

Attention: ■

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Aussie horror rises from the grave

While the rest of the Australian film industry is languishing, horror movies are alive and thriving and reaping in the big bucks according to a Queensland University of Technology researcher.

PhD student Mark David Ryan is undertaking the first in-depth study into the re-emergence of horror films and the reasons why horror hungry fans can't get enough of our Aussie schlock.

Mr Ryan said while the rest of the Australian film industry had experienced a contraction in the sales of films to overseas markets, the demand for Aussie horror films had never been stronger.

"Like the undead from beyond the grave, Australian horror films are alive and well," he said.

"Throughout the 2000's, Australian horror production has enjoyed a period of growth that is unequalled throughout the past three and half decades of Australian film history.

Mr Ryan said that in the last eight years, the production of Australian horror had trebled, with more than 60 titles produced or in development, including several breakout successes attracting strong international profiles.

"In 2004, *Saw*, which was created by Australian filmmakers but produced in the US for US\$1.2 million, returned over US\$100 million at the global box office, " he said.

"It subsequently became the most successful international horror franchises in almost two decades, with *Saw I, II, III* and *IV* grossing over US\$450 million at the global box office alone.

"*Wolf Creek*, produced in 2005 for A\$1.4 million, returned over A\$50 million in worldwide revenue, while other films such as *Undead*, *Feed*, *Storm Warning*, and *Cut* have connected with cult and horror audiences in DVD markets around the globe.

"Another recent success was the film *Black Water* which sold into 76 countries to become one of the most widely distributed Australian films in the last year. "

Mr Ryan said the global appetite for fright was in many ways a reflection of the age in which we live.

"Historically horror films have reflected social and cultural fears of a specific era and some suggest we're living in an era of paranoia as a result of global terrorism, " he said.

"Some suggest the rise of zombie horror films is a result of 9/11, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the social anxiety emanating from this, similar to the explosion in 1950s mutant and outer space creature horrors in response to the fear of nuclear holocaust, the Cold War and space exploration.

He said factors driving contemporary horror production included growing worldwide demand for horror films combined with an inflow of international finance and the rise in digital video.

"In recent years there has been a strong market demand for horror movies across the globe, as the genre has steadily become more mainstream, " he said.

"Horror and genre films have long been marginalised by government funding agencies in Australia; however with the emergence of cheap digital video, filmmakers are taking their careers into their own hands.

"In terms of return on investment, horror films are usually made on low budgets but with the potential to earn considerable profits, making them one of the most profitable movie genres for producers.

"This has enabled mainstream producers to bypass public funding models, targeting international markets lured by the potential of strong returns of low-budget horror films."

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*****Hi-res images of Mark Ryan available for media use ******