

**P**lease bring back the ironic, winking mock-horror films. This new brand of snuff-flick horror is absurd — and they make me queasy.

The *Scream* franchise, which playfully mocked the conventions of the horror movie genre and tickled rather than severed bones, has given way to a new breed of cinematic butchery — silly, way over-the-top exercises in gross-out special effects. No laughs, but buckets of blood and gore and barrels of severed body parts — all shot in closeup. The camera never blinks.

Films like *Wolf Creek*, *Hostel*, Rob Zombie's grisly efforts like *The Devil's Rejects* and the *Saw* series have ushered in a new horror — or at least a return to the old horror. Like old horror films from the '70s, these are most definitely low-budget B-movie affairs. The difference is that vast improvements in special effects technology mean you don't need big bucks to make that scene of some guy shuffling off his mortal coil as a result of a large spike through the eyeball convincing — and likely to make you heave your popcorn.

I have resisted acquainting myself with this bloody new wave of horror films for two reasons — I don't particularly like horror films and I detest gratuitous displays of violence. So I missed *Wolf Creek* and *Hostel* and the first *Saw*, and it was with some trepidation that I rented *Saw II* earlier this week.

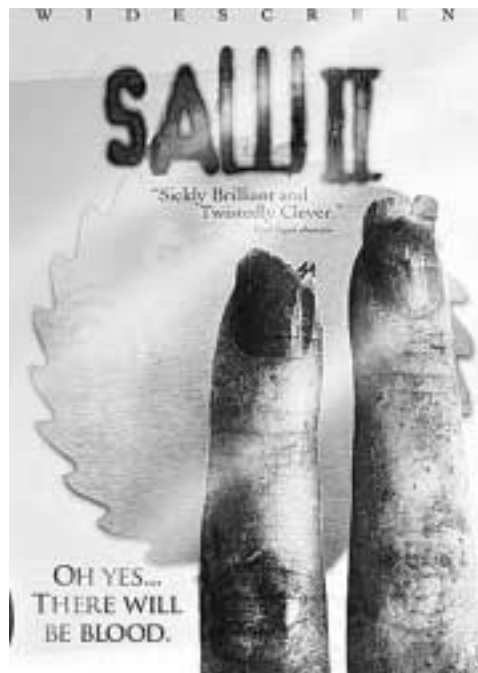
If some of the nuances and character motivations have eluded me because I didn't fulfil the research requirements by seeing the original *Saw*, well, sue me. I'm still traumatized by that spiked Venus flytrap-thingee that made a pincushion out of some poor dude in *Saw II*.

Gross, and stupid. That sums up *Saw II*. No details of plot needed — there is a quick setup and then we are trapped along with the other, mostly comely young people, in a booby-trapped house, at the mercy of the murderous killer nicknamed Jigsaw. The comely youngsters get picked off one by one, of course, in truly nasty fashion. (Toward the end we get a twist, and a neat setup for No. 3.) That's the point. As nasty, gross and sick as possible.

*Saw II*, *Hostel* and the like are all about how far — or low — can you go. They are about scaring the crap, to be indelicate, out of an audience that does not scare easily, and wants to jump out of their seats.

It is a very young demo that goes out on

# Saw II too gory



the first weekend to see these movies, which often open at No. 1 at the box office.

That box office tends to fall off dramatically after the first week, but not before these films are in a nice profit position before the inevitable Halloween DVD release. This new wave of horror shows no sign of abating.

I'm no sociologist, but it makes sense that there is something to the theory that the target demo is eager to see more graphic and imaginative depictions of violence, thanks, in part, to the graphic and imaginative depictions it has grown up with in video games, movies etc. It is not necessarily a desensitization to violence, it's just pushing the envelope — every generation pushes the envelope a bit further.

As for this return of grisly horror, director Joe Dante said recently, "Everything goes in cycles." That means we may be giggling at horror films again soon, instead of reaching for a barf bag.

> NEAL WATSON

## Spotty Domino misses mark

What a waste. Domino Harvey's life — tough, true and tragic — was the stuff big-screen biographers dream of. Harvey, the daughter of actor Laurence Harvey (*The Manchurian Candidate*), ditched her Beverly Hills-minted fortune for a seedy gig as a bounty hunter and died last year, not even 40 years old, of a drug overdose. What more do you need?

That's a question director Tony Scott (*Man on Fire*) and writer Richard Kelly (*Donnie Darko*) should have asked themselves before they mounted this staggering, excessive mess. To say Scott — thrashing us with hyperbolic camerawork until it qualifies as audience abuse — botches the job is an understatement.

He renders *Domino*, which he lovingly laboured on for years, unwatchable. Kelly's frazzled, frenetic script is so convoluted at one point Scott throws up a digital scorecard on screen so viewers might be able to follow along. Like they'll want to.

The only words they'll be pining to see at this point, two-thirds into Scott's over-adrenalized opus, are The End. Believe me, it can't come fast enough.

Drowned in the dementia is both Harvey's life — there is so much fiction in *Domino* that the facts are rendered unrecognizable — and a cast of A-listers who should have known better.



Chief among them is star Keira Knightley, a newly minted Oscar nominee for her turn in *Pride and Prejudice* and this week's owner of the World's Sexiest Beanpole crown — bestowed on her by Internet nerds — thanks to her nude *Vanity Fair* cover.

Not that she's alone in the misery. Suffering alongside her are Mickey Rourke as Domino's bounty-hunting Obi-Wan Kenobi, Ed Mosbey; Christopher Walken as the architect of a reality-TV show *Domino* ends up starring in (a creation of Kelly's that further divorces the story from reality); and Jacqueline Bisset as Domino's socialite mother, who tried to tame Domino's inner demons at an early age by putting her in boarding school.

Saddled with a screenplay that never strays to the deep end of the pool, Knightley's performance runs the gamut from A to B.

But she probably had other things on her mind.

As the movie — which kicks off with an FBI shrink played by Lucy Liu interrogating Domino — disintegrates before our eyes, it's all Knightley can do to cling for dear life as Scott's rocket implodes on the launchpad.

At least viewers can switch it off.

> KEVIN WILLIAMSON



## MUSIC DVDS



## The Small Faces

*Under Review*

Chrome Dreams | MVD

Some music geeks dig The Faces. Others prefer The Small Faces. Don't know the diff? Don't sweat it. Not many North Americans do. That's where *Under Review* comes in handy. This standard-issue 67-minute British TV doc chronicles the brief, meteoric trajectory of The Small Faces, who were huge stars in their native England in the '60s but unknown on this side of the Atlantic. The usual slate of writers and historians recount the history of the band, which was formed in 1965 by singer-guitarist Steve Marriott and included bassist Ronnie Lane, keyboardist Ian McLagan and drummer Kenney Jones. More to the point, plenty of vintage clips show the boys in action, playing hits like *All or Nothing*, *Tin Soldier*, *Sha-La-La-La-Lee*, *What'cha Gonna Do About It* and *Itchycoo Park* (their only North American hit) on assorted TV shows. Bonus features include a discography and trivia quiz. On the downside, there's no input from the surviving bandmem-

bers. And if you're a Faces fan, you'll be disappointed that the disc abruptly ends with the defection of Marriott in 1968 — so you don't hear about how they drafted Rod Stewart and Ron Wood and morphed into superstars with songs like *Stay With Me* and *Ooh La La*. Hey, you can't please all of the geeks all of the time.

★★★ out of ★★★★★

> DARRYL STERDAN