“What an Awfully Goo-ey Mess!”

The *Hellraiser* battle is complete. Did your choice make the cut, and move themselves into a coveted semi-final spot?

Not a massive turn-out for this last battle, and it was as close as it could get. With only 31 total votes, Clare Higgins comes out ahead – by one vote. 16 for Higgins, and 15 for Laurence. Which means, we bid farewell to our beloved Kirsty, *Hellraiser*‘s final girl. The wicked stepmother wins out over the innocent ingénue. This also marks the first time in the competition that a villain comes out on top. So we’ll see Ms. Higgins in the semi-final rounds – which are not far off.

Like our last two ladies, our next two contestants had to deal with more than their fair share of sticky, goo-ey, nasty messes while filming their respective films. But through all of the special effects trying to take center stage, they are still able to shine – with memorable performances which have landed them here – in the latest battle – heretofore known as “What an Awfully Goo-ey Mess!”

First up, Oscar-winner Geena Davis is the curious reporter who falls in love with Jeff Goldblum’s mad scientist, Seth Brundle in David Cronenberg’s brilliant re-imagining of *The Fly*.

Davis won an Oscar only three years later for her role in *The Accidental Tourist*.

Davis was nominated for a Saturn Award for her role as Veronica Quaife. And it’s absolutely deserving of an actual win. Let’s examine why she’s in this competition.

Let me sum it up for you with one word: *shotgun*.

Not enough for you? Take a trip back with me for a moment. Let’s go past all of the horror and crying and terror Davis puts on the screen as Veronica and move right into the climax. It hurts to see her reaction to pulling that trigger. It hurts to see her reacting to the sad/damaged creature on the floor in front of her. It hurts to know what courage she had to muster to do what she did. She killed her lover, the father of her child and one can assume, her soul-mate. There’s a genuine love between Davis and Goldblum (weren’t they dating at the time?), and that’s why this intimate film makes such an impression.

But there are other moments worthy of praise for Davis in the film. How about the abortion dream-sequence, where the larvae is extracted from her womb? Where does a gifted actress like Davis (or anyone of her caliber) go to in their mind to pull out a screaming, terrified and unbelieving reaction such as the one in this scene? It’s mind-boggling how much exhaustion and fear she brings to Veronica.

However, nothing can compare to her teary-eyed and frightened delivery of “I don’t know what you’re trying to tell me” as Seth (now deep into his physical transformation) talks to Veronica about “insect politics”. She’s come to the loft to tell him she’s pregnant, is about to have an abortion, and he ends up telling her “I’ll hurt you if you stay”. Wow. The acting from both of these thespians in this scene – I mean, c’mon. You can’t top that. And Davis’ wide eyes, trying so hard to keep from looking directly at him -- painful. She just breaks my heart in this scene.

Immediately following, she rushes to the car and pleads with Stathis (John Getz) to take her to get an abortion right then and there. “Don’t you understand? I want it out of my body.” I think that the majority of Davis’ scenes in this film, certainly as things become dire, are transcendent. I can’t imagine that she would complete a take of a scene like the one at the car – regarding the abortion – and then Cronenberg calls “cut” and she turns to Getz and says, “so pretty good craft services today, huh?”

What I’m saying, is that Davis embodies the hysteria, disbelief and terror of Veronica. You can see it in her heaving chest, in her teary eyes and in the way she delivers her lines. Davis is there for you Veronica. She is you. And that’s why Davis is a no-brainer to be in this competition.

There was a lot of talk from critics when the film was released, that Goldblum would be a shoe-in for an Oscar nomination. And he certainly should have received such an honor. But Davis is every bit as good as Goldblum – worthy of a supporting Oscar (at least the nomination). It’s a beautiful chemistry between these two actors and these two characters.

Among her smaller scenes – before the ickiness happens – is her first intro to the tele-pods. This film wastes no time in getting to the goodies, and Veronica’s initial apprehension and suspicion as Brundle shows off his invention which “will change the world”, immediately gets you into her corner. The brilliance of Davis’ performance (and in turn, Goldblum’s), is that we understand the journey she takes from uncertain journalist, to active participant, to hopelessly loyal and in love.

There’s been talk about many Oscar-winning actors who were slighted by the Academy on previous performances, and then winning a year or so later for another good performance, but perhaps not as good. Point in case for us genre-lovers: Jeremy Irons should have been at least nominated for *Dead Ringers* (another Cronenberg film), but wasn’t – only to win a year later for his performance of Claus von Bulow in *Reversal of Fortune*.

Davis blows our minds (pun intended) with *The Fly*, receives little recognition – then a few years later wins an Oscar for *The Accidental Tourist*. Hmmm.

Our second contestant is Shawnee Smith. Before she was working side-by-side with *Saw*’s Jigsaw, she was a perky young cheerleader, trying to solve the goo-ey problems of her small, mountain town of Arborville. In the 1988 remake of *The Blob*, Smith is Meg Penny. She gets caught up in the drama that overtakes her doomed burg, as a creature of unknown origin crash-lands in a flash of light – just on the outskirts of town. Quickly, the creature eats/absorbs everything in its path, growing ever larger with each meal.

Smith was quite young when the film was made, and there are some green acting moments to be had, but overall, Meg’s a likeable, resourceful heroine with a lot of spunk.

Let’s examine some of Shawnee’s quieter triumphs for Meg. I think one of her stand-out emotional moments happens after the craziness in the hospital. Paul’s dead, no one believes Meg and she’s now “safely” tucked away in her bedroom – clearly in shock and blankly gazing at her snow-globe (incidentally a nice bit of foreshadowing for the film’s climax). She’s teary-eyed as her mother enters her room to offer up a sedative (now that’s good parenting!). There’s not a ton of dialogue in this scene, but it’s her soft and pleading, “You don’t believe me either” to her mother which sells the moment. Her mother replies with a non-committal, “You’re home now. You’re safe.” And it’s that moment when Meg makes the choice to figure this out on her own. So she puts down the pill and sneaks out. It’s a nice moment to see that Meg is not a damsel in distress. She makes the decision to investigate – in doing so, defying her parents, defying authorities and setting out to clear her name. She *did* see what she says she saw!

Shortly thereafter, she finds Flagg (Kevin Dillon), with the intention of bailing him out of jail, but they end up sharing a bite at the local diner. As she tearfully explains what happened to Paul (Donovan Leitch) at the hospital, we see how terrified she actually is. When Flagg asks her what drugs she’s on, she retaliates with a fabulous delivery of “You put on this big show, but you’re just like everyone else in this town. You’re full of shit, Flagg!” He calms her down, offers her a sandwich, and makes a joke about her being the “homecoming queen type” and how did it feel to say that curse? And Meg is able to drop her guard for just a moment, and share in the laugh. Flagg lightens the mood and so we get to see a softer Meg (before things get really wacky, and she has to step up and be the hero). Smith really delivers in this exchange!

I saw this film during my horror heyday of the ‘80s, when I was about 14. One moment which always stood out to me, and which garnered post-viewing conversation between my best friend and I (we were horror junkies) involved Meg’s escape into the sewer tunnels with her younger brother Kevin (Michael Kenworthy of *Return of the Living Dead Part II)* and his buddy Eddie (Douglas Emerson). They’ve just left behind the gnarly scene back at the movie theatre, and are blindly running about through the water and waste, hoping to avoid the Blob. At one point, Eddie (when introduced, he’s a pretty cocky kid) has a mini-meltdown, saying that he wants to go home, etc. And rather than take the usual “person in charge who is also terrified” role and scream at the kid to shut up, or slap him or what-not, Meg takes a deep breath and lightly tells him (and her brother) that everything’s going to be okay. Now, this is a minute moment to point out, but as a kid, I recognized its novelty. I don’t know if that was Smith’s choice or director Chuck Russell’s, but it sets Meg apart. Even in such a dire situation as the one they find themselves, she puts on a strong face for the two kids. Sadly, we know that her calm demeanor doesn’t help out poor Eddie in the end (kids dying in horror films – so rare!), but my best buddy back in the day and I made note of this fantastic and unique moment. Smith sells it, and upon my recent re-screening of the picture, I was happy to see that it still stands up as my favorite bit from Smith.

One other thing I always appreciated from Smith, as well as Meg – their no-nonsense go-get-‘em attitude. When Meg returns to town to find the whole population gathered in front of the library, wandering and wondering what is going on, as all of the haz-mat suits corral them, she finds her parents, discovers that her brother’s at the movie theatre and approaches one of the dudes in white. He tells her that they are making their way through town, section by section. What I love about this moment, is that Meg doesn’t wait for a second. She sneaks off and goes to rescue her brother – no hesitation. While this action is written in the script, making it more of a “Meg thing”, Smith still sells us on this choice. We as the audience have no qualm in following Meg, and appreciating and understanding the character’s choices. Doesn’t matter what’s on the page, if Smith didn’t do a great job selling it (no matter how good the writing), we’re simply not going to care.

So which icky, goo-ey mess pleases you most? Geena Davis’ love affair with a human fly, or Shawnee Smith’s battle with an oozing, hungry blob?

As always, cast your vote right here on our site, over on Facebook, or with the lovely folks of Twitter – Ultimate Horror Lady along with your choice #geenadavis or #shawneesmith