



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
UN CERTAIN REGARD  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

EVA MELANDER

# BORDER

A FILM BY ALI ABBASI

METAFILM STOCKHOLM, BLACK SPARK FILM & TV AND KÄRNFILM PRESENTS  
A FILM BY ALI ABBASI WITH EVA MELANDER EERO MILONOFF IN "BORDER" SCRIPT BY ALI ABBASI ISABELLA EKLÖF  
JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY NADIM CARLSEN PRODUCTION DESIGNER FRIDA HOAS  
COSTUME DESIGNER ELSA FISCHER EDITED BY OLIVIA NEERGAARD-HOEM ANDERS SKOV MUSIC BY CHRISTOFFER BERG  
MARTIN DIRKOV PRODUCED BY NINA BISGAARD ÞÓÐOR GUSTAFSSON PETRA JÓNSSON  
BASED ON THE SHORT STORY "GRÄNS" BY JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST

FROM THE WRITER OF "LET THE RIGHT ONE IN"





SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE  
**UN CERTAIN REGARD**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# BORDER

*A FILM BY Ali Abbasi*

2018 - Nordic Noir - Sweden/Denmark - 2.39 - 108 min

## PRESS

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## LOGLINE

After a customs officer develops a strange attraction to the suspect she's investigating, the case's revelations soon call her into question her entire existence.

## SYNOPSIS

Customs officer Tina is known for her extraordinary sense of smell. It's almost as if she can sniff out the guilt on anyone hiding something. But when Vore, a suspicious-looking man, walks past her, her abilities are challenged for the first time ever. Tina can sense Vore is hiding something she can't identify. Even worse, she feels a strange attraction to him. As Tina develops a special bond with Vore and discovers his true identity, she also realizes the truth about herself. Tina, like Vore, does not belong to this world. Her entire existence has been one big lie and now she has to choose: keep living the lie or embrace Vore's terrifying revelations.



## IN CONVERSATION WITH **ALI ABBASI**

### INSPIRATIONS

I think genre can be complicated. It is both a creative framework and a marketing device. If you hear a Wagner opera, it can have brutality, romance, strange humour, grotesque elements, all of that composing one cohesive work. What genre is Wagner? Classical, expressive turn of the century, or something else. It's never about one thing but many, and Wagner is one of the artists who put multitudes together in a special and unique way.

I never thought about *BORDER* in terms of a 'genre mixture', although a big part of my job is being a mixer, balancing all the different elements into one coherent whole. Rather than a genre label, I would say more simply that maybe it's a very European film. A Japanese version or an American version would probably look very different.

I come from a background in literature, and my own brain still works much like a writer's. At least that's how I learned to tell stories. It was a while before I became interested in movies, because when I was younger, I was more arrogant and in my mind films were merely for the 'masses.' At the time I really thought watching movies was a pastime for people who had nothing better to do!

With film, I was never interested in story, but more in the boundary-pushing end of the spectrum. Mainstream and even non-mainstream cinema in many ways felt narrow and restricted compared to literature. What I am interested in is looking at society through the lense of a parallel universe, and genre filmmaking is the perfect vehicle for that. That's where film gets more stimulating for me: rather than in the personal drama of my own problems, I like to experience my thoughts and impulses through another body in another world than my own. I think there's also something interesting in cutting the connection with the personal, in completely creating art.



I love Luis Bunuel and I actually named my son Luis after him. Chantal Ackerman is another great inspiration of mine; my first short film was a homage to her. I like the way she takes the banality of life to an absurd and surreal level. Fellini is also one of the masters I admire, and in my view could be considered the ‘Wagner of cinema’ gluing different genres together and making it work. I like filmmaking that resembles being a circus instructor in some way.

Today genre might be the closest “market” to go for if your interest is operating in parallel universes: it’s a license not to be straight, a license to be weird. It can look all different ways: Western, Science Fiction or whatever. You remove yourself from the mandates of reality and also the normal codes of narrative drama. I don’t like to play that brave filmmaker talking about important social issues, but at the same time I don’t generally consider myself a ‘fan’ of horror or genre films either. I’m interested in everything going on beneath and behind the surface, in all that affects people in ways they cannot know. Genre films are also known as good entertainment, so I like the idea that people let their guard down and relax. That’s when it becomes a good place to talk about politics in a more subtle and covert way. I tried that in Shelley and then again here in Border.

## BORDER & THE UNIVERSE OF WRITER JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST

My first exposure to John's stories was actually seeing the film *Let the Right One In*, and afterwards I went and read the book. *Let the Right One In* was a real discovery and the movie invented something new; Nordic genre realism, which was a breath of fresh air in Swedish cinema. I'll admit Sweden was actually the last place I expected to see an innovative genre film come out of. That's why it was such a great surprise to discover the universe of John Ajvide Lindqvist.

One thing I love about John's writing is that he is at the same level as his audience. It's not high art and you don't need to be 'literary' to appreciate it. At the same time it's not just popular fiction, it has a special nerve, but one which is hidden. In *Let the Right One In* for instance – should we read the story as a twisted take on Swedish society or simply an innovative take on vampire mythos? It's not a simple endeavor to add a layer of the fantastic on to realism, and John's special quality is building that bridge between the real and the fantastic, always the hardest part.

I dove deeper into John's writing, and that's what led me to "Border". My friend and fellow filmmaker Milad Alami had also recommended it, and after reading it I knew there was something there. Though at the same time my first thought was also how tricky the story would be to bring to the screen. Because in the novella, nearly the entire story plays out in Tina's head through her diary entries. We read her mostly as a passive observer of goings on.

Even the publisher recognized this and soon began mentioning other short stories that could be a better fit. But by that time I was set on adapting "Border," which felt like it had something bigger to going for it in the same vein as *Let the Right One In*. "Border" wasn't as elaborate as *Let the Right One In*, but similarly the characters had something that made them engaging as well as complex and otherworldly. I kept getting pitched other Lindqvist stories that were nice new twists on genre, but I wasn't connecting as much. After *Shelley*, people had already branded me as a horror director, but I don't think that's accurate. "Border" had all the extra ingredients in addition to the genre elements, the ones that make the story so interesting. So I knew this was the one, and we started developing it while I was still working on *Shelley*.

Then as we worked on adapting the short story and writing the script together, first with John and then with Isabella Eklöf, we started to make changes. We wanted the film to have even more of a dark underbelly. The whole crime investigation sub-plot for example is new and was added on to the original story.



## CASTING AND CREATING **TINA** (EVA MELANDER) & **VORE** (EERO MILONOFF)

I basically looked through the entire catalogue of Scandinavian actors! I use casting as a creative tool and it was a very long casting process. But there was no doubt at all when I met Eva and Eero. From that point I could not imagine anyone else doing it.

I also don't have any preconceived theoretical ideas about what will work with my cast. When I direct, I try to give the actors a lot of freedom, so 80% for me is about the choice made in casting and 20% being something more like a personal trainer. I try to enhance their performance and help them fully realise their potential. I cannot make them better than they are.

Eero's character needed to convey danger and an underlying sense of perversion, but also a vulnerable side. I discovered it's really hard to find someone who genuinely has both, and Eero was the only one. This duality is for me is what makes his character really work. As a Finnish actor in a Swedish film, in a way, it also made sense that he would be a 'foreigner.' I had always thought of Vore as someone coming from outside civilisation, and Swedes also have a share of legends and lore involving Finland, which made it an even better fit. In the film Eero speaks Swedish phonetically; so in theory he could just as easily have been a Spanish actor. But given Finland's long history with Sweden it made even more sense – Vore feels familiar but at the same time not. He sounds like he could be illiterate. Actually Vore is clearly not illiterate, he just might be non-human.

As for Eva I got really lucky. I was worried that this character could be too passive, and it's not really in my temperament to make something about a passive character – I focus more on crazy people doing crazy things. But Eva expanded the range of the character by 800%. I actually thought at first that Tina shouldn't talk much at all, but then how do we get to know her?

Luckily Eva is much more expressive wearing a thick silicon mask than many people are without one! She squeezes out small things that make a big difference, with all the different ways she sniffs



for instance! There's the angry sniff, the sad sniff... we could even adjust the way she was sniffing between takes. Eva is extremely meticulous, crazily detail oriented, a true perfectionist. She works like an engineer, with an almost scientific way of approaching her feelings and performance. It can even get as precise 20% more of that, 30% more of this and so on.

Eva also has quite a meticulous personality, she has to be in control, while Eero is more impulsive. They both took on a bit of each other during the working process and the shoot: Eero became more detail conscious while Eva became more impulsive. There was some kind of symbiosis happening between them.

Besides this, there were all the challenging aspects of their physical transformation. I had worried that the masks would limit them, and Eva had to be in make-up for four hours a day, By the time we got to the set she had already been there for six hours and had a full workday before we even started shooting. Huge respect to them both for not letting it affect the work. And actually I think the masks probably set them free in a way, to really create whole new characters and identities. Eero and Eva also took on 20kg each for the roles; so they actually became different people.

## **CULTURE, MIRRORS, AND MAGICAL REALISM**

To me the movie is not about 'Us vs Them' but about a person who can and does decide to choose her own identity. I try not to get into identity politics as such. But I also like to believe that to some extent you can choose your identity. Everyone interprets what they see about people the way they want to. It's all about context.

Even though I'm not very invested in racial discussions, since my childhood I know what it feels like to be a minority. Minority to me doesn't mean a different color, but more importantly a different persona. I am as much a minority in Iran as in Copenhagen.





Still there are certain things that come through Iranian culture. We are more interested in things we don't see. We are obsessed with death and the afterlife. We see hidden patterns and motives at work all the time. Sometimes it might be a bit paranoid but it can also be poetic. I was brought up this way, to see something you don't see. And paradoxically film may be the best way to treat and approach the things you don't see, to show the invisible.

There's also a rich poetic tradition in Iran, and I am a product of that culture too. Just like Americans maybe have pop culture in their blood. This is our pop culture. I see a thread running through the work of Iranian filmmakers and maybe even cultural similarities with other Eastern countries like Russia.

Something about not going after the most obvious thing. Seeing things behind things. I've been influenced by a lot of Latin American magical realism as well: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and Roberto Bolaño. Living in these countries, from Latin America to Iran, seeing so much deceit around, somehow you lose the grasp of what is really true.

Movies are unique because they are mirrors that can be a deceitfully close simulation of human life. I see humans as well developed animals and I'm interested in the situations when our animal instincts clash with society's structure. When the thin layer of civilization we are living under starts to crack and protagonists are pushed into the extreme. Not just because the extreme is interesting. Their answer interests me. The complexity of this situation is its beauty, not its sadness.



## INTERVIEW WITH **JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST**

### **To what extent did you, Ali and your fellow co-writer Isabella Eklöf, evolve the novella to capture the essence of the story in the film?**

Ali's language of imagery is very sensual and raw all at the same time, which suits the story perfectly, since it is a love story with open nerve-endings. Ali and I had an early meeting before I wrote the first drafts, and there we discussed some possible changes to make the story more acute. Some of this I included but there was much more done by Ali and Isabella, especially regarding the story thread with the police and the children. Apart from that, I find that the film in its essence stays very close to the original story. "Border" is around 50 pages, while "Let the Right One In" is 450, so naturally much more of the original story is included in this film. Almost everything in the story, though sometimes in a different context, plus the new original thread of Tina's investigation.

### **Your stories often involve realistic, sometimes working class characters and settings. What's the importance of maintaining the connection to everyday life?**

Well, nobody is really interested in a story about mutated vampires on a space ship, are they? Because of the extreme or supernatural elements in my stories, I strive to make everything else as believable and relatable as possible. Then I sneak in other elements a bit at a time, until you as a reader or spectator find yourself accepting and even rooting for creatures that you would never meet in your everyday life.

### **What is the most nerve-racking thing about bringing one of your stories to the screen?**

The most difficult thing is that my characters tend to think a lot, questioning their own actions. Since voice-over is seldom an option, I have to find ways to externalise the internal, that they say or do things that convey the same idea as a train of thought. The most nerve-racking thing is seeing the film for the first time, not knowing if I will love it or just have to be polite. In this case, that was not a problem. Fifteen minutes into viewing a rough cut at home, I had to pause the movie and go out to smoke a cigarette to calm myself down, because I was so happy. I've been lucky again.



## **Ali Abbasi**

Ali Abbasi (born 1981, Iran) has a background in literature with several 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. 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 drama. *Let the Right One In*, his first novel, was selected as Best Novel in Translation 2005 in Norway and shortlisted for the Prize in Literature of the Swedish Radio 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 GP:s Litteraturpris in 2008 and a nominee for the August Prize in 2015.

In the recent couple of years, Lindqvist has kept his strong position in the genre 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*.

The movie *Border* by Ali Abbasi based on the novel by the same name and co-written by Lindqvist will premiere at the Cannes Film Festival this year within the Un Certain Regard section.



## **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. this winter and previously in Sweden and other territories. Eva has been starring in many other Swedish productions, for example the acclaimed Swedish/Danish crime series "The Bridge" and in the series "Jordskott", "Nurses", "Modus", "Real humans", "Lasermannen" and "Mästerverket". She has also been starring 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 Malmö, 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. Eva is currently starring in the title role as "Richard III" at the Uppsala 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 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 gave him a Jussi Award nomination for best supporting actor.

## CAST

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

## CREW

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

**A META FILM STOCKHOLM, BLACK SPARK FILM & TV AND KÄRNFILM PRODUCTION**

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

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With the collaboration of **RED RENTAL BY MAAN, MAAN RENTAL, ACT3, TGBVFX**

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International Sales **FILMS BOUTIQUE**

Duration 108'  
Year 2018



## **Producers**

### **META FILM**

Meta Film is a Danish production company founded by Meta Louise Foldager Sørensen in 2010. The adventure of Meta Film began in Copenhagen but has since expanded to London and Stockholm. The motivating power of Meta Film comes from an eagerness to tell all different kinds of strong and important stories while maintaining the value of high artistic quality. Meta Film will premiere five Danish and international features in 2018. In addition to BORDER the five features include: ANIARA, also a Meta Film Stockholm production, THE SAINT BERNARD SYNDICATE which recently won two awards at Tribeca Film Festival, the international feature THE WIFE from Meta Film London starring Glenn Close and Jonathan Pryce and our Danish/Spanish drama HAPPY PEOPLE.

### **SPARK FILM & TV**

SPARK is a Swedish production company founded by Piodor Gustafsson. The company, which the name suggests, has the ambition to spark great ideas and to be a vessel for creativity. SPARK produces high end features and TV-series, going forward only with the projects that resonates with the team. With home base in Stockholm SPARK goes where the good stories are, approaching every project, big or small, with full engagement and ambition. SPARK is currently producing two TV-series and recently co-produced the feature THE WIFE, directed by Björn Runge, starring Glenn Close and Jonathan Pryce.

### **KÄRNFILM**

Kärnfilm was founded in 2015 by producers Martina Stöhr and Petra Jönsson together with Daniel Sachs. The mission is to produce high-end drama with the highest artistic and qualitative ambitions for a broad audience. Kärnfilm means “Core films” which alludes to the ambition of always focusing on the core of the story and the core elements of the process. Kärnfilm is based in Stockholm and is active developing and producing TV series, feature films and documentaries with a clear ambition to reach an international audience.



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