



fish

A War (Krigen)
(Denmark 2015)

Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening

DIRECTOR : Tobias Lindholm
RUNNING TIME : 115mins
RATING :

Synopsis:

A Danish army commander's life and family are turned upside down by the fallout from a single decision made under desperate circumstances in Afghanistan.

Review: Mark Kermode

This powerful drama about a Danish army officer on trial after his patrol suffers a traumatising loss in Afghanistan blurs boundaries between bravery and blame.

“The issue is not what you have done, but what you do now...” Denmark's entry for the 2015 best foreign language film Oscar is a gripping and thought-provoking affair from writer-director Tobias Lindholm that counterposes battlefronts at home and abroad. We open with an arresting, *Kajaki*-style sequence in which a Danish patrol in Afghanistan suffers a horrifying loss.

From here we cut to Denmark, where the family of Pilou Asbæk's company commander Claus Michael Pedersen are awaiting his call. As the drama unfolds, moving inexorably from conflict zone to courtroom, we shift back and forth between the commander and his wife, Maria (Tuva Novotny), both of whom face potentially life-threatening situations involving the protection/endangerment of children and judgment calls made in haste.

With its handheld camerawork (by Magnus Nordenhof Jønck), sparse music cues and affectingly naturalistic performances, *A War* employs quasi-documentary “realism” to powerful effect. The combination of nailbiting tension and suffocating stillness that characterised *A Hijacking* (*Kapringen*) (from which key cast members return) inflects the life-and-death mundanity of the war-zone sequences, while later stages echo the communal paranoia of *The Hunt* (*Jagten*), which Lindholm co-wrote with Thomas Vinterberg.

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 24th July 2022
8.15 pm Tuesday 26th July 2022

Review: Cont.

Ultimately, this is a film about guilt, grief and accountability, the chaos of war clashing with the sterility of an after-the-fact trial as the boundaries between blame and bravery are blurred beyond resolution. Novotny is terrific as the wife and mother struggling to hold her family together as her husband is hauled over the coals, and Lindholm's juxtaposition of images of prone children, worlds apart, is both acute and alarming.

Source: www.theguardian.com Mark Kermode 10/1/16 Last modified 22/3/2018 Edited extracts ~ accessed 8/5/21

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COMING UP:

August	<i>Pain and Glory</i> [Spain]	Sunday 21 st & Tuesday 23 rd
September	<i>Limbo</i> [UK]	Sunday 18 th & Tuesday 20 th
October	<i>Riders of Justice</i> [Denmark]	Sunday 16 th & Tuesday 18 th
November	<i>Skies of Lebanon</i> [Lebanon]	Sunday 20 th & Tuesday 22 nd
December	<i>Antoinette in the Cevennes</i> [France]	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th

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Some Thoughts on: *Only the Animals (Seules les bêtes)*

The separate chapters of this French mystery artfully switch viewpoints, cleverly revealing the secret (unlikely) connections between a solitary farmer, an unloving married couple, a young waitress and African internet scammers. The only link is the mysterious death of a woman in a snowstorm. This film reminds us of the structure of "Babel", but it is delightfully different. This dark mystery has wonderful elements of dark humour, especially in the last scene.

The film is well-directed and the actors are decidedly unglamorous and very natural.

My personal opinion is that the shaman scenes in Cote d'Ivoire could have been removed but the film was, nonetheless, engaging and interesting.

The title remains ambiguous: is it only humans who kill for reasons other than food, shelter and survival, or ...what happens to the animals left alone when their humans die?

Roz Garwen

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Many of the online reviews of this film use terms like jigsaw puzzle, thriller, cynicism, cliches, unhappy marriages – but for me, the most persistent and poignant theme of this film was the ever-widening ripples of the relationships. It's not so much that we the audience had to fit it altogether, as to realise that as the spooky Papa Sanou says to Armand, chance is much stronger than you. In other words, there are very few coincidences. The ripples had to happen, whether we know about them or not.

I like the technique of different perspectives of the same situation. Alice's need for affection is matched by Michel's need for romance. Even the pretence of love is better than nothing, as when Alice refuses to believe that Joseph cannot want her, and Michel in the end chooses to believe in the romance with Armandine, knowing full well it's a scam. After Michel swerves away to avoid picking up the hitchhiking Marion (whom he believes to be Armandine), he kisses Alice tenderly. What was that about? He was happy because he believed Armandine was coming to meet him, so happy that he can kiss his wife?!

The relationship between Evelyne and Marion is an intriguing one. It becomes clear even before she says it, that this affair is fun and "light" for Evelyne and no more, whereas for Marion it is whole-hearted. So whole-hearted that she cannot believe that because she so much wants it to be permanent, Evelyne cannot fail to want it also.

Poor Joseph, whose relationship with his now-dead mother seems to have been the only and most important one in his life. It is only with the dead Evelyne that he can feel at ease, even telling her his secret about leaving his mother's body on her bed because he could not cope with crowds of people and the business of death. He speaks only to animals. Did Michel know this about Joseph, when he left Evelyne's body near his house? Or was it just payback for Joseph's affair with his wife, to see how he would cope with finding the dead woman? Did Michel ever find out about Joseph's suicide? Would he care?

Armand, the scammer, has real feelings for his daughter, and perhaps even for Monique, her mother. But collecting the "colonial debt" seems to be the only way he knows how to make a living, and he's clearly pretty good at it. I almost put an exclamation mark there, simply because so much of this film is a poignant mixture of black comedy and tragedy. I think of that remarkable scene where Michel catches up with Armand in Abidjan, almost throttles him (shades of Evelyne?) but in the final analysis stops, and cries out, it was never about the money. Is that why Armand sends yet another message to Michel via the scamming site – and why Michel, laughing with irony perhaps at himself, replies? It was all about the money for Armand, and never about the money for Michel – and so he chooses to continue the fantasy. This is apparently how such scams work.

Who sees the most clearly in this group of people? Perhaps it is Monique and her daughter (Armand's daughter) now with her Frenchman who turns out to be Evelyne's husband. But with that final scene outside the luxury house in the cold and lonely countryside, it does not seem as if Monique is going to find much to enjoy.

Many thanks as always to Fish for providing such quality films, and to the Empire management for their continuing and generous support.

Trish Topp

Message from the President

Thank you to Trish Topp and Roz Garwen for their reviews on *Only the Animals*. There were many very positive comments about the film immediately after the Sunday screening. I hope our choices for the remainder of the year will be equally well received. Thanks to the Empire for securing these films for us.

Please note also, that we are always happy to receive members' reviews to include in the Newsletter.

Those who attended the June screenings will know we are reintroducing our guest policy. This will allow each member to bring a guest to one film from July, 2022 to June, 2023. You will see below that the request is to be sent by text message to Deborah Blay at least 24 hours prior to the screening. Please provide your full name, phone number and whether you will be attending the Sunday or Tuesday session.

Sandra Gillespie.



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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