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SXSW Eden Still - H 2012

THE BOTTOM LINE

Sex-trafficking survival tale should break filmmaker Megan Griffiths out of the fest circuit. [▢](#)

Megan Griffiths takes an alternative approach toward otherwise lurid subject matter in

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Otherwise lurid subject matter in her true-story-inspired drama.

AUSTIN - Grim but gripping, the true-story-inspired *Eden* tells the survival tale of a Korean-American girl kidnapped by a prostitution ring in 1994. A big change from director/co-writer **Megan Griffiths**'s last feature, *The Off Hours*, this one is impossible to ghettoize as a festival-only film and has strong prospects, in arthouses and perhaps in a wider theatrical run.

Winner of SXSW's Audience Award for narrative feature, the picture takes a non-exploitative approach to lurid material. **Jamie Chung** plays Hyun Jae, a New Mexico teen who gets into a stranger's car and winds up deep in the desert, imprisoned in a self-storage facility where dozens of girls are forced to work as call girls by a team whose boss (**Beau Bridges**) is a corrupt Federal Marshall.

After unsuccessful attempts at escape, the girl (nicknamed Eden) adapts, accepting her plight to such an extent that she helps drug-addled captor Vaughan (**Matt O'Leary**, more convincing here than in his other fest entry, *Fat Kid Rules the World*) recapture other escapees in order to curry favor.

As Eden becomes part of the organization's day-to-day operation, Chung and Griffiths refuse to overdramatize the psychological tradeoffs survival demands. Though they make turning points and big decisions accessible to viewers, Eden's decision to put her conscience on ice is a mostly internal struggle; she's usually as outwardly cool as Bridges is, though both characters encounter one or two surprises that make complete unflappability impossible.

By putting the script's emphasis on Eden's adaptation instead of on the violations she must endure, the filmmakers both avoid having to show the most degrading action and make the story easily embraced by those who feel women onscreen are too often viewed as mere victims.

Eden is no simple victim, though she certainly loses something of herself in this tale of survival. When the young woman is finally free of her captors and calls home, her mother's quavering voice exclaims, "it's you?!"

The answer to that question isn't quite yes. But the woman holding the phone is a more believable human character than multiplex audiences are accustomed to seeing in this kind of scenario.

Director: Megan Griffiths

Screenwriters: Richard B. Phillips, Megan Griffiths

Producers: Colin Harper Plank, Jacob Mosler

Director of photography: Sean Porter

Production designer: Ben Blankenship

Music: Jeramy Koepping, Matthew Emerson Brown, Joshua Morrison

Costume designer: Rebecca Luke

Editor: Eric Frith

Sales: John Sloss, Cinetic

No rating, 97 minutes