

SPEAK UP

Silence is not a virtue.

SYNOPSIS

As Katie wakes up in a small upstate NY hospital, she's told by the attending physician Jennifer that she's been in a serious accident. She has some memory of it—the crashing, the blood, the rain – but she has a significant head injury that has also impacted her ability to speak.

When Katie's memory begins to return, her brain starts to play tricks on her. Memories of her blaming and mortified mother resurface, along with feelings of shame and terror. Then, last night's accident comes flooding back into view. The Sheriff, Meeks, is also trying to get to the bottom of what happened.

Something doesn't add up. A man—Frank—left her to die after he assaulted her at the bar. But Katie is still alive. With no way to communicate her story, she faces a range of hostile responses from the hospital staff, the Sheriff and her own boyfriend Jack.

Then in walks the Chief Physician, Dr. Eaton. It's Frank. The man who tried to murder her.

To cover up his tracks, Frank tries to fuel the suspicion that Katie is acting crazy and might be trying to wiggle out of his accountability.

Katie must outsmart and escape the very man who tried to kill her before he decides she's better off dead.



DIRECTOR'S VISION

Dakota Gorman — All About Sex (2021), The Girl in the Pool (2024):

Repression is a powerful tool, a universal coping mechanism that takes many forms. But when wounds are left untended, that tool can become our worst enemy—a kind of rot that lingers deep in our subconscious, shaping how we move through the world while it slowly eats us from the inside out. It becomes our monster. This concept perfectly encapsulates the struggle of the characters in *Speak Up*, a wonderfully twisted thriller where repression fuels both victimization and cruelty, locks people in fear and paralysis, and ultimately spawns the terror at the heart of the film. Beneath the physical plot, reminiscent of classic “female in distress” films like *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Dressed to Kill*, lies a psychological thriller exploring each character’s inner demons—the mini-monsters of their own making.

While Frank becomes Katie’s predator, fitting into the traditional female-thriller structure, he is also her mirror. Both are engaged in a losing battle with themselves, their mutual discontent eating away at them. Through the physical and psychological conflicts that shape the film, Katie is able to defeat her inner monster, while Frank is swallowed whole by his own. And beyond the story itself, I’m drawn to how Katie’s verbal impairment pushes us as filmmakers to craft a uniquely visual experience. *Speak Up* uses the power of silence to tell a story about the importance of having a voice in this world.



CHARACTERS



Lilly Krug as **KATIE**

Katie is lost at this point in her life. She is someone who has experienced a world of hurt as a young girl but her resilience has made her a survivor. Her scars are clear to see. She has been working on her anger for years, something that comes out when she's put in a corner, or when she feels her safety is threatened. Her anger has made her isolated in her life, and while people have come and gone, that vulnerability has allowed others to exploit her. There's a self-destructive nature to her anger, and that's something people pick up on and abuse. When she encounters Frank, she has no plan for her life and feels her best days are behind her, but she's a fighter and her anger is both her worst quality and her best. It's her anger that is going to give her the fight to survive. Rather than complying with authority and giving in, Katie must reckon with past demons, as well as present threats, to survive.



Stephen Moyer as **FRANK**

Dr. Frank Eaton's reputation and authority has been years in the making. As Chief Physician, he is trusted by his entire community for their care. Yet recently, with his intense divorce, he is desperate to maintain this image of his that gives power and influence. Frank does not think he is a bad man—is he right? Is he just a regular man, under intense pressure, whose belief in himself as the hero doctor, combined with the slow deadening of his empathy over time and hundreds of patients, family troubles, and the extraordinary events of one night, have led to the perfect storm while rationalising the morality of his own actions? Or is he deeply, fundamentally, a narcissist manipulating others' vulnerabilities, an abuser, an utter evil?



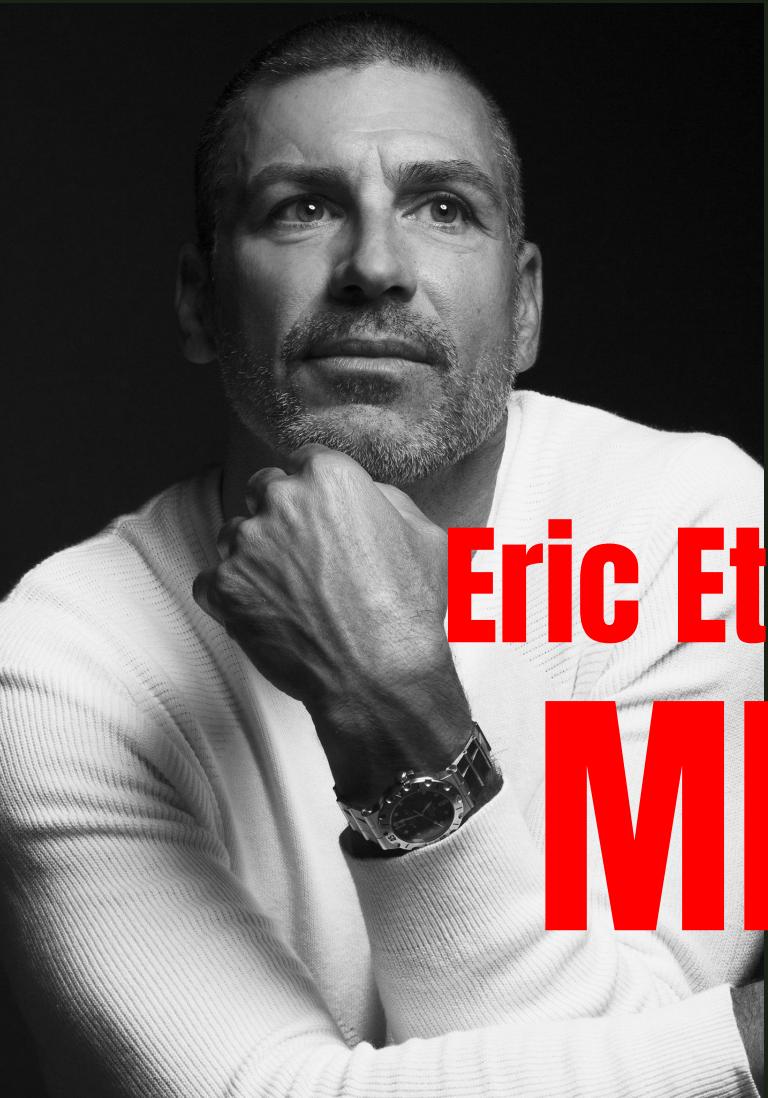
Radhika Apte as **JENNIFER**

An Indian doctor on a work visa in the U.S., Jennifer has spent her entire life making sure that she lives up to people's expectations. She worked hard to get to Med School and when she did, she found herself thrown into the deep end of Covid, an emotionally traumatic experience she was not prepared for, or has recovered from since. She is a queen of compartmentalising and focusing on the task at hand. She doesn't judge her patients as she pursues her diagnosis and best treatment. She is a moral person, but she has far too much to lose to let her conscience make decisions for her. But having witnessed human frailty and trauma at a momentous level, Jennifer's humanity is cracking through—and she has a breaking point.



Anna Rust as **DEANNA**

A nurse who has spent her career in the one place, Deanna has seen it all and endured a lot. She has developed a hardened cynicism towards the job that has long replaced her initial compassion. She became a nurse because she cared about helping people but the job, its long hours and how people have treated her have seen her love turn to resentment. She harshly judges her patients and belittles their pain. The only comfort she finds in her job is being close to Frank, the man she admires and loves. Their affair is the only respite in her otherwise gruelling life—and she hope they will be a couple one day. In the meantime, this job is an endurance and her patients are inconveniences. A native upstate New Yorker, Deanna has little respect for outsiders like Katie or Jennifer.



Eric Etebari as **MEEKS**

As the 2nd generation Sheriff of Warren County, Meeks is a former high school athlete who never escaped the confines of the same streets he knew as a child. Meeks has embraced Warren County as his kingdom and built a nice life here: wife, children, a position of respected authority and a job where he can do just a little bit of good each day.

Meeks possesses the innate ability to make whomever he's talking to feel like the most interesting, important person in the world. He knows everyone and their business, because they feel comfortable enough to tell him – and this has turned out to be pretty handy for his job. But he does have his blind spots, his cultural biases, like any other. His mindset is attuned to, shall we say, traditional values, and he doesn't quite trust outsiders. Once he has an opinion formed of you, it can be hard to shake – and as one of the other real respected authority figures in town, Meeks' opinion of Frank is pretty set. They go way back, playing touch football in backyards since grade school, and Meeks always knew Frank was the smartest guy he'd ever met. If anyone here would ever make something of themselves – would *deserve* to – it would be Frank. And Frank has done so much good for the community. The idea that he could've hurt someone – that Meeks might need to investigate Frank for a crime? That's a difficult mental circle for Meeks to square...



Franz Drameh as **JACK**

Jack is Katie's boyfriend, or at least he was until a few hours ago tonight. He's generous and empathetic, immensely well-meaning...but he does have his limits, like everyone else, and loving Katie is hard work lately. He understands all she has went through in her past and wants to be sympathetic to it, but at the same time, he's felt more like a therapist or a parent than a boyfriend for much of the last year or so. As an attractive, successful guy in his late 20's, it'd be hard to say this is ever what he imagined his happily ever after would be.

He's well read, has a decent enough sense of humor, and has avoided developing many of the toxic traits that have plagued his fellow men. If anything, one might say he's too much of an ally – too nice, always bending so far over backward to say the right thing that it can be annoying. He uprooted his life to move out here after Katie's recent struggles in the city, something he as a SoHo-born upper-middle-class black man considers the ultimate act of heroism; this isn't exactly his scene. He will try as hard as he can to do the right thing until exhaustion sets in and, ultimately, he just isn't strong enough to push back when someone in a position of authority – even someone he's rather suspicious of – tells him "no."



THEMES



#METOO AND SURVIVOR'S EXPERIENCES

SPEAK UP is an allegorical psychological film about the experience of accusers in modern society. The #MeToo movement has been instrumental in showing us what survivors have to endure when they have a story to tell. While most can experience indifference, there's also gaslighting, psychological manipulation, victim blaming or outright hostility. That person is left feeling psychologically shattered by the implications of trying to alert to their experiences, to the point where they have no voice at all. And if their attacker has social capital, accusers will have far less power.

SPEAK UP is a thriller that looks at these themes in microcosm, and through Katie's inability to use her voice to condemn her attacker.

FEMALE RAGE

Women like Katie understand that their existence in the world has been defined by the presence of male violence, and having experienced it in her past, Katie has internalised the shame and rage of that to a point of self-destruction. The very 'ugly' value of women's rage is what Katie must embrace to fight an attacker, and a system, that would leave her voiceless. While too often anger is seen as a virtue for me but 'undesirable' in women, rage is Katie's only form of self-expression in this world. It is her body and her trauma enduring to free herself from a world that wishes her harm and people who wish to control her.

As she tries to escape her present world, she must deal with that root cause of her anger and shame from her past. In fact, her rage is her superpower.



PROJECT SPECS

WRITERS:

Josh Berman (Angels of The Sky)
Rioghnaigh Ni Ghrioghair (Don't Go Where I Can't Find You,
Balor Hall)

DIRECTOR:

Dakota Gorman (The Girl in the Pool)

PRODUCERS:

Alex Lane (DRAGN)
Oleg Shardin (DRAGN)

LOCATION:

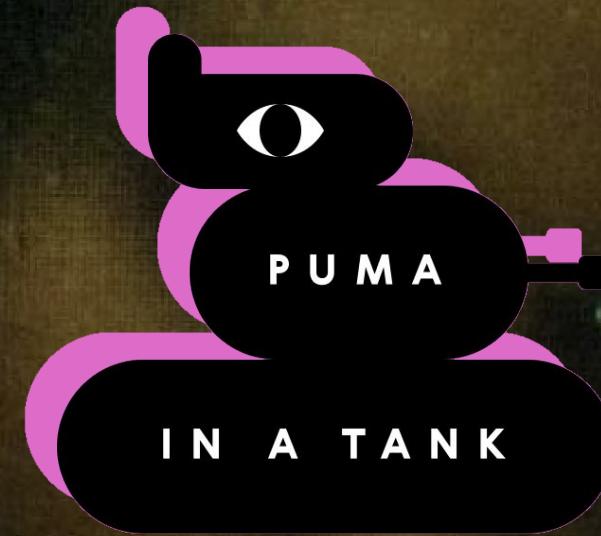
Hungary

SHOOT:

Q4'25

DELIVERY:

Q2'26



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