

2010: The Year in Horror—Sam's Top 10 Movies

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Thursday, 23 December 2010 10:55



This late, startlingly chilly NYC December marks my first attempt at writing and posting a Top 10 list of any sort; I was worried. I began to realize that as far as the genre was concerned, I didn't know if I really thought enough of 10 films to give them best-of-the-year-style praise. Feeling slightly down, I've since perused a list of releases, and, once I shook up my memory a bit, found enough to get me pretty animated—and what's more, as my premiere foray into a bit of listmaking, came up with a mix of films that I feel just might be a fitting representation of who I am as a filmgoer, horror fan and writer. Let's hop to it...

10. DOGTOOTH (Dir. Giorgos Lanthimos; pictured above)

Cautionary tale of extreme parental repression? Allegory of the dangers of totalitarian brainwashing government? I don't know exactly what DOGTOOTH is, and truthfully, as interested as I am in dissecting and discussing, I kind of never want to arrive at an absolute idea. It's too bizarre, too maniacally energized with black humor and bursts of violence, and Lanthimos and cinematographer Thimios Bakatakis' beautiful, observant and sometimes frustratingly out-of-frame stylistic choices leave everything a little bit too out of reach to appreciate this as anything other than a great piece of abstract, Lynchian, Haneke-esque and wholly awesome cinema.



9. HEARTLESS (Dir. Philip Ridley; pictured right; [my review](#))

I hadn't seen a Ridley film before the experience of HEARTLESS, and as with the aforementioned DOGTOOTH and subsequent movies on this list, you may come to understand just how much I appreciate and advocate films that go for it—that is to say, motion pictures that are pure displays of passion and fearlessness. After a 14-year absence, Ridley dove back in to

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construct a vision that's often frightening, playful, endearing and melancholy. HEARTLESS isn't perfect, but it's the fractured reality of it I hold so dear.

8. MONSTERS (Dir. Gareth Edwards)

The immediacy and reality of handheld coupled with a gripping look at the fantastic. Sold as much more of a creature feature than it is, Edwards' debut is a stunning display of homegrown visual FX (that often best studio work) and that elusive trait we're so often searching for: character.

7. RED WHITE & BLUE (Dir. Simon Rumley; [my review](#)) and ENTER THE VOID (Dir. Gaspar Noé)

While stylistically, aesthetically and even narrative-wise, these films are completely separate entities, Rumley and Noé are making some of the most startling, challenging cinema right now, and both of their 2010 films were something to behold. Rumley's meditation on revenge and some of the most frightening places we can find ourselves in was among the most harrowing real-world-based horror in recent memory, and Noé's mind-melting journey into the afterlife is something that, like HAUSU (which Criterion released this year, and should be on your shelf), if you consider yourself a fan or student of film, needs to be seen.



6. CROUSEY (Dir. Barbra Brancaccio & Joshua Zeman; pictured left; [my review](#))

I was fortunate enough to follow this film along from its premiere at Tribeca to theatrical release, and between subsequent viewings and Q&A moderations, it still envelops me in eeriness every time. It's both a spooky true-crime story and an examination of urban legend and rumor. It's on Netflix Instant; get to it.

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5. SPLICE (Dir. Vincenzo Natali)

Oh, Natali goes for it, and it's gross and silly and heady and often just a little too weird to be goofy. If there's any heir to the throne of Crone(nberg), it might just be Natali, and I'm terribly excited about this, especially if he keeps planning on bringing talent like Sarah Polley to tales of Freudian monster sex and parental fears.

4. THE LAST EXORCISM (Dir. Daniel Stamm; [my review](#))

No matter how tired the trend, a good story told well will transcend its borders and boundaries, and THE LAST EXORCISM was both more than another handheld horror and overcame its EXORCIST-stepchild expectations. By tackling the baggage we bring to stories of Satan, those he'll possess and their psychological alternatives head-on, with two phenomenal performances from its leads, the film succeeded in not only being clever and enthralling throughout, but in building back up (through an over-the-top ending that, unlike many peers and colleagues, I wholeheartedly applaud) that supernatural fear which seemed so silly going in.

3. [REC] 2 (Dir. Jaume Balagueró & Paco Plaza)

It may not be as inherently scary, but Balagueró and Plaza's sequel is just as visceral, relentless and ridiculous, eschewing familiar scientific-plague explanations and driving full force into the demonic and supernatural. I had a blast with [REC] 2 and back-to-back, the two films make for one of the best go-to franchise double features around.



2. KIDNAPPED (Dir. Miguel Ángel Vivas; pictured right; [my review](#))

While it technically doesn't open in the U.S. until 2011, not a whole lot affected me more this

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year than this home-invasion stunner. As everyone welcomes the death rattle of torture and bemoans the endless remakes, the scariest and most exciting subgenre of the 2000s is seeing its entries praised individually, but often going undiscussed as a whole. Hopefully, KIDNAPPED will cause enough of a stir, as its gorgeous filmmaking (seriously, some of the best split screen we might ever see) is coupled with an evil, ugly tale, to bring the global trend to the forefront and receive some serious accolades.

1. BLACK SWAN (Dir. Darren Aronofsky)

The previous film and BLACK SWAN were among the most memorable theatrical experiences I've had not just this year, but in recent memory. Aronofsky epitomizes bravery of vision and unending passion, and he brought Natalie Portman with him in a film that, like HEARTLESS and MONSTERS, takes intimate, raw handheld aesthetic and blends the supernatural, dreamlike and the surreal into its tale of a young woman and her reach for perfection, dedication to her art and the ultimate madness it drives her to. It's f**king mesmerizing and scary and heartbreaking and exhilarating, and I'm dying to see it again.

As far as non-horror goes, I was over the moon for SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD and NEVER LET ME GO, and really hope a lot of you got a chance to check those out as well. Also, you've severely missed out if you haven't even dipped a toe into the ocean of quality that is TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE. More than just creating fun throwbacks, the team at Glass Eye Pix and the filmmakers they've assembled are very much crafting great little spookfests that remind us why we love horror storytelling in general.

What did everyone love this year, and what are you looking forward to in 2011? Let me know!

{comments on}