

## “EXCISION” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Vivienne Vaughn  
Friday, 05 October 2012 11:57

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EXCISION is a very strange movie (in fact, according to writer/director Richard Bates Jr., even John Waters, who has a small part, thinks it's weird). And it's perfectly odd and twisted in all of the right ways.

The film (arriving October 16 on DVD and Blu-ray from Anchor Bay) is a feature-length adaptation of a short with the same title and creator, and stars AnnaLynne McCord as Pauline, an egocentric, socially awkward high-school outcast with aspirations of becoming a surgeon. Bates' script largely centers on the stress of her familial life and her estranged relationship with her conservative religious mother, Phyllis (Traci Lords)—who wants Pauline to be as sweet and charming as her younger sister, Grace (Ariel Winter), who suffers from cystic fibrosis. Pauline wants to be accepted by her mother, and her mother wants the same, but the two bring out the worst in each other.



Pauline is probably even less accepted at school than in her home, but none of this stops her from seeking out what she wants, as she embarks on a mission to lose her virginity. As the plot progresses, her actions become increasingly bizarre; meanwhile, her sister's condition worsens. Pauline requests a psychiatrist; instead, her mother sends her therapy sessions with the family's priest (Waters). She also forces Pauline to attend cotillion, with unsurprisingly disastrous results. Throughout the film, the monotony of the suburban world is interspersed with Pauline's sarcastic prayers to God and her surrealistic, visceral dreams, which involve lots of nudity and blood.

EXCISION boasts a very talented array of actors, and everyone excels in their roles. Casting against type is prevalent, as in the cases of McCord, Lords and Waters, and the result is performances that are nothing short of fantastic. McCord in particular stands out, transforming from a 90210 bombshell into the awkward, acne-ridden, cold-sore-infested Pauline, who has greasy hair and poor posture to boot. This girl is not your typical heroine; she's misanthropic and psychologically disturbed, and rather than being a victim type of outcast, she holds her

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own and isn't afraid to resort to verbal abuse and physical violence when necessary. Yet somehow, she's truly relatable—as are all of the people in this film, in addition to being generally well-developed. Lords is particularly good as Phyllis, lending depth to a character had potential to easily be portrayed as one-dimensional.

The DVD and Blu-ray present the unrated movie in 2.40:1 widescreen, looking very good with high production values, especially considering the shoestring budget it was made on. The images are colorful, well-lit and crisp; even the most vile visuals are still aesthetically pleasing. Unfortunately, the discs don't include any bonus footage, though they do come with an audio commentary with Bates and McCord. Here, the writer/director discusses the whirlwind process of making his first feature, along with the general struggles of independent filmmaking (some of the on-set problems included a crew composed largely of film-school freshmen, the effort to include a whopping total of 267 scenes into the shooting schedule, last-minute rewrites due to lack of coverage, fights on set, questionable craft services, etc.). McCord discusses getting into the role of Pauline and her devotion to her craft—she was willing to use a real bloody tampon in one of the more graphic scenes, much to the enthusiasm of Bates and horror of her makeup artist—and what it was like working with Lords and the rest of the cast.

This track is a must-listen for aspiring filmmakers, especially those with an interest in making genre films on small budgets. It's quite evident that Bates and McCord are both immensely proud of what they have achieved in the labor of love that is EXCISION—and rightfully so. They are very encouraging that with enough passion and drive, it is possible to turn your dream project into a reality, signing off with, “If you believe it, you can achieve it. Now go make an awesome movie!”

It's unfortunate that EXCISION failed to see wide theatrical release, because it's truly a breath of fresh air in the horror genre. It pulls off an interesting concept in a manner that strikes a perfect balance of horror, teen angst and dark comedy. Bates has cited Alejandro Jodorowsky, David Cronenberg and Dario Argento as inspirations, and EXCISION draws the right amount from these influences, successfully combining them with a unique storyline. EXCISION will leave you reeling and saying, “What the f\*\*k did I just watch?”—in the best way. You may be unsure of exactly what kind of journey it's taking you on, but be assured, it's a thoroughly enjoyable ride.

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*Look for interviews with Bates and McCord on EXCISION in Fango #318, on sale this month.*