



Melissa Sue Anderson and Glenn Ford star in 'Birthday'

'Birthday' gore lacks originality

By **BRUCE BAILEY**
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Happy Birthday to Me really "takes the cake" when it comes to unfair denouements and lack of originality.

In this Montreal-made horror flick, teenagers are knocked off one-by-one in practically the same pattern we've seen all-too-recently in *Prom Night*, *Funhouse*, *My Bloody Valentine* and *Friday the 13, Part Two*. It's about time filmmakers (particularly Canadians) hopped on another bandwagon or built one of their own.

To the film's credit, the ending is a stroke of macabre inspiration and the revelation of the killer is surprising. (Several possible conclusions were shot before the producers settled on this one).

But though this is the only film in the recent spate without a predictable climax, it doesn't come by that distinction legitimately.

There is no way that the audience could guess the killer's identity, because all the information in the tortured explanation is completely new,

never foreshadowed by even a single clue.

The story focuses on teenager Virginia (Melissa Sue Anderson of *Little House on the Prairie*) who returns to exclusive Crawford Academy after brain surgery intended to repair an injury suffered in a car accident. She hooks up with the school's "Top 10" — a gang of snobbish pranksters.

Virginia still suffers from memory lapses around the traumatic event (which took place on her birthday) and she's in therapy with an avuncular psychiatrist (Quebec-born Glenn Ford). Her anxiety-level is heightened as other members of her clique meet rather gory ends.

Bloodthirsty fans should get a kick out of watching knives, garden shears, a fireplace poker and a pile of weights hit their marks. A character named Steve meets the most bizarre fate when he gets a shish kabob skewer jammed through his mouth — making him the world's first shish ke-Steve.

And though plotting is weak, the screenwriters still deserve considerable praise for writing dialogue that's close to the way typical adolescents actually speak.