

## EUGENE

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### Review Highlights

***“Jake Barsha’s feature film debut is a brilliantly disturbing psychological thriller about a lonely bachelor who befriends a young hustler and his girlfriend with disastrous results for all involved...Strong performances -- Stuart Bennett in the lead role is particularly fine -- support EUGENE’s taut script and beautiful camerawork...a dark little film.”*** -- Palm Springs International Film Festival

***“Eugene’s’ moving and often disturbing transformation of it’s main character is a transformation which hasn’t been seen in film since ‘Taxi Driver’ (1976). Eugene’s quest to find inter-personal connections takes him into directions we, the audience, never saw coming. His emotional awkwardness paints him as sympathetic and sad man who tugs at your heart strings. What is so unexpected about this film is that the more Eugene seeks affection and human contact, when he fails, the less human he becomes. As he wrenches himself from his past, he begins to shift his future. You can’t help but become engrossed in Eugene’s path, both hoping for him to succeed and fearing for him when his goals are met.”***

**--Matthew Stevens, Senior Programmer, IndieSpirit Film Festival**

***“I selected EUGENE for FilmOut because I was blown away by the originality, themes, direction and acting – particularly the excellent performances of the three leads (Bennett, Reyes and Ethridge)-- and I always want to include a film that makes the audience squirm in their seat! This is definitely one of the best films of the festival this year...”***

**-- Michael McGuiggan, Programmer, San Diego FilmOut**

***“EUGENE is a fascinating story about alienation in Los Angeles with great performances by Stuart Bennett as Eugene, and Ryan Reyes as a young hustler with Megan Ethridge as a woman caught in the middle. The talented cast and in particular young and conflicted Ryan Reyes are people to watch.”***

**-- Barney Oldfield, Programmer – New Filmmakers New York**

***EUGENE is a thriller about a 30s something misfit, Eugene, who lacks social skills but is desperate for human connections. First time director Jake Barsha chooses to peel back Eugene's past like leaves on an artichoke. Each new revelation makes us a little more anxious because Eugene just gets creepier. His attempts to date are painful to watch and leave him angry. Eugene has trouble keeping a job and making friends. He spooks a prostitute which seems to cause some sexual confusion. But he is no more comfortable with the young hustler he picks up. He is so hungry for the human touch he pays the young drug addict for a hug. Along the way we learn Eugene's parents died in a house fire, he was raised by foster parents, likes horses and has money. But, though money can't buy the compassion or the companionship Eugene seeks it can be used as bait. This is a good example of fine story telling on a small budget. The cast was terrific. Stuart Bennett, as Eugene, was chilling. I am anxious to see Barsha's next effort.”***

**-- Kim Jindra, IndieExpress**

***“Jake Barsha’s striking EUGENE moves deftly from psychological portraiture of an extremely lonely man into more macabre territory.***

**-- Dennis Harvey SF 360 (San Francisco Film Society)**

***“EUGENE is a dark portrait of a man so lonely and miserable that it’s almost hard to believe it’s as watchable as it is. Captivating in a way that reminds you of a natural disaster, Eugene is powered by morbid curiosity, just like its titular main character. Plagued by a sad life, Eugene tries to kill himself more than once in the movie, only to back out at the very last second. Why? He doesn’t have anything to live for—but he’s scared. He can’t rest with the idea of a terrible world that would keep going and not remember he was ever there, even if staying means more pain. Not too far removed from those of us who are too invested in Eugene’s story to turn away before a point of satisfaction, even if we know exactly how his story would eventually crash. Mesmerizingly played by Stuart Bennett—never pushing believability as he nosedives from pathetic to creepy—Eugene is a repressed bachelor whose only wish is to experience love. He lives alone in a modest apartment, his past-time is watching freaky videos online and he works at a stable, hoping to become a horse-jumping jockey. He has no friends, no coworkers. When he asks a woman out for a date, his sexuality is questioned, leading to an encounter with a heroin-addicted street hustler named Josh (Ryan Reyes) and his porn model girlfriend Heather (Megan Lee Ethridge), both not in great shapes themselves. They give Eugene their time of day, but their love for each other only sparks jealousy in him. Eugene’s not exactly firm with its plot or even its intention. A character piece in the vein of Taxi Driver, it merely follows its desperate anti-hero down an unpleasant path of heartbreak, disappointment and despair. It deals with absolutely screwed up lives with little hope in their future, thus offering the kind of unsettling mood where you know for sure that it’s going to exit on some kind of bloodbath, even if it holds the urge back until the very end. One hopes that film can provide something more than the grim chronicling of a man running into one bad luck after another. It’s a character study, but all it studies is how desperate loners have self-destructive tendencies, and if you push them they might push back harder. It offers none of the moral challenges that made this approach a successful one for Travis Bickle. Eugene may be too inward-focused and unflinchingly cynical to stop itself from appearing as empty as its main character’s life, but it still shows great promise in its players, particularly Bennett’s sympathetic lunacy and director Jake Barsha’s superb grasp of early Cronenberg-like fetish for the disturbed.”***

**--Arva Ponto, Just Press Play**

***“Jake Barsha’s haunting depiction of a young loner’s descent into Hollywood’s sea of rent boys and drugs...the humanity of Stuart Bennett’ title character got to me and maintained its grip...Ryan Reyes convincing turn as a pleasure-adverse, heroin-addicted hustler provides this cautionary tale with an eye-candy sugar rush.”***

**-- David Lambie, Bay Area Reporter**

***“A disturbing psychological thriller that kept me on the edge of my seat the entire viewing because I was not sure where it was going, and I was not sure I really wanted to see the ending if it went some of the directions it looked like it might. This young director was at the screening and we talked to him for a few minutes after the screening. He is clearly one to watch for in the future. Taut script, directing, and editing really impressed me. The Hollywood establishment folks with the big bucks who make big blockbusters could learn a lot by studying this small budget film.”***

**-- Ron Booth, Tacoma Film Club Annex**

***“Writer-director Jake Barsha creates a physically stark, emotionally detailed portrait of the title character, slowly stripping away his layers until Eugene's pain is exposed like an open sore. Bennett's understated performance makes Eugene's complex character seem hauntingly simple and sadly real. Ethridge and Reyes play characters who shouldn't be attracted to one another, but Reyes is such a sympathetic bad boy, their relationship is believable. The film takes too long for their paths to cross, but, at 85 minutes, the explosive conclusion is worth the wait.”***

**-- Bruce Fessier (The Palm Springs Desert Sun)**