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TV The Journal view



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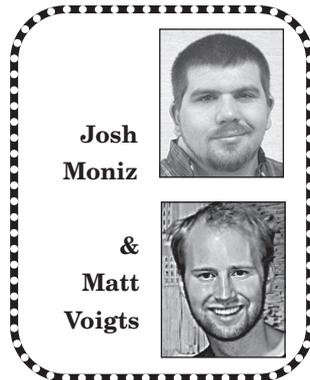
Double Take: "Scream 4"

Matt: Bloody good fun, not so good parody,
Josh: A bloody bad joke

Matt: "Scream 4" is one of the best slasher movies of the last decade, which is only partially a backhanded compliment. While the movie is not as good as the original, it is an exuberant, suspenseful bloodbath that reminded me of how much I like the genre. On the negative, for a movie that parodies horror film conventions while embracing them, it doesn't seem quite in tune with how the genre has changed since the 90s.

The funny, suspenseful 1996 original movie – a slasher movie in which horror movie fans were the prey – was influential in bringing self-awareness to mainstream cinema and briefly bringing back the "masked killer stalks teenagers in the woods" genre. In recent years, however, 'suspenseful' horror has largely supplanted by gross-out torture films like "Saw" and "Hostel" and lazy cash-ins like last year's "Nightmare on Elm Street" remake. While the characters in "Scream 4" seem vaguely aware of this, the movie itself seems confused on what exactly it's parodying and subverting.

When it mocks bad sequels and remakes, "Scream 4" seems restrained, as if it



Josh
Moniz

&
Matt
Voigts

lacks confidence that it isn't a lazy cash-grab itself. On the other hand, the tagline proclaims "new decade, new rules," and characters constantly pay lip service to an 'all bets are off' philosophy of contemporary horror movies that is never explained and doesn't really ring true. In any sense, the killer doesn't go for elaborate Saw-like deathtraps but rather the good old stalk-and-stab.

The movie is much more effective in how it addresses all the navel-gazing this culture of Facebook and the Internet, especially in the killer's motivation. Does "Scream 4" consider itself a remake or a sequel? Series fans will enjoy how the movie also has fun with that idea near the end. Perhaps the most 'meta' element of "Scream" this time around is that it's a good, old-fashioned slice-em-up that's most at home when referencing itself.

Josh: I have to strongly disagree with Matt on this



Neve Campbell and Mary McDonnell get a return visit from the Ghostface Killer.

movie. I think the film is just an old joke that's been told too many times.

I believe the use of "meta" is something that should only be used sparingly, when there is a purpose to it. I think of it like the gimmick failing shows pull, where they do something dramatic then undo it by saying it was all a dream. A stunt like that can irk the audience, but it can be acceptable on a one-time basis.

The first "Scream" required the meta-jokes and Scooby-Doo style mystery about who is the killer to catch people in ways they didn't expect. Audiences at that time had been burned out by the overload of horror films in the 80s. It made them care about the killer and the victims again, thus making them able to be scared. "Scream 4" overuses it so much that it undermines everything it accomplishes. The intro has

four or five "film-within-a-film" reveals in a row. To me, that's like repeating the same joke five times.

For every good character development it makes, it has a character mention this is a movie, which causes you to lose your emotional investment. For every cliché it tries to make fun of, it just ends up doing a few minutes later. One step forward, two steps back.

Maybe I wouldn't be so bothered if it had an original story, but the new film is the exact same film as the first "Scream." The only thing different is a palette swap of digital phones and devices for the clunky 90s phones. Additionally, the "surprise" ending loses its punch if the entire length of the film is spent telling you that the film will pull tricks.

There is some good in this film. Some of the scenes are genuinely scary and the acting is much better than

what you would expect from a horror film. Additionally, the majority of the film plays like a comedy, so there are a few acceptably funny moments.

Matt: I'll agree that the 'meta-movie' has become a cliché in its own right, and that most of the movies that followed "Scream," including its own sequels, weren't very great. "Scream 4" does lean heavily on its glories of the 90s, but I would argue it isn't the same story. The first one was about characters copying the movies. By part four, that rabbit hole has gone deeper and they're relying on copies that are myriad levels deep. By nature, that's not going to be as fresh, but the execution of that concept is done just well enough for me to consider it a fresh take.

Josh: I can see where Matt is coming from, but I just can't find the film acceptable. In "Scream," Craven completely understands the way people used phones in the 90s, as well as the problems with the devices (no caller ID). In "Scream 4," the digital devices are used in such a random fashion that it feels like someone who has never used one made the film. I think if the filmmakers had better know the technology, they probably could have made up for some of "Scream 4's" flaws. Similarly, the underlying assumption in this film that the

kids use digital devices only because they're self-absorbed is borderline ageism.

Matt: Parody, my friend, take it as parody. If you're a fan of the series, go see it; if you're new, rent the first two and then go see it.

Josh: If you're obsessed with the "Scream" franchise or you're a gore hound, you'll find it OK. For everyone else, I'd give it a pass.

Matt: 7.5/10 ; **Josh:** 5/10

Synopsis:

Survivor Sidney Prescott returns to Woodsboro on the anniversary of the original massacre to find the Ghostface Killer is back as well, ready to carve up a new generation of teenage horror movie fans – and perhaps returning originals Sheriff Dewey Riley and his wife, ex-reporter Gale Weathers.

Starring: Neve Campbell, David Arquette, Courtney Cox, Emma Roberts and Hayden Panettiere.

Director: Wes Craven

Writer: Kevin Williamson

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