Given the current financial turmoil society faces, coupled with the real advances developmental science is making, the new feature film JIM is certainly not just another postapocalyptic tale, but rather a possible vision of things to come. JIM ranks as an independent sci-fi gem with important social, economic and scientific relevancy. The movie makes its world premiere in New York City on October 8, then begins a run in Los Angeles October 15; keep reading to see exclusive pics and a clip.

With JIM, first-time director Jeremy Morris-Burke cleverly weaves together stories of the past, present and distant future to create a scary vision of hopes and dreams, as well as chaos and nightmares. The film tells the story of Jim Kotofsky, a man who once had a good job, a loving wife and a prosperous future. But debt, unemployment and personal tragedy take its toll, setting up Jim to lose psychological control at any given moment. Fed up with the world, Jim turns to Lorigen Engineering, a biotech firm that can engineer a son for him who’s capable of overcoming all obstacles the world throws at him. The tale is set in a ruined future where the leader, Niskaa, governs a world comprised of genetically modified beings and clones that lack the capabilities of reason and compassion. That is, all but one young clone who sets out on a quest for knowledge and truth.

“It was important for me in making this film to illuminate patterns over long time spans,” says Morris-Burke, “to interweave past, present and future and highlight the points at which they interconnect and become indiscernible from one another.”

JIM contains some disturbing moments that emphasize its relevance to modern reality, along with stylish cinematography and quality special FX. While it represents the collaboration of a collective group of talented people, it remains the singular vision of Morris-Burke, who also served as writer, cinematographer and editor. He also co-produced the film with his wife, Vanessa Morris-Burke, who co-stars as Jim’s wife.

The early creative seeds that would blossom into this cerebral sci-fi thriller were planted after the tragic events of 9/11. Grim and somber emotions that were brewing in his own mind, his natural surroundings and overall media fueled Morris-Burke’s imagination, and he began sketching out the framework of the story. “Personal experiences of friends and acquaintances and problems with the local economy, coupled with my own thoughts, inspired the development of JIM,” he recalls. “Many of the characters and events are composites of people I know and the experiences they’ve had. This is especially true of Jim, who faces these challenges that are thrown upon him.”

In a world where the gap between the technological haves and have-nots continues to grow, Morris-Burke notes, “The middle class is dying. People I know struggle to hold on as shifting social norms and technological progress allow the affluent to excel to ever-greater heights. I see this happen to many people close to me. It was important to me to create a character in Jim who never comes across as a loser. Instead, he’s someone who’s battered by insurmountable social and economic obstacles. For Jim and those in a similar position, the American Dream has been dead for a while now—we’re just grasping at the remaining scraps.”

With a strong background in theater, Morris-Burke initially envisioned JIM as a stage production—but as the story evolved, he soon realized that it was best fit for the screen. “I realized that it couldn’t be limited by the restraints of theater production, like single-location stage sets,” he says. “I chose film because it offered more opportunities to assemble visual, aural and emotional constructs into a larger whole that could transcend its parts. Thus, the three stories in this film run in parallel and feed into one another in various ways.”

The big hurdle, however, was that Morris-Burke had never made a movie before, nor was he traditionally schooled or trained in creating cinema. He did have a strong passion for cinema, an impressive background in the arts as a designer and extensive experience in elaborate stage lighting. “Being an independent filmmaker of modest means, it was my challenge to convey this story with the tools I had at my disposal,” he says.

Morris-Burke exhaustively researched the Internet for tips from independent auteurs willing to share their war stories of starting out in the business. “Being almost entirely self-taught, I owe my virtual tutors in cyberspace a debt of gratitude,” he says. The novice purchased an HVX camera and began learning how to use it. His expertise in lighting immediately gave him an edge over most first-time cinematographers, as is evident from the film’s elegant visual style; the viewer gets the impression that JIM was shot by an experienced veteran. To prepare to cut the movie, Morris-Burke learned how to use the standard editing application Final Cut Pro.

With a completed script and tools in hand, Morris-Burke formed Tinmouth Films, named after the Vermont city where he lensed part of JIM. He raised the money to realize his project and began seeking out actors. “Casting the lead role of Jim was easy,” he says. “I was very familiar and impressed with Dan Illian’s theater work. In fact, as I was writing the script, I had already envisioned Dan in the part.” Illian delivers a standout performance as Jim, transforming from a heartfelt, loving husband to a man on the brink of insanity. Another New York stage actor, Michael Strelow, who starred in the recent indie chiller THICKER THAN WATER: THE VAMPIRE DIARIES PART 1 (no relation to the CW show), plays Niskaa.

To depict the landscape of his futuristic world, Morris-Burke relied on his graphic arts prowess and designed elaborate cityscape artwork using imagery he created with Photoshop. Some scenes take place in ominous caves and required a special look and feel; after scoping out various locations that just didn’t seem right, the filmmaker went back to a fondly remembered childhood attraction, the caves at the City Museum of St. Louis. “They were perfect,” he says.

“The museum staff was absolutely wonderful and cooperative. It still is one of my favorite places to visit when I’m in St. Louis.”

In addition to some surprising twists, JIM leaves you with a simple, timeless message: Be careful for what you wish for. You can find our more about the film at its official website .

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