

NEON

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FILMS

B O R D E R

A FILM BY ALI ABBASI

Run Time: 101 minutes

Rating: R

FESTIVALS:

Cannes Film Festival
Telluride Film Festival
Toronto International Film Festival
Fantastic Fest
Los Angeles Film Festival
Mill Valley Film Festival
Chicago International Film Festival
Hamptons Film Festival
New York Film Festival
Miami Film Festival
Philadelphia Film Festival
Hawaii International Film Festival
London Film Festival

NEON Christina Zisa Christina@neonrated.com 646.362.4724	LA Publicity – Josh Haroutunian josh@divergentpr.com Keaton Kail keaton@divergentpr.com	NY Publicity – Cinetic Charlie Olsky charlie@cineticmedia.com	Digital Publicity – Smith & Company Rene Ridinger Rridinger@smithandcompany.com
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Short Synopsis:

Tina (Eva Melander) is a border guard who has the ability to smell human emotions and catch smugglers. When she comes across a mysterious man with a smell that confounds her detection, she is forced to confront hugely disturbing insights about herself and humankind.

Long Synopsis:

At a ferry-port customs checkpoint, Tina (Eva Melander) is one of many polyester-uniformed guards standing watch. Short, with her features broadened and blunted by a congenital genetic condition, and one of many in her polyester uniform, she blends into near invisibility, a cog in the system. During the day, she keeps a close eye on travelers; off the job, she has a small place surrounded by primal forest and a normal life of family, friends and work right down to her ailing dad and her indifferent dog-trainer live-in boyfriend.

The only thing exceptional about Tina's work is how exceptional she is at it; in a way even she can't quite explain, Tina can literally *smell* guilt, fear and fury seeping off of some travelers, and her results speak for themselves. Mostly she detects booze-smugglers and other minor transgressors, but two separate travelers give off clouds of strange scent that give her reason to look closer: One is a suit-clad smoothie found to be carrying a cache of child pornography, the other is a smiling, swaggering rambler named Vore (Eero Milonoff) whose silent ways and familiar-strange features pull Tina closer.

As Tina's strange skill and determination see her helping the police work up the chain of sex criminals she caught a small link of at the terminal, she has to go to the grey city streets and 'perfect IKEA apartments' of her suspects. Back at her home, in the woods, wild and waters, she and Vore talk and grow intertwined, as he reveals more and more secrets about his life even as he confounds and confuses her. He has many of the same scars as her, knows more about her past in some ways than she does, and soon Tina has to decide just how much of her life she's willing to upend in the name of *belonging*. When the true nature of the case Tina's working and the lies about her childhood past she's uncovering lead towards friends and family, Tina will discover -- for herself -- who she truly is.

Director's Statement, Ali Abbasi:

John Lindqvist (author, *Let the Right One In*) wrote the short story we turned into *Border*. His way of writing and his universe is very *specific*, and he doesn't write 'feel-good' literature; if I were to put it in words, he works in fantasy genres, or subgenres, but it always has a *twist*. The way he treats his characters, he uses a lot of space and effort in describing their inner conflict, and their feelings, and their emotions, and their thoughts, which is the kind of thing that you would kind of expect from 'serious literature.' I guess what I'm saying is even if he's known as a fantasy writer, underneath there's always something unsettling, and something very serious, and other conflicts going on, which makes it hard to just see it as 'fantasy literature.' The story had a complexity in itself, and we of course developed it and took it further and changed some things, but I think the DNA comes from John and his work.

You could say *Border* is about being an outsider; of course you could say that, but I also think that when you think about where the story comes from, John is a white guy that is totally adapted to his society, and as for (being an outsider,) I mean, that's not why he wrote it, I would guess. The experience of being outsider is not exclusive to if you're brown in a white society, or if you're a woman in a man-dominated society. I think you can be perfectly fit for the society you live in, but still experience ... I don't know: You end up in a job you don't like, or you end up in a marriage you don't ... you know, I think every person has experienced how it feels to be an outsider, and that's why, in a strange way, *everybody* is an outsider. Or at least they know how it *feels*. There are always groups and places that exclude *you*.

This story is stylized, it's not realism; there are other elements, and it's elevated. So we thought instead of going with that, with stylized shots or framing that kind of signals something *special* is going on, we tried to go the *other* way. Instead of going with the magical, we went with the realism in our cinematic language, which I think was the right thing to do because it kind of anchors the realism. Because if it wasn't *real*, you probably wouldn't care about Tina.

We had this theme through the whole film ... nature versus nurture, or nature versus civilization, or whatever you want call it ... and we, of course, worked with that, for our cinematic production design, and without locations. We tried to create a contrast between the ferry terminal and the forest, and again, as for the realism of it, that place in reality does sit exactly like that. The ferry terminal is kind of like a piece of concrete landed at the shore, just a slab on the edge of a forest. And you go inland to the forest, and then there are some small communities of houses, and the film is what the surrounding community looks like. And then there's a city an hour's drive from there. The set design was not that far from reality, and of course, we could have chosen to have more shades in between, but it just ... it made sense.

I'm not very technical with directing, so I think my process is fairly simple. The most important thing, and the thing that takes the most time, is casting, finding the right people. And I think if you find the right people, then you're done. *And* you've written a script where scenes make sense. *And* you've been thinking through them. And I think a lot of directing is within the script, how the lines are written, how and what the rhythm of it is. I think after that I'm more of like a

personal trainer. So I would go and say 'Okay, show me what you want to do.' And I would say 'Well, do a little bit more of this, and less of that, and it would help you.' Because I think at the end of the day I can't make people better than they are, I can't direct them to a golden pinnacle or something. But I can help them to fulfill their potential or be as good as they can be. I have different raw material and then I put the raw material together in the editing room and then I do different stuff with it. And the final movie, or the final scene, can be very different from the raw material. My way of working is more geared towards getting *variations* of material than one getting one *exact* type of material.

I think the idea of *monster* is very connected to the idea of *human being*. Because monsters are always defined as ... you don't call a fox a *monster*. I think the idea of monsters has always been where there's enough humanity, or elements of humanity, so that we can relate to it as some kind of human-like creature. But it's also far away enough from us so that we know that it's *not* human. I think that *space* is how you define a monster.

I'm definitely interested in the psychology of *nature versus nurture*, of what happens when you're at the limit of *humanity*. And what is it that defines humanity, which I think is a very relevant question; I don't think it's just an artistic or existential question like it maybe was in the eighteenth century. Not anymore. Because soon, we're going to have legal, ethical, and technical questions to answer about *humanity*. You know? And one of the core questions of the movie is 'What does it take to be a human being?'

During a Q-and-A in Telluride, I was telling some person in the audience how *nature versus nurture* and similar thinking underlies a difference between Democrats and Republicans. Generally speaking, Republicans put an emphasis on nature: If you don't have a job it's because you're lazy, if you're a crack addict it's because you like drugs, if you're a criminal, it's because you have a bad *nature*. And generally speaking Democrats put an emphasis on nurture: If you're poor maybe it's because of the socio-economic situation, or your context, or our society.

And of course, it's neither 100% this or that. But I'm probably more on the nurture part of it. I would say, from my own experience, that I think the context, the society and the socio-economic situation is really, really important. And for me, it's easy to justify how Tina is more human than Vore is. I think Tina has had the *context* to develop empathy, which to me is the most critical part of being human.

Filmmaker & Cast Bios:

Ali Abbasi:

Born in 1981, in Iran, Abbasi also has a background in literature, with several credited short stories published in Persian. In 2002 he gave up his studies at Tehran Polytechnic University and travelled to Europe, where he finally settled in Stockholm, Sweden to study architecture. In 2007, Ali graduated with a BA in architecture and subsequently enrolled at the National Film School of Denmark, where he studied directing. Ali's first feature, *Shelley*, premiered in the Panorama section of the 2016 Berlinale.

John Ajvide Lindqvist:

John Ajvide Lindqvist is a Swedish author who was born and raised in Blackeberg, a suburb of Stockholm. In his youth, he wanted to become something 'awful and fantastic.' First, he became a conjurer and came in second in the Nordic card trick championship. Then he was a stand-up comedian for twelve years. John Ajvide Lindqvist has written parts of the TV series *Reuter & Skoog* as well as stage plays and TV dramas. *Let the Right One In*, his first novel, was selected as Best Novel in Translation 2005 in Norway and shortlisted for the Swedish Radio Prize in Literature and winner of the 2008 Selma Lagerlöf Prize for Literature, "... for a body of work that encompasses masterly storytelling and a feel for the strong forces of horror and imagination." Lindqvist is also a winner of the GP:s Litteraturpris in 2008 and a nominee for the August Prize in 2015. In recent years, Lindqvist has kept his strong position in the genre and field by publishing independent yet connected collections of novels: *I Am Behind You*, *I Always Find You*, *Our Skin*, *Our Blood*, *Our Bones* and *The Last Place*.

Eva Melander:

Recognised as one of the most talented of her generation of Swedish actors, Eva Melander has proved herself to be equally accomplished on stage and screen. Eva was awarded with the Swedish Academy Award (the Guldbaggen), for her critically acclaimed performance in the Swedish feature *Flocken*, directed by Beata Gårdeler. She recently starred in the TV production "Rebecka Martinsson: Arctic Murders" which aired on Channel 4 in the U.K. as well as Sweden and other territories. Melander is best known for many other Swedish productions, like the acclaimed Swedish/Danish crime series "The Bridge" and her multiple roles in TV series as varied as "Jordskott," "Nurses," "Modus," "Real Humans," "Lasermannen" and "Mästerverket." On film, she can be seen in the features *The Hypnotist*, directed by Lasse Hallstrom, and *Sebbe*, directed by Babak Najafi. Eva trained at the National Academy of Mime and Acting in Malmo, Sweden and has since been starring in several stage productions at the most prestigious theatres in Sweden, including the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm and the Stockholm City Theatre.

Eero Milonoff:

Eero Milonoff is a well-known Finnish actor. Milonoff is of German, Russian, and Swedish descent on his father's side. He graduated from the Theater Academy of Helsinki in 2005. Milonoff has played in over 15 feature films in Finland and abroad such as *Popular Music* (2004, dir. Reza Bagher), *The Home of Dark Butterflies* (2008, dir. Dome Karukoski), *False Trail* (2011, dir. Kjell Sundvall) and *Sixpack Movie* (2012, dir. Ville Jankeri) as well as in television and theatre. In 2008, he was nominated for the Jussi Award for Best Actor for his role in the biopic *Ganes* (2007) and in 2016 for the Venla Award for Best Actor for his role in the TV series *Hooked* (2015). In 2016 Milonoff starred in the critically successful film *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Mäki* (dir. Juho Kuosmanen) which won the Un Certain Regard Award at the Cannes Film Festival and earned him a Jussi Award nomination for best supporting actor.

Credits

CAST:

Tina	EVA MELANDER
Vore	EERO MILONOFF
Roland	JÖRGEN THORSSON
Agneta	ANN PETRÉN
Tina's Father	STEN LJUNGGREN
Daniel	KJELL WILHELMOSEN
Therese	RAKEL WÄRMLÄNDER
Robert	ANDREAS KUNDLER
Tomas	MATTI BOUSTEDT

CREW:

Directed by	ALI ABBASI
Written by	ALI ABBASI, ISABELLA EKLÖF, JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST
Based on	<i>Grans</i> by JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST
Cinematography	NADIM CARLSEN
Editing	OLIVIA NEERGAARD-HOLM, ANDERS SKOV
Production Designer	FRIDA HOAS
Costume Designer	ELSA FISCHER
Sound Design	CHRISTIAN HOLM
Music by	CHRISTOFFER BERG, MARTIN DIRKOV
VFX	PETER HJORTH
Make-Up & Prosthetics	GÖRAN LUNDSTRÖM
Casting	SARA TÖRNKVIST
Executive Producers	META LOUISE FOLDAGER SØRENSEN, TOMAS ESKILSSON, LOUIS TISNÉ, DANIEL SACHS, HÅKAN PETTERSSON, ANNA CRONEMAN, PETER NYRÉN, THOMAS GAMMELTOFT, ERIKA WASSERMAN
Produced by	NINA BISGAARD, PIODOR GUSTAFFSON, PETRA JÖNSSON

BORDER

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In co-production with
FILM I VÄST, SVT, META FILM DK,
COPENHAGEN FILM FUND

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