

## "LIVID" (Fantastic Fest Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
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LIVID is a stunner of a second film. Following INSIDE—what's probably the most striking contemporary horror debut—Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury have begun to carve their niche, proving their adeptness at switching tone and subgenre while crafting recognizable and intriguing style and thematic obsessions all their own. Thankfully, that style elevates an admittedly thin story and lack of cohesion into a surreal, lyrical and moving nightmare.

The film concerns a very haunting house. Young Lucie (Chloe Coulloud) is in the midst of training to be a sort of visiting nurse, traveling to the homes of the elderly and sick and administering whatever their medical attention requires. In the process, her mentor Ms. Wilson (Catherine Jacob) introduces her to the interior what's essentially the old, dark house on a hill of Lucie's small fishing town. Inside lies the comatose famous dance instructor, Jessel and rumors of treasure; rumors that work enough magic to coax Lucie, her boyfriend William and his brother Ben inside to sniff it out. Once inside, they learn the secrets of Jessel and her long-dead daughter Anna.

Whereas INSIDE was something of an assault, LIVID feels poetic and entirely drenched in the nightmare logic of more stylistically-concerned foreign horror. It's exciting and enthralling, and showcases some of the best imagery, production design and art direction you're likely to see this year. Jessel's manor is overflowing with the bizarre and supernatural; tea parties attended by swiveling animal-headed dolls, deadly ballerinas, music box corpses and one particularly amazing and beautiful flashback sequence with popping, popping reds that evoke of the audience an atmosphere not unlike Anna's floating.



Moreover, while LIVID's story is a simple one spread even thinner by its intent on crafting the oddities of a dream (the admirable scares are unannounced, refusing to utilize shrieking strings and instead being simply unsettling and more effective), there's plenty there to sink one's teeth

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into. Many will remark on how much of a departure it is from the brutality of their first film, but at its core, LIVID shares many of the same sentiments. Maury and Bustillo seem fixated on the troubles of, and caused by motherhood. INSIDE saw its protagonist widowed, dissatisfied and both terrified of and possibly no longer desiring that transition to being a mom. LIVID aims to reverse its focus, investigating the burdens mothers lay upon their daughters with Beatrice Dalle (the incredible villain from INSIDE) briefly reteaming with the directors, essaying Lucie's deceased mother who's left her child listless and overshadowed by her suicide.

At a certain point, LIVID becomes a truly dark fairy tale. Lucie's otherworldly counterpart is clearly Anna, and Jessel is both a wicked mother and teacher, essentially keeping her supernatural daughter confined (and for good reason). While Anna is, for the most part, [Possible Spoilers?] a specific form of movie monster, the spirit of magic and mysticism that permeates the story gives the film a fresh feel. It also adds to the overabundance of ideas on display, but the fact that the two filmmakers really reach for the stars is entirely more engrossing and admirable than holding back.

They're also uninterested in holding back their influences, but not for theft's sake. LIVID makes reference to many beloved horror films, two very explicitly, with the filmmakers seemingly celebrating that to those of us who love the genre unconditionally, these films were our contemporary fairy and cautionary tales, keeping alive the truly grim nature of many fables' origins.

LIVID's final moments are a bit stretched and its end is sillier than probably intended. It's imperfect, yes, but entirely worth loving; likely and hopefully appreciated and adored over time.

