



KRIGEN (A WAR) was recently screened by Kino Ken at the 2016 Carnegie Mellon International Film Festival in Oakland, Pennsylvania. Below is his review of that subtitled production, an Oscar® nominee for Best Foreign Language Film.

13 of a possible 20 points

1/2 of a possible **

Turkey / Spain / Jordan / Denmark 2015 color 115 minutes subtitled live action feature war drama AZ Celtic Films / Nordisk Film Production Producers: Rene Ezra and Tomas Radoor

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 2 Direction: Tobias Lindholm 2nd Unit Direction: Yanal Kassay
- 1 Editing: Adam Nielsen
- 1 Cinematography: Magnus Nordenhof Jønck 2nd Unit DP: Ian Tomkins
- 1 Lighting: Aslak Lytthans
- Special Visual Effects: Thomas Øhlenschlaefer, Dann Damgaard Sandgreen, Lasse Strøm, Dan Dirckinck-Holmfeld
- 2 Screenplay: Tobias Lindholm
- 1 Music: Sune Rose Wagner
- 1 Production Design: Thomas Greve
- Art Direction: Burak Yerlikaya and Nasser Zoubi
- Set Dressing: Ece Kiltac
- Costume Design: Louize Nissen
- Makeup: Paul McGuinness and Bjørg Serup
- Weapons Handler: Adalet Uzum
- Weapons Coordinator: Marc Leroyer

- 1 **Sound Design: Morten Green**
Sound Effects: Oskar Skriver*
Sound Recordist: Jonas Langkilde
Sound Rerecording Mixing: Morten Green
 - 2 **Acting**
 - 1 **Creativity**
- 13 total points**

Cast:

Pilou Asbaek* (Claus Michael Pedersen), Tuva Novotny* (Maria Pedersen, wife of Claus), Dar Salim (Najib Bisma, translator), Søren Malling* (Martin Olsen, defense attorney), Charlotte Munck* (Lisbeth Danning, prosecuting attorney), Dulfi Al-Jabouri* (Lasse Hassan), Alex Høgh Andersen (Anders, a soldier), Jakob Frølund (Terkel Sand), Phillip Sem Dambaek (Brian Brask), Cecilie Elise Søndergaard (j) (Figne, daughter of Claus and Maria), Adam Chessa (j) (Julius, elder son of Claus and Maria), Andreas Buch Borgwardt (j) (Elliot, younger son of Claus and Maria), others

KRIGEN (A WAR) opens at a U.N. outpost in Afghanistan where a contingent of Danish mine disposal specialists is attempting to defuse active explosives before civilians are injured by them. It's a nearly endless task. Each camouflaged or buried snare is too often only discovered incidentally, through incapacitation or death of a foreign peacekeeper who misstepped once too often.

The local international authority assures natives seeking protection it will come through removal or detonation of these booby traps. Afghans may not shelter at a military installation for fear a spy or terrorist may infiltrate it. Following this protocol, Danish commander Claus Pedersen refuses to grant permission for overnight lodging at one to an Afghani family with a very sick child. He and his soldiers will clear out any Taliban guerrillas the next morning. But these civilians at risk must stay in their home village where Danes treated the young girl earlier that day. Her father's entreaties sway a nurse / translator seemingly new to the region. Claus remains adamant, overruling arguments from both distraught father and a female subordinate. Having already lost one man on routine patrol recently, he dares not risk additional lives of countrymen.

When his troops do visit the endangered family's village the next day they discover to their horror a Taliban bloodbath. Their supplicants have all been massacred for seeking aid from foreigners. It no longer matters whether mines remain undisturbed. Four more civilians are dead. The Taliban has won another battle for community control. Who will now appeal to international protectors for anything?

Claus is by no means just as callous about underlings. When one of those returns from a mission traumatized by unanticipated death of a fellow patroller, he relieves the man from expeditionary duty, reassigning him temporarily to station tasks. Claus then takes his place on outside scoutings, something he isn't supposed to do, at least not so frequently.

On one such journey, his unit comes under surprise attack from unseen aggressors. Initially, the enemy appears to be only snipers with automatic rifles. However, it becomes increasingly apparent attackers also are equipped with mortars. Using those effectively to pin down opponents, severely wounding their surveillance expert in the process, the Taliban threat is immediate and potentially lethal. Unsure where to direct countering fire, Claus makes a snap decision to focus on a mud compound which may or may not harbor women and children. Neither he nor his men are sure who or what is inside. For the U.N. commander, paramount issues are receiving air support and speedy evacuation of a wounded comrade bleeding profusely. With base headquarters badgering for confirmed sighting evidence of armed belligerents and too much obscuring dust and gunfire to comply, the combat veteran in charge of ground operations reaches the end of his patience and prevaricates, informing a superior that indeed his force is under fire from a target building known as Compound Six.

Only much later does Claus learn that inside it a group of unarmed women and children had been clustered. All of them were killed by the bombardment he ordered. This is unacceptable to U.N. command, resulting in his immediate suspension from active duty and recall to Denmark. There he will face charges of willfully ordering what looks to be a massacre of innocents.

Back on the home front, spouse Maria is battling with middle child Julius. His scrappy, defiant behavior is creating problems both at home and school. Lacking paternal guidance, Julius feels neglected and unloved, of less value in his dad's eyes than anonymous Afghani children. Additionally, preschooler Elliott regards older brother Julius as a model for his own deportment, a worrying development. Daughter Figne keeps her own counsel about the situation, privately insecure, wondering when and if her dad will come permanently home. Aside from regularly scheduled brief overseas cell phone contacts, there are no direct communications between children and Dad. Is this healthy for any of them?

Claus is trapped in a moral quandary, doggedly hammered for ethical blindness by a state prosecutor, awkwardly defended by subpoenaed eyewitnesses and defense counsel Martin. The latter he only partially informs of the truth to avoid potential manslaughter indictment. Wife Maria encourages him to give false testimony. Klaus must, in her opinion, keep clear of a jail term which would further estrange him from the rest of his family and responsibilities for their welfare.

Should he accede to her urging, or follow the promptings of conscience and integrity? Can anyone not present at the critical moment he asked for air cover possibly understand and

evaluate his judgement? Does war remove distinctions between criminal behavior and commendable military zeal?

Director Lindholm's declared aim is to encourage discussion of these controversial topics. Using seasoned Afghani combatants and refugees as cast members, he insured a degree of authenticity rarely offered by war dramas. Much of the war zone dialogue was extemporaneous, raw, completely believable. Tension, built gradually, is sustained impressively by resort to handheld cameras in scenes where armed forces are out on patrol. Just as realistic are domestic interludes, with one of the best lines of the entire film coming from Elliott after he downs an entire glass of milk in one extended series of gulps and then declares it wasn't good for him. Mixing humor, pessimism, and irony throughout, screenwriter Lindholm keeps sermonizing and nihilism both at bay.

Most praiseworthy of all KRIGEN's components, though, is its performances, each character, no matter how small the role, ringing utterly true. Pilou Asbaek's conflicted Claus Michael Pedersen, consistently underplayed, sets the tone for remaining cast members. Charlotte Munck's scathingly polarizing Lisbeth Danning, arrogantly self-righteous representative of misapplied state power, flaunts moral smugness memorably.

Yet audience identification may well ultimately swing back to lying Claus. Simple black-and-white morality isn't a goal of this production. It is the better for daring to highlight gray regions instead.

Music, art direction, cinematography, lighting, and overall sound design are adequate, but overshadowed by script and acting. Both of those are remarkable enough to make KRIGEN a rewarding cautionary tale rather than escapist entertainment.

Some obscenities and war violence insure A WAR is actually suitable only for youths at least sixteen years of age and adults.

A debt of gratitude must go to Brad Van Hoeij's September 15, 2015 article about KRIGEN in the *Hollywood Reporter*, where details of shooting locations and casting can be found. Interested readers can access it at www.hollywoodreporter.com .

KRIGEN is playing the first week of April locally at the Regent Square Theater in Edgewood, Pennsylvania. It is scheduled for Region 1 dvd release in June, 2016