

# NEWS

As Massombagi tracks Khaled's survival tactics, he picks up on the boy's rapid thinking processes, the way he meets his responsibilities with unquestioning determination and crisp efficiency. But on the other hand, when he applies lipstick to his mother's decomposing lips, you understand that without help, he's not really capable of dealing with his new reality. In spite of his worldliness, his seemingly emotionless handling of every challenge that confronts him, Khaled is a needy child who can't admit to himself that Monique is gone. The deadpan expression he wears in almost every scene might seem like heroic stoicism, but it's also the face of deep denial.

The primary dramatic tension of this picture comes from wondering how long Khaled can plan and execute his strategies while maintaining the pretense that Monique is still in his life. It's like waiting for the inevitable catastrophe that will crush a child whose most beautiful memory is of the birthday when his mother bought him an ice cream sundae with hot chocolate sauce. The movie's final shot, of Khaled's empty apartment with no sign of him anywhere, is a screen on which the audience can project its own movie of his future. Abusive foster homes? Institutions? Khaled's fear turning to rage and explosions of violence? Massombagi keeps political rhetoric, sociological jargon and moral conclusions out of the mix. Here are the facts, he's saying. Draw your own conclusions.

Maurie Alioff

TAKE ONE

## TURNING PAIGE

2002 112 m *prod* Chaos, At Shepherd Park Productions, *exp* Carolyn McMaster, Colin Neale, *p* Carolyn McMaster, *d* Robert Cuffley, *sc* Robert Cuffley, Jason Long, *ph* Mark Dobrescu, *ed* Ken Berry, *pd* Paryse Normandeau, *c* Chris O'Neil, *mus* Michael Shields; *with* Katherine Isabelle, Nicholas Campbell, Torri Higginson, Brendan Fletcher, Philip DeWilde, Nikki Barnett.

**P**aige Fleming, a high-school student who dreams of becoming a writer, lives with her father in Moncton, New Brunswick. Her mother committed suicide two years earlier. Now Paige looks after her father, Ross, as he tries to recover from alcohol addiction. Her older brother, Trevor, left the family shortly after mom's death; however, before he did, he got into a fist fight with Ross, who ended up in the hospital. One night, Trevor unexpectedly returns after a long absence and reawakens the memory of their dead mother.

Paige, who fictionalizes her life in the plots of her stories, asks her English teacher for help with her writing, but feels betrayed when her teacher reveals more to her literary friends than Paige would have liked. Ross, whose grasp on his work-a-day life is tenuous at best, resumes drinking and loses his job. Trevor finds this out when Ross comes home while Trevor is searching through some of his mother's clothes in the basement. Ross drunkenly insists he put them back. When Trevor refuses, the two fight and Ross is hurt again. Paige blames Trevor and starts to drink herself. This leads to a drunken confrontation with her teacher.



Later Paige comes home to find Trevor wrecking the living room with a golf club. He insists the family must come to terms with the mother's death and confront the turbulent past. For once Paige agrees with him, and tells Ross she can't stay if he doesn't deal with it. Ross refuses to do so.

Calgary-based director Robert Cuffley chose his season well in setting *Turning Paige* near the end of winter. The snow, harsh skies and perennial foggy breath add to a feeling of being trapped, accentuating the characters' inability to escape. The family is the crucible within which the characters must struggle to come to terms with their past and each other, and one couldn't ask for a bleaker confluence of circumstances than this family must endure. They are ravaged by rage, denial and alcoholism. Mom was, before her suicide, a shut-in and alcoholic. Ross (Nicholas Campbell) has been in AA for almost a year. He has secretly begun drinking again, though he hides it from his children as long as he can. Before the end of the movie, Paige (Katherine Isabelle) starts drinking heavily herself.

Cuffley focuses on the emotional triangle of Paige, Trevor (Philip DeWilde) and Ross, whose relationship is all but defined by the mother's absence. Isabelle (from *Ginger Snaps*) gives a strong performance, gracefully navigating the intense emotional shifts between her relationship with her teacher (Torri Higginson) and her dysfunctional family. Campbell (from *DaVinci's Inquest*), as the bumbling, tortured father is exceptional, and proves once again he's an actor of hidden depths. Evocatively using misdirection and implication – mimicking the character's deliberate evasions – Cuffley's feature film debut is a moving portrait of a volatile family hiding from its troubled past.

Michael Power

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