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## Review: 'Code Blue'

*Jay Weissberg*

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***Urszula Antoniak's highly anticipated sophomore film features a nutty night nurse who muscles in on Angel of Death territory.***

**A night nurse with interpersonal issues (read: she's nuts) muscles in on Angel of Death territory in Urszula Antoniak's highly anticipated but disappointing sophomore feature, "Code Blue." Caught up in that odd invented junction between sex and death, the helmer pushes both to the limits of humiliation, wearing her Lars von Trier influences with pride — unsurprising, given Zentropa's involvement as co-producer. Tiresomely provocative where Antoniak's debut, "Nothing Personal," was life-affirming, the pic is meticulously crafted and appears to reflect its creator's vision, though outside fests, it's hard to imagine who else wants to share in this self-consciously dour view.**

Rail-thin fortysomething nurse Marian (Belgian thesp Bien de Moor) is a solitary ascetic figure whose only physical contact is with her dying patients, especially those she delivers, via injection, into the arms of Thanatos. She's new in town — if there is a town, as Antoniak keeps shots tight and creates a world largely devoid of markers or geography.

Marian's apartment, with its bare walls and still-unpacked boxes, is on an upper floor whose cloud-filled windows make it seem as though she lives closer to heaven than to earth.

From this vantage point one night, she sees a woman being brutally raped. Also watching is Konrad (German thesp Lars Eidinger, "Everyone Else"), a neighbor she spies in his own apartment; neither appears bothered by the rape, but the glance they exchange opens up a world of erotic possibilities for her. He's not entirely a stranger: Earlier on a bus, she inhaled the smell from his suited crotch and followed him to a video rental store where she takes home his returns, namely, "Dr. Zhivago" and a porn movie.

If only judging by her behavior upon finding the rapist's used condom, it's clear that Marian's wacko. Her thighs are also scratched up (unexplained), she claims she has a daughter (unexplored), and she's definitely not good with people outside the hospital. Press notes refer to her as saint-like, and while plenty of saints probably had a few screws loose, nowhere does the helmer convey the sense that this woman selflessly sacrifices herself for the good of others: Her fixation on death stems from obsession rather than altruism. When she unexpectedly meets Konrad at a party, she jumps at the chance of real intimacy, no matter how humiliating.

Undoubtedly there are those who believe in the connection between sex and death, and an orgasm really is "la petite mort," the little death of French saying. But it's a form of transubstantiation most auds will find not merely far-fetched but slightly ridiculous. Marian's need to "assist" the terminally ill is as deep as her need for intercourse, and Antoniak goes all out to conflate the two, leading to a spectacularly uncomfortable ending guaranteed to provoke eye-rolls as well as squirms.

There are barely any real conversations in "Code Blue," but whereas the lead's silence in "Nothing Personal" stemmed from a need to temporarily cut herself off and mentally regroup, here Marian's antisocial behavior

clearly comes from a much more disturbed place. That there's some kind of honesty can be attributable to de Moor's troubling, ego-less performance and the formal rigor of the shoot. Lenser Jasper Wolf's striking images are either fastidiously lit or awash in darkness, reinforcing the emptiness in Marian's world with a pale, monochromatic color scheme and minimalist decor.

## Code Blue

Netherlands-Denmark

### Production

A Bavaria Film Intl. presentation of an IDTV Film, Family Affair Films, Zentropa Entertainments5, VPRO production. (International sales: Bavaria Film Intl., Geisalgasteig, Germany.) Produced by Frans Van Gestel, Arnold Heslenfeld, Floor Onrust. Co-producers, Joost De Wolf, Marie Gade Denessen. Directed, written by Urszula Antoniak, based on the short story "Woods" by Jacek "Luter" Lenartowicz.

### Crew

Camera (color), Jasper Wolf; editor, Nathalie Alonso Casale; music, Ethan Rose; production designer, Vincent de Pater; costume designer, Bho Roosterman-Vroegen; sound (Dolby SRD), Victor Horstink; sound designer, Jan Schermer, Kristian Eidnes Andersen; line producer, Charlotte Vinther; casting, Kemna Casting. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Directors' Fortnight), May 15, 2011. Running time: 81 MIN.

### With

Bien de Moor, Lars Eiding, Annemarie Prins, Sophie Van Winden, Christine Byvanck, Hans Kesting. (Dutch, English dialogue)

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