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PRESENTS



# ARMADILLO

**A film by Janus Metz**

2010, Denmark, 100 min, 1.78:1

**Publicity Contact:** Julia Pacetti, JMP Verdant Communications  
juliapacetti@earthlink.net / (917) 584-7846

**Press materials:** <http://www.kinolorber.com>

**A Lorber Films Release from Kino Lorber, Inc.**  
333 West 39th Street, Suite 503, New York, NY, 10018  
(212) 629-6880 / [contact@kinolorber.com](mailto:contact@kinolorber.com)

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## SYNOPSIS

Armadillo is an active military base, used to support tactical operations in Helmand, Afghanistan. It houses a mixture of 170 Danish and British soldiers in the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), who are responsible for providing security to the surrounding area and eliminating any Taliban insurgency.

Following a group of Danish soldiers stationed at Armadillo through an entire tour of duty, filmmaker Janus Metz creates an unforgettable portrait of the reality of military life on the front lines — with unprecedented access to the soldiers both in the camp and in the field. Documenting both the boredom and horror of warfare, Metz shows us the soldiers playing video games and laughing at pornography, struggling to communicate with unhappy civilians, and brutally killing a group of Taliban soldiers who are found hiding in a trench. The film avoids judgments for or against the war, and instead shows the soldiers struggling to maintain their humanity in a world filled with violence.

## CREDITS

Directed by JANUS METZ  
Idea by KASPER TORSTING  
Produced by RONNIE FRIDTHJOF & SARA STOCKMANN  
Co-Produced by MAGNUS GERTTEN & LENNART STRÖM  
Cinematography by LARS SKREE  
Editing by PER K. KIRKEGAARD  
Sound Design by RASMUS WINTHER JENSEN  
Music Composition by UNO HELMERSSON

## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

*Winner, International Critics' Week*  
Cannes International Film Festival

*Winner, Grierson Award (Best Documentary)*  
BFI London Film Festival

*Official Selection*  
Toronto International Film Festival

*Official Selection*  
DOC NYC

*Official Selection*  
South by Southwest

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## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Janus Metz was born in Denmark and received a master's degree in communication and international development studies from Roskilde University. He worked as a documentary researcher before moving to South Africa, where he worked on the television drama *Soul City* and made his debut documentary short *Township Boys* (2006). His most recent work includes *Love on Delivery* (2008) and *Ticket to Paradise* (2008), both films on marriage migration, prostitution and globalization.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

With *Armadillo*, I was curious to explore how the micro level of war – where human interaction takes place – affects one of the greatest conflicts of our time. How politics meets practice in the war zone. In the early research for the project, when I first met the young soldiers, I was surprised that the majority of those who had already been to war had a desire to return. Their experiences were violent and bloody, but they all talked with great excitement about battle and about the strong bonds and feelings of unity with their fellow soldiers.

Everyday life at home seemed to have become boring in comparison with the intensity of war. It seemed like an addiction. This puzzled me to the extent that I wanted to try and put myself in the soldiers' shoes. Why do they want to go to war? Is it to change the world and make a difference? Is it excitement? Personal ambitions? Is it something else... and how do these things affect each other as well as the conflict at large. What impact does this "addiction" have on the situation in Afghanistan? How does it affect the soldiers' ability to assess a difficult situation? What does it mean to the way local Afghans perceive the foreigners in their country?

Does it have an effect the other way round – on the nations that lead these "democracy wars" and what does it tell us about young people of our time? I've always been interested in making film about people who go through life altering experiences. It involves a "rite of passage" where they are ultimately faced with themselves and their own humanity – it is universal and basic. In the context of war and the young men who are fighting them, I was interested to find out how the perception of masculinity, the good, the bad, the civilized and the barbaric, is reflected in action and how these concepts are adapted in this "coming of age" story.

guardian.co.uk

## ***Armadillo*: the Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark**

**In Denmark, the press and public have been stunned by *Armadillo*, Janus Metz's documentary about a UK-Danish base in Afghanistan, and the actions of the soldiers based there**

By Geoffrey Macnab  
guardian.co.uk, Thursday, June 3, 2010

Guess which film knocked *Prince of Persia* off the top spot at the Danish box office this week. *Sex and the City 2*? *Valhalla Rising 3*? Wrong: it's a new film called *Armadillo*, by young Danish director Janus Metz, that has provoked a furious debate in Denmark since its premiere in Cannes last week. The film, its director calculates, has already been the subject of 300 to 400 articles in the Danish press. The Danish minister of defence, Gitte Lillelund Bech, has seen it, as have many other politicians and senior members of the military, who have now commissioned an inquiry into events it shows. There has been such a clamour among the public to see it that the film has been rushed into cinemas this week, almost two months in advance of its original release date.

*Armadillo* is the name of the "forward operating base" in Helmand province, Afghanistan that is home to 170 Danish and British soldiers. The incident that caused particular consternation comes toward the end of the documentary when the Danish soldiers are caught in a firefight with the Taliban. The soldiers are exhilarated after they finally kill their adversaries. What has shocked Danish public opinion is the suggestion (as one soldier later puts it) that they "liquidated wounded people and piled up the dead to take pictures of ourselves as heroes".

*Armadillo* doesn't offer conclusive proof that the Danish soldiers broke the rules of engagement. Nonetheless, the very possibility that they might have done is startling in itself. The public has been shocked by the level of brutality shown by Metz. The notion that the Danes are in Afghanistan on a peacekeeping mission and spend their days building schools and "giving out candy to kids" is clearly no longer tenable. What really happened when the Taliban in the ditch were killed is unlikely ever to be unravelled. Says Metz: "It was my intention to place the viewer in a position where he could say that it's not even possible to know what was going on. Maybe the soldiers don't even know themselves."

Metz says he grew very close to the soldiers he was filming. "The whole question of embeddedness carries this paradox. You become 'one of them', lose your critical perspective and start becoming a soldier yourself. But you have to step back and be able to describe." Metz says he was "not out to expose the soldiers, or pull their pants down." He simply set out to be as honest as possible about their experiences. "When you manage to defeat your enemy, there is great relief and great exhilaration. Maybe we're looking at something that goes to the core of something very human," Metz says. "The soldiers are so close to death and they actually kill someone. The way they handle the bodies afterwards maybe testifies to something at the very core of humanity – of our grubby human nature. War has always been there. It has always been part of us."

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*Armadillo* has many of the hallmarks of fictional war movies. We see the young soldiers at home in Denmark, preparing to go to the front for the first time. In Afghanistan itself, they watch porn on laptops while on night duty, and relish the camaraderie of being part of a tight-knit platoon. However, their bravado is soon undermined. During a firefight, one doe-eyed young soldier is wounded. His baffled, mud-encrusted face makes it very clear that this isn't just paintball. At the same time, Metz also tries to show the experience of the Afghans themselves. He highlights the plight of farmers caught between western soldiers (with guns) and Taliban insurgents (also with guns). These farmers have to cope as their cattle are killed and their crops trampled.

Politicians have reacted to *Armadillo* as the film-makers expected, and along party lines. "They have used it to argue for their own opinions," producer Ronnie Fridthjof says. "The left wing says, 'Oh, this proves we need to get out of the war'; whereas the right wing say, 'Our boys are doing a really good job!'"

Metz himself refuses to be drawn on the central question of whether the Danish troops should still be in Afghanistan. "I am not really a politician. I am a film-maker preoccupied with film-making questions," he says. "Having said that, I think it's very important that we start taking Afghans more into consideration when we are talking about Afghanistan, and that we start looking more at the history of the country. Many of the Afghans I have spoken to see the international forces as people who've just landed from the moon."

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