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Introduction to Special issue: J.R.R. Tolkien and the Works of Joss Whedon

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**INTRODUCTION: SPECIAL ISSUE OF JOURNAL OF TOLKIEN RESEARCH:
J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND THE WORKS OF JOSS WHEDON
Kris Larsen and Janet Brennan Croft**

Two more different creators of imaginary worlds than J.R.R. Tolkien and Joss Whedon might be hard to imagine; one an Oxford professor, a scholar of linguistics and literature, who devoted most of his creative energy to building, peopling, and niggling at a single expansive world; the other working primarily in popular video and graphic media, both creating connected works of his own and working within universes initially created by others. One conservative, devoutly religious, a military veteran, who led a scandal-free personal life; one liberal and (complicatedly) feminist, atheist, with a publicly problematic personal and professional life.

But both have been deeply concerned with similar issues in their world-building: horror and the monstrous, critiques of heroism, women's roles, faith and lack of faith, and free will and predestination. Both have created compelling and complex characters. Even at a linguistic level, there are comparisons to be made between Tolkien's language-creation project and the verbal pyrotechnics of Whedon's *Slayer* slang.

Papers in this special issue cover topics as diverse as death in Middle-earth and the Buffyverse, the horror trope of the Final Girl, varieties of heroism and courage, and greed and other villainous motivations. Works by Whedon primarily considered include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, *Firefly*, and *The Cabin in the Woods*; Tolkien sources include not just the Middle-earth legendarium but also "On Fairy-stories" and *The Notion Club Papers*.

Our intention is not simply to draw connections and contrasts between the works of these two brilliant minds, but, it is hoped, to specifically lead the readers of this journal down the proverbial rabbit hole into a deeper understanding of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Any new-found interest in becoming a Browncoat or member of the Scooby Gang the reader might develop as a result of engaging with these essays is simply incidental.

We are also not responsible for any nightmares that may result, especially of ineluctable waves.