

'Falls' beautifully filmed

By **CHRISTY LEMIRE**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Seraphim Falls" comes from Mel Gibson's company, Icon Productions, but it's so creatively and consistently violent you'd think Gibson himself directed it, too.

(He didn't — it's actually the workmanlike feature debut from longtime TV director David Von Ancken, who co-wrote the script with Abby Everett Jaques.)

This technically solid but dramatically unremarkable Western finds Liam Neeson chasing Pierce Brosnan through the snow-covered mountains and across the blinding desert after the Civil War, seeking revenge for an offense that isn't revealed until nearly the end. (While the narrative structure is clever, it also depletes the film of context and necessary heft until it's too late.)

Along the way, characters are shot, stabbed, pierced through the skull, whacked in the face, sent plummeting down a waterfall and nearly frostbitten.

Oh, and a horse gets disemboweled. Presumably this is why they called it the Wild West.

But it's all photographed with bleak, widescreen beauty by John Toll, the Oscar-winning cinematographer of Gibson's "Braveheart."

Also looking great is Brosnan, almost unrecognizable beneath a scruffy, salt-and-pepper beard and tanned, weathered visage as Gideon, a former Union Army captain. He successfully began to dispel his polished James Bond image as a miserable hit-man in 2005's "The Matador"; here, he hops in the saddle and tramples over it.

The first time we see Gideon, he's by himself in the snowy woods, where he takes a gunshot to the arm with manly stoicism; later, on the run from his pursuers and soaking wet from his waterfall dip, he strips off his shirt in the freezing cold, dips his



AP PHOTO

Liam Neeson stars in "Seraphim Falls." The film is set just after the Civil War.

knife into a campfire to sterilize it, then plucks the slug from his skin and cauterizes the wound with the flat side of the blade. (Von Ancken's camera doesn't flinch; Gideon does only slightly.)

Neeson's Col. Morsman Carver; formerly of the Confederate Army, is on his tail with a grudge to settle. Accompanying him is a posse of men with whom he barely gets along, and whose numbers dwindle as the film progresses. (Some of them fall victim to Gideon's MacGyver-like craftiness.)

"There might have been a man rode through here, tall, don't talk much," Carver asks strangers in pursuit of his prey.

And nearly everyone he and Gideon run into during the protracted chase initially appears pure or spiritual in some way, but ultimately they all turn out to

be hustlers or hucksters.

Among them is Anjelica Huston, who shows up out of nowhere in the middle of the desert, selling cure-all and offering unolicited philosophical advice, along with some much-needed ammo.

Then again, she might be a hallucination in her horse-drawn carriage, dressed in red and dripping with honey; either way, she's a hoot.

Von Ancken maintains a steady pace throughout, until there's nothing and no one left but these two men in hand-to-hand combat on the desert floor. Apart from one other, each suffered nightmare flashbacks to the event that binds them; here, they can do nothing but face what happened.

Their climactic confrontation is visually arresting in its starkness. But as an anti-war statement, a call to lay down arms that's clearly intended to be relevant today, it's a bit too clunky in its literalism.

MOVIE REVIEW

'Seraphim Falls'

Rating: R for violence and brief language
Stars: 2½ out of four

TAKE IT HOME ON DVD

'SAW III'

The third installment of the blood-and-guts horror franchise arrives in a variety of flavors on DVD and Blu-ray high-definition disc.

This time out, the terminally ill nutcase Jigsaw (Tobin Bell) carries out his twisted morality games with the help of his apprentice (Shawnee Smith), targeting two detectives on his trail as the newest victims for his warped effort to test humanity's weaknesses.

The Blu-ray disc and an unrated DVD release offer a grislier version of the movie that adds five minutes of footage. The R-rated theatrical cut also is available on a separate DVD release, but only in full-screen format.

'THE GUARDIAN'

Kevin Costner teams with Ashton Kutcher for an adventure drama following the exploits of dogged rescue swimmers off the coast of Alaska.

Costner plays a veteran Coast Guard rescuer whose nerve is shattered by tragedy on a mission, prompting his reassignment as trainer of new recruits, including an overconfident competitive swimmer (Kutcher).

Along with four deleted scenes, the DVD has an alternate ending, a rosier conclusion that director Andrew Davis says was shot as a safety valve in case the sobering finale of the released version proved too downbeat for studio executives.

'BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN'

The 2005 Academy Awards favorite, which wound up losing in a best-picture upset by "Crash," gets a DVD makeover with a two-disc set.

Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal star as sheep-tenders who share a summer of love then resume their affair years later as family men, the movie becoming a cultural phenomenon that prompted parodies and endless gay-cowboy jokes.

Among the DVD extras are interviews and a look at Willie Nelson's studio session recording a cover of Bob Dylan's "He Was a Friend of Mine" for the film.

TAKE IT HOME ON CD

John Mellencamp (Universal Republic Records) **FREEDOM ROAD**

"Our Country," John Mellencamp's hit that's currently running in a television commercial for Chevy Trucks, sounds like a Hallmark card to America, on the anthemic choruses, at least.

But the middle stanzas question whether his country lives up to its democratic ideals.

In that sense, the song adroitly represents the heartland rocker's 19th studio album, *Freedom Road*, which celebrates the American dream while pointing out darkening clouds on its political and social landscape.

"Jim Crow," a duet with Joan Baez, deals with modern bigotry, while "Heaven Is a Lonely Place" pricks religious narrow-mindedness. The title song, one of eight featuring harmonies by vocal quartet Little Big Town, suggests that with liberty comes responsibility and the potential for abuse.

Like classic Mellencamp tunes "Pink Houses" and "Rain on the Scarecrow," *Freedom Road* thrusts a rocking fist in the air while putting Americans on alert about problems bedeviling their nation.

Saliva (Island)

BLOOD STAINED LOVE STORY

Kudos to all the artsy metal bands, but there's something undeniably rewarding about a straight-ahead, unpretentious hard-rock band bulldozing its way through songs.

Nothing about Saliva's new *Blood*

Stained Love Story is ingenious or even imaginative, and yet the Memphis band's unrefined confidence is just as effective as most studio trickery might be.

Songs are solid, if familiar, and skillfully executed.

Lead singer Josey Scott is a carnival barker on opener "Ladies and Gentleman," a heavy-but-smooth fusion of electric thrash and vocal harmonies, and it's only the high-voltage of the catchy subsequent cut "Broken Sunday" that separates the track from pure pop.

Saliva goes a bit flat when Scott, normally a fine singer, ventures into near-rap style on "King of the Stereo" and "One More Chance."

On the rowdy "Black Sheep," the vocalist snarls the declaration, "I'm the black sheep of the family!"

Yeah, that's mundane. But it's satisfying to hear Scott growl.

Clinic (Domino)

VISITATIONS

Clinic prescribes another dose of unnerving clamor with its fourth release, *Visitations*, a follow-up to 2004's acclaimed *Winchester Cathedral*, which in turn followed 2002's *Walking With Thee*, a Grammy nominee for Best Alternative Music Album.

If press releases are to be believed, *Visitations* is more upbeat than previous projects from Clinic, though it's anyone's guess what vocalist Ade Blackburn is actually singing with his clinched-teeth, indecipherable delivery.

But whatever it is, it's mesmerizing and buffeted by waves of buzzing guitars.

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Pam Smith
Indiana's "Biggest Loser"

from the hit TV show "The Biggest Loser"

Pam Smith's finishing makeover was completed by the Artistic Team at Robert's Salon. To begin, Pam's hair was lengthened and thickened using the finest 100% natural human hair extensions by Hairdreams in three shades, strategically placed to create soft face-framing layers. Her hair was then colored with natural blonde and caramel highlights to add depth and dimension. To insure maximum shine, it was finished with a gloss clearcoat. To accent and enhance Pam's natural beauty, the Robert's team highlighted her features using Robert's Signature cosmetics including smooth as velvet demi-matte foundation, winter sage and blackberry eye shadows with 24-karat gold sheer satin liner. Her look was finished off with a flush of nutty berry contour on her cheekbones and her lips were glazed with Red French Red lip color. After her transformation, Pam was treated to a photo shoot by the Robert's team to record her amazing accomplishment. You can have an amazing new look...just like Pam's! Give the Robert's Artistic Team a call today at 881-8207 to schedule your consultation.

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