

Attention: ■

14 October 2009

Horror, Aussie style: Fear in the outback

With Halloween just a couple of weeks away, it's time for horror buffs to get together lists of their favourite movies, and a Queensland University of Technology horror expert wants to make sure it includes plenty of scary Aussie movies.

Dr Mark David Ryan completed his PhD earlier this year looking at the growing horror movie industry in Australia and said the rich, unique landscape of this country often acted as a major character in horror films.

That the theme of many Australian horror movies lies around a hostile, vast and unpredictable landscape is little surprise - especially considering the wild year Aussies have seen, with devastating floods, bushfires and dust storms showing off the majesty and power of nature.

"Horror films hold up a mirror to the dark aspects of a given culture, or underlying cultural fears and anxiety, and in the case of Australian films it is often about a hostile landscape, nature taking its revenge, and also of a fear of outsiders," said Dr Ryan.

"Often, in Australian horror, the victims are foreigners, backpackers, or outsiders from the city, and one of the key themes emerging within the horror genre is that Australia is a dangerous place for a holiday."

This theme has been explored in Aussie fright flicks such as *Wolf Creek*, *Rogue*, *Storm Warning*, *Lake Mungo*, *Long Weekend* and *Dying Breed*.

"*Wolf Creek* is an example of using landscape as a character - this vast, endless scope with near-complete isolation, and the sense of foreigners coming in to that. But the landscape is also portrayed as a dangerous and alien entity which is out to get 'Aussie' characters that don't belong," Dr Ryan said.

"*Blackwater* is another Australian horror film about nature getting revenge; in that case it was a killer crocodile. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* it was a supernatural force. It is certainly a recurring theme."

Mr Ryan said horror movies with a distinctly Australian flavour were also effective when shown to international audiences.

"To a lot of countries, Australia is still a bit of a mystery and the idea of the outback, this huge expanse of land, is in itself haunting," he said.

"Horror has a guaranteed global niche, and Australian horror movies are often a little bit different, they have a unique ambience about them."

Dr Ryan said the popularity of Australian horror was due in part to horror films being able to be low-budget, and film-makers not having to rely on government money or famous actors to create a spine-chilling story.

He is now working on a book about the Australian horror industry and continuing his research in the area.

"When I first started watching Australian horror films, I was fascinated there existed this filmmaking culture much bigger and far cooler than people realised," he said.

Dr Ryan will be presenting films at *Dead Country*, an Australian horror film festival to be held at the Modern Institute of Art, South Bank, over the Halloween weekend.

MARK'S TOP PICKS FOR A HORROR-FILLED HALLOWEEN MOVIE NIGHT:

Recent Aussie horrors:

Wolf Creek, Dying Breed, Black Water, Rogue, Undead

Aussie classics:

Razorback (1984), Patrick (1978), Howling III (1987), Body Melt (1993), Night of Fear (1972)

Media contact: Sharon Thompson, QUT media officer - 3138 4494 or sharon.thompson@qut.edu.au

****Hi-res pics available for media**