

## Film Review: Memorable Central Character Drives Depressing ‘Bullhead’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 2, 2012 - 2:01pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The central character in the Oscar-nominated “Bullhead” is a force of nature not unlike Jake La Motta in Scorsese’s “Raging Bull” or the title character in Refn’s “Bronson.” He is less human than hormone as he injects himself with steroids like a bull being fattened to make better steaks. And his story is clearly one that it is going to end tragically. This dark, vicious film gets a bit muddled at times but the strength of its lead performance and a strong visual palette make it a stark but worthwhile trip.

Jacky Vanmarsenille (Matthias Schoenaerts) is introduced threatening a man. He’s an enforcer, the kind of guy who can put those he speaks to on edge just by his very presence. He’s hulking, lurching, and his eyes always look partially closed. He also seems like a shell of a man, pure testosterone with less and less humanity with every injection into his ass or pill down his gullet. But there are glimpses, mostly through Schoenaerts’ excellent performance, of the human under the bull-like exterior.



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Jacky works in a shady industry – illegal trafficking of hormones for beef production. After a police officer investigating the unusual criminal industry is shot, an informer named Diederik Maes (Jeroen Perceval) comes back into Jacky’s life. It’s here where we learn why Jacky is the way he is through a series of flashbacks. Twenty years ago, Jacky and Diederik were friends. They happened upon a pretty girl in the neighborhood the way that boys do when the girl’s brother grabbed young, wide-eyed, sweet-looking Jacky and forever mutilated him by pounding his testicles with rocks. For the rest of his life, Jacky would be forced to take the hormones and steroids to try to make him feel like a man. And Diederik couldn’t tell the truth about the assault because of the power of the criminal’s father. Their friendship was shattered.



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*“Bullhead” stars Matthias Schoenaerts, Jeroen Perceval, and Jeanne Dandoy. It was written and directed by Michael Roskam. It was released in Chicago on March 2nd, 2012.*



Bullhead

*Photo credit: Drafthouse Films*

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