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## BEST MOVIES OF 2004

**Chris Hartley (Head Honcho)**

### **Shaun Of The Dead**

Here's one that came out of nowhere to capture the heart's of many a horror fan and unlike last year's *Cabin Fever* all the glowing comments on the trailers and ads from "horror celebs" (fellow filmmakers and writers who decided to comment on the movie) turned out to be true. What works in *Shaun Of The Dead* is the fact that it successfully mixes romantic comedies, parody, and horror into an entertaining ride even managing to have a hero in Simon Pegg who's really not like your average everyday zombie killer. In fact Shaun's somewhat of a slacker and unambitious, he just happens to be really good at killing zombies.

### **H.H Holmes: America's First Serial Killer**

Sometimes the truth is much more horrifying than fiction and this independent documentary from Chicago filmmaker John Borowski following the life and crimes of notorious serial killer H.H. Holmes proves it tenfold. Loaded with facts, well done recreations (that never exploit), and with a strong eerie tone (that's helped by the narration by Tony Jay, a veteran of Disney films); *H.H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer* deserves its place on my list as one of the top 5 horror films of the year. The real horror comes in knowing that everything Borowski tells us, actually happened - and that itself is truly scary.

### **Dawn Of The Dead**

For the second year running a remake not anticipated by genre fans turns out to

be way better than expected. Taking the basic premise of George A. Romero's 1978 original and running with it this is screenwriter James Gunn and director Zack Snyder's nod to the original while adding enough twists and ideas to make it stand on it's own as a well made, oftentimes creepy, and oftentimes darkly funny film. Plus it slings the most gore seen in any Hollywood movie in years and it ends on such a somber note that if you stuck around for the credits in theatres you literally walked out shell-shocked.

### **Suburban Nightmare**

It's not often that a psychological horror flick that's more of a character study than violent and/or bloody manages to be this engrossing. Made on a low-budget by EI Cinema and filmmaker Jon Keeyes (who had some success with 2000's *American Nightmare*) the reason *Suburban Nightmare* works is because of the great chemistry between leads Trent Haaga (who proves without a doubt he can act much better than the Troma movies he frequents shows) and Brandy Little, and director Keeyes script which manages to blend tension, smart dialogue, and black humour perfectly. So perfectly, in fact, that this is one of the best independent movies to come down the pipe in a while.

### **London Voodoo**

Upstart company Heretic Films released a handful of off-beat and off-centre films last year (*I'll Bury You Tomorrow*, *Sacred Flesh*, and this one), but this British film is their best acquisition yet as it manages to take a topic not touched upon a heck of a lot in horror (voodoo) with writer-director Robert Pratten managing to make a movie filled with nightmarish imagery, quietly spooky moments, and some well written characters. And it's great that this is the second of two independent, character driven movies to make my list because it's something truly lacking in horror these days.

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### **Aaron "Red" Mason (Staff Writer)**

#### **Shaun Of The Dead**

With all the hype surrounding *Shaun Of The Dead* I was sure I'd be disappointed by it, I usually am when something is acclaimed by almost any source, but this one really did deliver. It has laughs, some gore (which truly surprised me), decent acting, and a hero character that looks like me - I suppose resembling Shaun minus the cricket bat isn't really a good thing, but how often do I get to look like a movie star? I think it's obvious that this is one of the best films of the year, horror or not, as the whole thing really clicks. Sure, it takes the horror comedy route, but it doesn't fall into the usual silly trappings that the subgenre usually suffers from. And for once the movie is actually funny, instead of relying on over the top gore to get laughs. Without a doubt *Shaun Of The Dead* has entered that hallowed horror pantheon that so few films ever manage to get to, and I have no doubt it's the best film of this year and many others.

#### **Ginger Snaps 2 & 3**

These two are probably going to be overlooked or forgotten by most at year's end, if for no other reason than the sheer number of "quality" horror releases this year, but that would be doing a great injustice to this fine trilogy of films. All three are drastically different films, which is rare enough when talking a horror

series, but surprisingly they were all really good - makes you wonder how much better they could have been with a bigger budget and support from somewhere other than the horror community. Nevertheless they have secured two new horror icons in Emily Perkins and Katherine Isabelle and given the werewolf subgenre a severe boot in the arse and a much needed revitalization.

### **Dawn Of The Dead**

It's not as good as the original film, lets get that out of the way right now, but comparing nearly any film to the original *Dawn Of The Dead* will get you the same result. Luckily this film, aside from its title, doesn't beg comparison to the Romero's masterpiece, as it's an entirely different movie. Certainly not for the zombie traditionalist (that would be those of us who prefer their undead slow, flesh starved, dim-witted, and in vast, vast quantities) the new *Dawn* gets it's scares from it's fast, almost inhuman (well, you know what I mean) undead - almost like *28 Days Later* set in a shopping mall. Gone too are all the social commentaries and intelligent moments the original strived so hard for, now it's just a fun, slightly gory zombie mash with some decent character actors and a badass Johnny Cash song.

### **The Grudge**

*The Grudge* is another film I wasn't expecting much from, especially with the disappointment *The Eye* was and the involvement of Sam Raimi, but I was...unpleasantly surprised. That's right dear reader, *The Grudge* is the first film in over 15 years to actually unsettle good ol' Mr. Red, and that's saying something. Something about that little cat kid just didn't sit right with me, made me feel like I did when I first saw *The Changeling* so many years ago. Must have something to do with little kids being ghosts, no wonder I always root for Freddy Krueger...

### **Exorcist: The Beginning**

I know you didn't see this one coming, I'd well imagine that this is the only "Best Of/Worst Of" list anywhere in which the new *Exorcist* film wouldn't fall into the latter, but I think you know why it's here. This is one of the best b-movies to come out in years, everything is so foolish and overdone that you can't help but be charmed by it. From it's Playstation-style jackals to it's WWE style final exorcism, not a damn thing in the movie should be serious, but the actors play it out like Shakespeare. If nothing else, you have to respect that commitment.

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### **Derek Carlson (Staff Writer)**

#### **Dawn Of The Dead**

Man was I dreading this one but my feelings couldn't have been more opposite when I walked out of an advance screening. Forget the running zombies and forget it's called *Dawn Of The Dead*, just enjoy a new freakin' zombie movie that not only doesn't suck but rules pretty darn hard!

#### **Shaun Of The Dead**

Easily the best horror comedy since *Dead Alive*. The only reason it's not number one is the fact it's not entirely a horror film. That shouldn't stop you from seeing this if you haven't already as this is a gem of a movie no matter what genre you

wanna place it in.

### **Seed Of Chucky**

2004 was a great year for John Waters fans. Not only did the "Sultan of Sleaze" release his raunchiest trashfest since 1981's *Polyester* (this of course being the hilarious suburban-nympho comedy, *A Dirty Shame*) but also put in a suitably scumbag-ish performance in one of the biggest surprises of the year. Through all the self-deprecation and decapitations my face never stopped smiling. I rarely have this much fun at the movies. Who knew it would be at a Chucky film?

### **Open Water**

Touted as "*The Blair Witch Project* meets *Jaws*" and not too far off, *Open Water* was the only horror film released this year that succeeded in doing what horror films are supposed to do - unsettling the viewer. The "all-too-real" horror of *Open Water* actually creeped me out and that's saying something.

### **Exorcist: The Beginning**

Horror fans are all too familiar with movies that are "so bad, they're good". While I wouldn't say this was actually "good" I do have to admit I was entertained! I myself generally judge movies on their entertainment value and on that merit alone, *Exorcist: The Beginning* deserves it's spot as one of my favorite horror flicks of the year. It did also manage some pretty creepy imagery (ie: the field of inverted crucified bodies at the beginning) and some memorable scares. That's more than I can say for *Alien Vs. Predator* (ha, I can't for the life of me even remember who won).