Despite the shatteringly good, brilliant THE CABIN IN THE WOODS and the fact that I have happily found more than ten titles to wholly endorse as genre films worth seeking out, I can't escape the sentiment that 2012 was in fact, a weak year. Is it the aimlessness of horror at the moment?

My 2012 list is varied in every possible way, the prominent link being an earnest attitude in the filmmaking. While I'm in no way interested in seeing an overall trend guide the genre as a whole, I would love to see something transgressive lead the pack from here on out. Is CABIN that film? It doesn't feel easily imitated in the way something like PARANORMAL ACTIVITY is. And what does an imitation of CABIN entail? Will most unsuccessfully hone in on its meta-comedy, rather its serious reverence to storytelling as culturally significant?

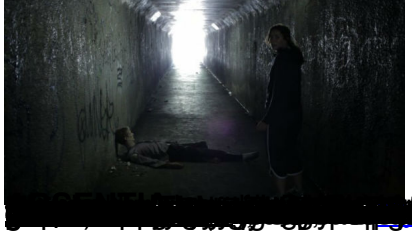
There are two films I've left off this year as they're slated for release at different points in 2013, and both feel in the right direction. Both AMERICAN MARY and HERE COMES THE DEVIL push. AMERICAN MARY is a tonal balance titan, and feels like a film that will be important to many teenagers on the cusp of weirder interests; a film that will push many adolescents over the edge into full blown genre fans. It could be a touchstone. HERE COMES THE DEVIL is strange, indulgent and like my 2011 top pick, KILL LIST—a film I kind of cheated with as it was officially a very early 2012 release—did what horror should, made me uncomfortable.

On topic:

THE CABIN IN THE WOODS

If ever a film dropped the mic.

THE CABIN IN THE WOODS is exhilarating on every level. A sharp, brilliant look at horror storytelling and why we do it, Drew Goddard and Joss Whedon's tale of five friends and their weekend in the woods adeptly manages major tonal shifts and heady genre examination. It takes its characters and their deaths seriously, while humor, genuine affection and boldness spreads until the incredible final moment. It elicits rewatch after rewatch, and hour after hour of conversation. Both subtle and outspoken, THE CABIN IN THE WOODS is no deconstruction. It's reaffirmation.

SLEEP TIGHT

Disregarding those who would confuse CABIN's meta qualities for snark, that film's biggest impact could be its role in a New Sincerity. I mentioned earnestness previously, and much of the films on this list are good stories, well told. SLEEP TIGHT, Jaume Balagueró's elegantly crafted, shuddering Hitchcockian chronicle of a frightening building porter is strikingly old-fashioned in its construction, but not a throwback. It's simply a modern tale of serious suspense with one of the most fantastic opening sequences you're likely to see in 2012. (My review)