irony doesn't just extend to the way that he writes his characters. As we're finding out it actually is really, ultimately deeply who he is. And for those of you who don't know Joss Whedon is kind of imploding right now. And there has been news for a while that the person he portrays himself to be this very feminist, very women supporting man in the television industry. He's really kind of not. He's kind of a dick, and it's really, for me, at least kind of disheartening because he's influenced the way that I want to write characters the way I want to write stories the way that I love to portray the weird twists and turns that I come about.



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And I even quote him very often because there's a lot of things that I think have value in the way that he says them, and now they're just kind of tainted a little bit, by the way, that he really is in person. So for those of you who don't know, let's go back into that back story. There was news this past week that exploded regarding Ray Fisher, and he's been working on Justice League. But he was talking about how the work environment with Joss Whedon, who was unacceptable, and he was getting a lot of backlash from it in that Warner Brothers wasn't taking this seriously enough. And what happened was Charisma Carpenter, who is, or was Cordelia Chase in Buffy and Angel.

She came out and backed his story and said that, you know, she had a very terrible time on both of those sets, that Joss Whedon was very inappropriate, that he was mean in ways that I can't fathom in my brain. It's like, how does that even happen, other than it being that whole male chauvinistic culture within television that we're kind of seeing come to light a little bit these past, I don't know, 5, 10 years. And she was talking about how you know, there were times both on Buffy and on Angel, where he would belittle her or make her feel bad. Or, for instance, when she was pregnant on Angel. He kept trying to tell her that she was actually ruining the show, actively trying to ruin the show. Wanted her to give up the baby or was pressuring her to kind of make that nudge on her own was belittling her religious choices. A lot of different things were happening. They're calling her fat when she did choose to have the baby, and then once the baby was born, he fired her, which is something I didn't realize for me. I figured she had the baby. She wanted to spend more time with the baby, and that's why she left Angel. That was just my assumption back in that time frame, right?

And what ended up happening then is that she's gone on all these years later to have really poor self-esteem, and we're not saying that this is all Joss Whedon's fault. But it is something that she's had to work through.

So she confronted this issue. She's having to soak it all in kind of work through all the problems in the dilemmas of it and sometimes constructively and sometimes destructively. And so she's had eating disorders because of some of this stuff. These were all kind of psychological and emotional implications of when you kind of go through an abusive relationship, which from the way that sounds like it was.

Now, if it was just Charisma Carpenter, if it was just Ray Fisher, I'd be like, Well, maybe they just didn't have a good personality. But the problem was after charisma came out all of a sudden, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Buffy herself, came out. And then Amber Benson, who played Tara in in Buffy, came out and we had Michelle Trachtenberg, who played Dawn, came out and that there was actually a rule that Joss Whedon could not be alone with her in the same room, which was 15 years old. Then we had Eliza Dushku, who played Faith, come out and we've had James Marsters, Anthony Stewart Head. We've had David Boreanaz have all come out in support of the victims in this situation, and it's become a much bigger scandal.

I guess then, probably anyone anticipated on what's really interesting about this dilemma is about 2017. He was going Joss was going through a very big divorce with his now ex-wife, Kai Cole. And at the time she had written a very scathing editorial actually about their relationship, about the fact that he is not the man he claims to be. And at the time I remember thinking, Okay, this is kind of the, you know words of, Ah, very upset and vindictive ex-wife is kind of what I was feeling those vibes on. And I remember writing a blog post during that time frame in support of Joss because for me, I can't fathom. I really cannot wrap my head around how a creator can create something that is so pro-feminist in a lot of ways. I mean, I know there are other issues going on there. If you look at some of the subtext going on in some of the episodes that haven't aged well But I know the way it impacted me was different. It impacted me that, you know, this person.

This man was writing characters that were very pro-female. That were very much, you know, don't underestimate a female just because she's blonde Just because her name is Buffy, she's going to kick your butt. And to me, I love that, um, irony.

And I love the way that it all kind of jibe together because I find obviously, in reality, people aren't always what they appear. And obviously, this is still the case now, just in the wrong direction. It's really kind of one of those things where I wrote the article or wrote the block post in support of Joss saying that, you know, I can't believe that a creator who can create these things would be that different because it just it doesn't work in my brain.

Pretty much what you see on my pages what you're going to get with the exception of you know, I'm not gonna murder anybody. I'm not gonna go grab a sword and like attack someone because I break characters who have, you know, badass, sword-wielding capabilities. Nothing like that and you have to have some darkness in order to create both the light and dark. So you're gonna have that as an author. You're gonna have that as a creator. He has that, obviously. But when the moral of the story and the way that you create the story good prevails and it continues to prevail in all of these stories, what would hope then, that the creator believes that as well? But it's, I don't know, just the past couple of years. It's seeming as though that's not necessarily the case.

I mean, look at the whole JK Rowling situation. She's written these incredible stories that have gone on to show the true depth of good versus evil. And she herself can't see how some of her beliefs in some of the ways that she's at least handling things, is not so good.

And the same goes for Joss Sweden. Obviously, he hasn't put out any kind of statement or anything like that, But I think the rest of these statements the rest of the people who are coming forward, it's pretty damning.

And unlike the Senate, I can take on new information and go okay, this is This is what is reality right now. This is the information and the truths that are being passed to me. So I have to take this for what it is. I can actually change my mind. So here's how I felt when I heard this news.

At first, it was that whole disbelief, Right? No way. This can't be happening, really? But as more people came out, it's like, Okay, shoot. This is actually really This is actually a thing that we need to be paying attention to while it's not the best news. And while we don't want Thio necessarily go Wow, this guy that I've really idolized for a very long time is really a dick.

At the same time, you can't as people as authors. We cannot hold on to our previous beliefs so tight that there isn't room for someone to come along and change your minds. And this affects so much more than just the way that we write and affects more than the way that we are as human beings. It could come down to the way you market the way you interact with your readers. It can interact with so many different aspects of how you operate as a person and as a human being, taking on in new information and being able to change your mind and critically think about a situation is so important and doing the right thing is so important.

So for me, if Joss Whedon were to come out tomorrow and say, "You know what? I've really given a lot of thought to everything that's just happened to all the people who are coming out, you know, regarding the stuff that went on during those years. Here's my take on this... This is what I was trying to do or I thought was funny. Or, you know, I was in a place where I thought this was okay, but now I see it's not." He might redeem himself a little bit if he could come out, and he could actually look at the way his behavior was and that maybe it wasn't as well-received as maybe he thought it was at that time and that he's willing to change. Perhaps there's some redeemable quality there.

But in the meantime, the way that I feel is that kind of the way that Sarah Michelle Gellar said. She said that she, you know, is so happy and supportive to be, you know, a part of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and take on that persona, you know, for the rest of her life. But she doesn't want to be associated with the name Joss Whedon for the rest of her life, and that's powerful.

So when I think about my own stuff like, will I allow Joss Whedon to still be an idol for me or an influence for the way that I write my books? Well, yes and no. I mean, I still believe that the way that he writes in the way that he creates is a very deep and profound artistic expression. But at the same time, I will always want to put it with a caveat. Now, I will want to say that I appreciate his artistic expression, but I think he, as a human being, needs a little bit of work, and I will always feel like I'm gonna have to caveat that or try to make that part right because I just don't feel like I want to give that man too much more of a platform beyond.

Obviously, this episode beyond having this discussion, because it's guys like that who continue to be jerks who can continue to be, you know, truly evil to their core, and then they get no repercussions from it. They get no consequences because they're higher up because they have more influence.

And I'm gonna have to say that even though he was an influence in my twenties, I have new influences to this day. New people, women who are absolutely incredible, who I also aspire to. So will I be giving them or clout, absolutely. Amy Sherman Palladino from Gilmore Girls and the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. She's incredible, she writes Fantastic worlds with depth and character, and its clarity is amazing. So will I transition a little bit more Thio supporting and encouraging people to look into those kind of mediums and platforms. You bet.

Will I stop talking so much about Angel and Buffy and Firefly and all those things? Yeah, I probably will, and it's not so much because I don't think they're a part of me. They really, really are. But it's also I've evolved as an author, as a human being, as a person as a mother as a woman, so I want to encourage that expression to come out more. I want to be able to talk with people who are really able to support one another, and I want to be able to use my platform as a way to be able to support authors, indie authors, traditional authors, author coaches, other people who really want to be able to learn and collaborate together in a meaningful way. So will I still mention Joss or Buffy? Probably not so much.

Now for you as authors, what can you learn from this? What can you take away from this kind of situation? Well, number one, it's that it's very difficult when you are able to tie your name to a particular project to then, later on, have to disassociate it. So, for instance, JK Rowling in her Harry Potter books. Stephanie Meyer in her Twilight books. Joss Whedon Angel, Buffy, Firefly, Dollhouse, All those things.

So when that happens and if something bad goes on later on, let's say you had a divorce. Maybe right now, in the middle of your best series you're having a great time and you're doing great things but you have a divorce, and let's say things come out about you that you didn't anticipate. Maybe they get spun in the wrong context. Or maybe they're true and you don't want it out into the light. All of this can happen. And when your stuff is tied directly to your name, you need to know that you are representing your brand and you're representing everything that you're creating and to hold yourself to a higher standard. I think than some of these people who think that they're above reproach.

So be careful, I guess, is what I'm saying. Be careful with how you represent yourself and how you're able to go about really showing everybody who you are.



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So from an author perspective, one of the things that I take away from this is that I'm no longer going to really tie an influence that I feel is really powerful to the person itself. I want to instead kind of sit with the creation, the artistic expression, and try to pick out Why does it resonate with me? Because even just waited for himself, talked about how their instances where you're going to write something and it will have, AH, a consequence that the artist didn't intend. When that happens, it means that you as the receiver of that information you're going to be taking in the story, the storylines in a new and unique way.

One that that artist maybe didn't even intend for you to take it as that. And so sometimes when we're reading books, when we're watching films, when we're watching TV, being able to separate it from its creator knowing that you, as the viewer as the reader are interpreting the information in your own unique way, is really powerful, it doesn't even mean that that's the way they wrote it or that's the way they wanted it to be seen. It's not even the way sometimes the way that it was shot as a film or a TV show or whatever. That's just literally the way that you and your personality and everything that you are and how you've come together was able to interpret all the information coming at you. So when you take that and you go, this is an influence for me and you create your own thing based upon it, based upon what you like, what you don't like. Ultimately, it's really just there as a mirror. It's a mirror for you to let you know what it is you like. What it is you stand for, what it is you're trying to express in your own writing. So I want you to think about that a little bit. I want you to think about, you know, over the course of this week, who's influenced you in and all the way that you write your books and the way that you come about your characters think about how you interpret their art and why you interpret it that way. Is it really the way that they intended for you to view it? Or is it really you taking it on in a new and unique concept or a new and unique way? Alright, guys.



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So I'm gonna be putting some links in the show notes for today's episode so that if you're interested in learning a little bit more about this whole fiasco, maybe your Joss Whedon fan the way that I was and you didn't know about all of this, that's fine as well. So you're gonna wanna check out some of these links. I will make sure to post them in today's show notes as well as you could get the transcript and all of that good fun stuff. So head over to authorrevolution.org/68 to get all of that good stuff. And in the meantime, if you find this as fascinating as I do, because I really do find it fascinating as much as I don't like Thio say that my idol in writing or one of my first idols in writing has kind of imploded upon himself, I do like the concept of having to do mental somersaults. I like having to question myself and readjust myself from time to time. I like being able to look more critically at who I am, who I was and who I'm becoming, and I think that it's a powerful way to be able to really embrace all of the things that we're trying to do as authors. All right, so if you want to continue this discussion, head over to the author Revolution online community on Facebook, Let's continue it. Let's talk a little bit more about what's happened. Why did this happen, and how do you feel you're gonna proceed when it comes to talking about TV shows like Buffy or Joss Whedon in general, I'm really curious to see if it's impacted you the same way that it's impacted me. Alright, guys. So that's all I have for this week. I really just wanted to have a discussion about this really huge news thing. I felt like I would be remiss if I didn't at least touch on it, because I have been a supporter of Joss Whedon. Throughout my entire writing career, I have posted numerous blog's about him. I have talked about how he's been an influence in my life. I have books where Hellmouth and even character names are referenced. So this is something that really, to me at least hits home. And maybe it does for you as well. Like I said, think about how this is influencing you in the way that you're going to approach not only creations that you enjoy, but the creators that they come from, and obviously how you, as an author, are going to be influencing the readers who are reading your work as well. Alright, guys, we'll talk to you again next week, and in the meantime, go forth and start your author revolution