

Blatant sex and gore far too bloody much

video/dvd



In The Cut
Director: Jane Campion
Available: Vid/DVD rental stores

"Did I ever tell you my mother used to dress me in girl's blouses?"

John (Kevin Bacon), a shirtless suspected serial killer puts this question to our protagonist Franny Avery (Meg Ryan) after he breaks into her New York flat.

This is a tame moment in New Zealand director Jane Campion's (*The Piano*) erotic thriller *In The Cut*.

A combination of implausible events and seemingly inhuman characters make Campion's sex-and-blood-drenched film noir inaccessible to the average viewer.

Based on the 1995 novel by Susanne Moore, *In The Cut* revolves around Franny Avery, a lonely high school English

teacher who, after witnessing the prelude to a vicious decapitation, throws herself at Detective Giovanni Molloy (Mark Ruffalo).

As Franny becomes a potential victim, several predatory male figures step up as likely suspects: Detective Molloy, his partner Detective Rodriguez (Nick Domici) and John, the shirtless stalker. Franny seeks "solace" in her half sister Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who encourages Franny to pursue sex with Detective Molloy "just for the exercise".

As the body count rises, the characters seem unaffected by the madness around them. As if lacking humanity, they are unable to engage the audience on any emotional level.

It's not that the characters are poorly acted — Ryan's turn as Franny is some of her best work.

It just seems their reactions to trauma are soulless. None of the characters exude enough warmth to garner sympathy from the audience.

This is best demonstrated when Detective Molloy calls Franny from a blood-soaked crime scene for a session of steamy phone sex.

Shot in the sultry streets of a New York summer in a gothic style similar to *The Piano*, the film is visually stunning.

The camera hovers and sways over the lust-filled characters as they sweat it out in the shadow of a serial killer.

As the stakes are heightened,

the film maintains a sluggish pace. The dislikeable characters and slow moving plot make the finale of *In The Cut* more of a chore than pleasure.

By the end of the film it is difficult to care about the fate of our Franny.

Somewhere underneath the layers of blood and lust of *In The Cut* is the universal theme of human need for love and companionship.

A wedding ring and a charm bracelet are symbols of this underlying notion.

The subtleties of this shock-for-the-sake-of-shocking film unfortunately get lost in a barrage of blatant blowjobs and bloody dismemberment.

— Peter James

Average woman overhaul makes ugly TV

television



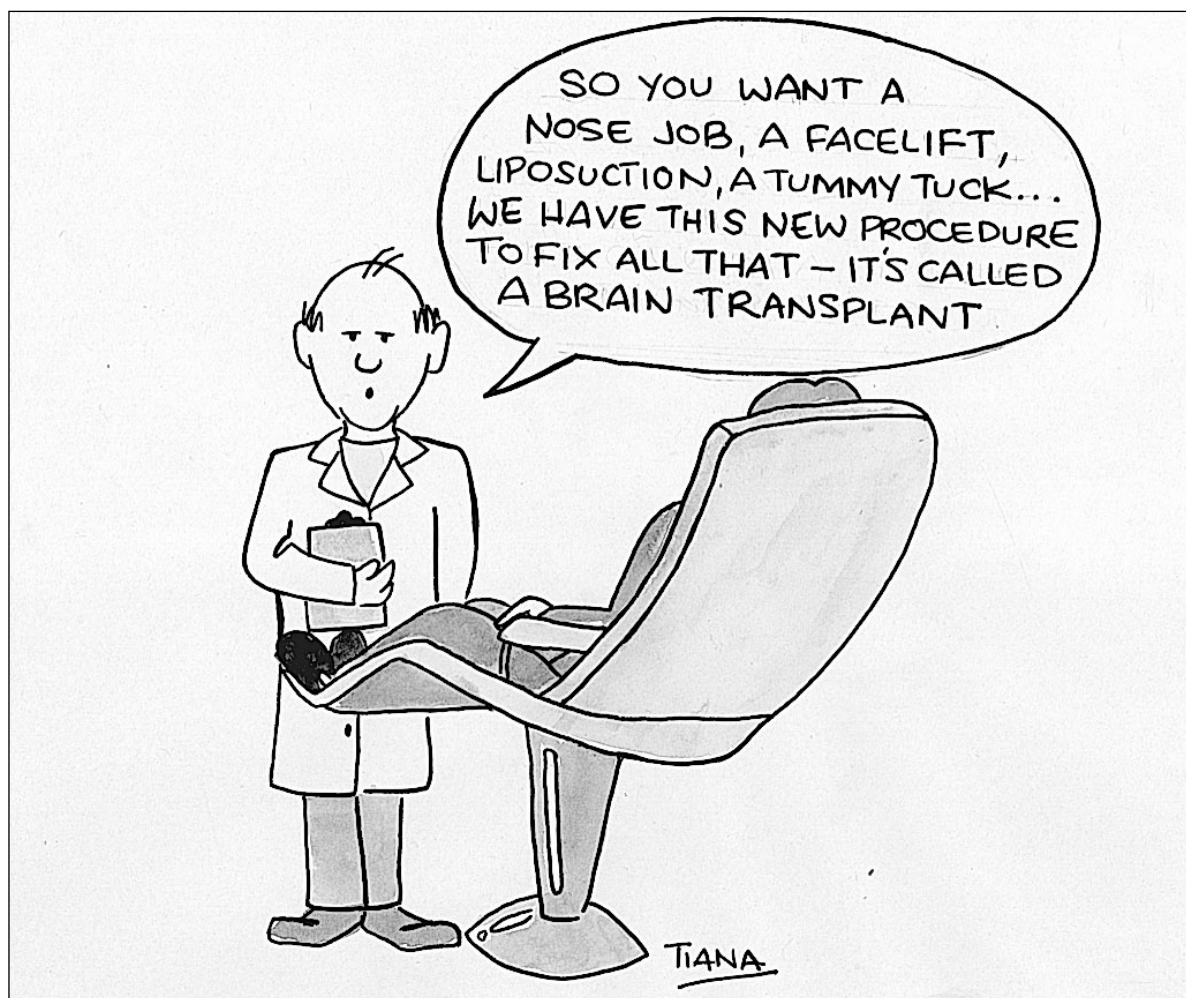
The Swan
TV3, Tuesdays 8.30pm
Review is based on episode 3 screened July 20.

TV3's latest reality show, *The Swan*, takes two average women each week, gives them to a team of plastic surgeons and coaches them to undergo a three-month overhaul before one is judged to have become beautiful enough to compete in *The Swan* beauty pageant.

A joke? No, just reality television gone mad.

The Swan has a regular team of plastic surgeons, dental surgeons, coaches and even a token psychologist, who regard invasive surgery with evangelical zeal. All of them have clearly undergone cosmetic enhancement treatments which limit them to one facial expression — a sneer.

The team meets Cindy who has a big nose. A really big nose.



"People just don't understand what it feels like on the inside to know you're ugly," weeps Cindy.

"That's an incredibly difficult nose to do. I mean, that nose could go horribly wrong," comments one of the surgeons.

Aside from rebuilding her nose, the plastic surgeons agree

Cindy needs another 15 surgical procedures.

Second contestant Tawnya is 40 years old and looks it.

"We need to get her looking ten years younger," ventures one of the experts.

The viewer gets to experience the whole makeover from surgery to gruelling gym workouts with the contestants swathed in bandages, while being hounded by the experts.

"You don't want to ruin all that work just because you ate butter," shrieks one coach.

Unlike other surgical makeover shows such as *Extreme Makeover*, the women aren't transformed to reveal their inner beauty — they're turned into beauty pageant contestants.

The "contestants" are all attractive but lacking self-confidence and certainly don't need to be turned into Barbie dolls.

Plastic surgery is trivialised to the point where it becomes grotesque.

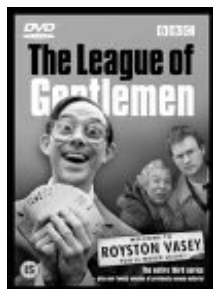
Three months are squeezed into 20 minutes to allow time for a sphincter-clenching dramatic finale where the contestants, who haven't seen a mirror in three months, have their new bodies revealed to them.

The Swan is eminently watchable but rather than a modern-day fairytale, it's nothing more than a freak show.

— Kate Palmer

Shacking up with some peculiar gentlemen

dvd



The League of Gentlemen
Director: Steve Bandelack
Available: DVD retailers

The third series of an award-winning comedy whose television broadcast caused extreme reactions has found a perfect home with its DVD release.

Praise and condemnation for the dark humour of *The League of Gentlemen Series 3*, written by and starring Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton, Reece Shearsmith and Jeremy Dyson, flowed in equal measure after its television premiere.

Royston Vasey and its peculiar inhabitants, such as Barbara — the hairy-chested, pregnant, transsexual taxi driver, saw a shift in comedic style, both daring and risky, that polarised opinion.

The easy route would have been to repeat the winning formula

of the previous series. One need only think of the warm, well-worn pair of slippers that was *Dad's Army*.

The two best-known and loved characters are killed off within the first five minutes — a metaphor for change that could have been commercial suicide, but was vital for the series to grow.

Gone is the sketch-based comedy in favour of six self-contained individual character stories which collide in a stunning finale, repeated each episode with increasing significance to the series ending.

Initially disappointing, because of the loss of familiarity, there are enough laughs to make

you want to watch episode two — plus you've paid \$50 so you might as well.

The style change settles in, or rather you settle into the style. These are not joke-packed episodes, but a deeper development of character, story and atmosphere over an entire series.

This is where the DVD is hands down a winner. Adverts could disrupt a carefully constructed atmosphere, but the real danger is viewers skipping episodes and missing the big picture.

The DVD has excellent extras including out-takes, interviews, and a and a special documentary about the making of the series.

This is a brave, stunning and

often hilarious piece of television which unfortunately leaves you wishing it was funny a bit more often.

The documentary gives an insight into artistic frustrations, writer's block and disappointments which sadly show in the finished product.

In the drive for distinction from previous series, the feeling of isolation of this strange world, set in a grim town on the moors of Northern England, has been lost.

However, with this series winning them more awards, a movie to be filmed this year and rumours of a fourth television series, we haven't heard the last of *The League of Gentlemen*.

— Owen Hembry