

## Blu-Ray Review: 'Splice' Brings Dysfunctional Parenting to a New Level

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CHICAGO – In the opening moments of “Splice,” the audience is experiencing the world through the eyes of a newborn baby. Yet unlike Gaspar Noé’s “Enter the Void,” which recreated human perception with eerie perfection, this point of view shot is blatantly skewed. The doctors seem to be looking at a pulsating fishbowl rather than a baby. That theory is swiftly proven to be fairly accurate.

The newborn is, in fact, not a human, but an animal hybrid created by fearless scientists Clive (Adrien Brody) and Elsa (Sarah Polley). Though they insist that their work aims to cure diseases such as Parkinson’s, they often seem a bit too fond of playing god. And when their bosses at the pharmaceutical company demand to see experiments that yield lucrative results, the two devoted lovers and collaborators decide to conduct their controversial work in private. Their next goal: splicing DNA to form the first-ever human-animal hybrid.



Blu-Ray Rating: **3.0/5.0**

This material may have spawned a daringly provocative and disturbing thriller in the hands of a master stylist like David Cronenberg. Instead, “Splice” is little more than a diverting B-movie, as helmed by Vincenzo Natali, a filmmaker best known for the 1997 cult favorite “Cube.” In that picture, a man is sliced by a series of invisible wires, causing his body to suddenly collapse like a Jenga puzzle (this memorable image was later ripped off in “Resident Evil”). Nothing in “Splice” quite matches that level of inventive nastiness, yet it does manage to be entertaining from beginning to end, piling one crazy twist on top of another. At its best, the picture is a twisted variation on the dysfunctional family comedy, with Clive and Elsa (not-so-subtly named after the stars of “Bride of Frankenstein”) becoming the reluctant parents of a wildly unpredictable creature: part woman, part dog, part eagle, all monster. It learns to communicate through Scrabble letters, and once it spells out the name of its parents’ company, N.E.R.D.(Nucleic Exchange Research & Development), Elsa decides to name her creation, “Dren,” though perhaps “Nilbog” would’ve been more appropriate.



Delphine Chanéac and Sarah Polley star in Vincenzo Natali’s Splice.

*Photo credit: Warner Home Video*

Though Polley and Brody play it straight, they are clearly aware of the script’s inherent nuttiness, and inject their roles with subtle wit. Yet like all monster movies, “Splice” sinks or swims on the basis of its central creature. In its early stages, Dren is entirely computer generated, and the effects are not at all convincing. Thankfully, the character’s lifespan is compressed for the convenience of the script, and as Dren ages,

the effects become increasingly more impressive until they are practically invisible. The adult Dren, remarkably played by Delphine Chanéac, is a triumphant hybrid of live action and digital effects, with eyes that appear only slightly further apart than they would on a naturally born human. Though the script is too much of a hodgepodge to adequately explore the various issues that it raises, "Splice" is consistently intriguing in its subversion of genres. It may not be the most insightful film about parenthood ever made, but it's a lot more fun (and a lot less grotesque) than "Life as We Know It."



Splice was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on Oct. 5, 2010.

Photo credit: Warner Home Video

"Splice" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish audio tracks, and comes in a combo pack including a Blu-Ray, DVD and digital copy of the film. Unfortunately, the disc offers only one measly extra that barely scratches the surface of the film's audacity, both in terms of its themes and its bizarre effects. Yet the jokey 35-minute behind-the-scenes featurette offers a rather enlightening portrait of the director himself, clearly enjoying his position as maestro of the cinematic grotesqueries. He's seen directing his actors by shouting things like "The creatures are fighting!" with a high-pitched giddiness that suggests William Castle by way of Timothy Treadwell. Perhaps the most difficult challenge for these actors was maintaining a straight face while their childlike leader barked out orders. There's a priceless moment when Brody and Polley liken the project to an acting workshop at summer camp, under the leadership of a "looney councilor."

While Natali admits that his pictures are all "terribly flawed," he insists that they have each succeeded in being the exact films he wanted to make, for better and worse. Co-writer Doug Taylor was initially uncertain about collaborating on the project until he was about a third of the way into the initial draft, as it became "sicker and more transgressive." The director notes that the script's incestuous undertones made it a particularly tough sell. Taylor says that the unique thing about this sci-fi thriller is that fact that its most important scenes revolve around internal character drama, rather than external spectacle. Of course, Natali is unquestionably no enemy of spectacle. The gorier, the better. As Polley passes the director wearing her pristinely white costume, Natali quips, "When you wear that suit, it makes me want to cover you in blood."

*'Splice' is released by Warner Home Video and stars Adrien Brody, Sarah Polley, Delphine Chanéac, Brandon McGibbon, Simona Maicanescu, David Hewlett and Abigail Chu. It was written by Vincenzo Natali & Antoinette Terry Bryant and Doug Taylor and directed by Vincenzo Natali. It was released on Oct. 5th, 2010. It is rated R.*



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