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**Friday November 1st, 2019**

**Arctic (12a)**

*Dir:* **Joe Penna**

*Starring:* **Mads Mikkelsen**

*Sponsor:* **Dr Roderick Ørner**

**Psychological Therapy and Consultancy Practices,  
Lincoln**

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**Synopsis:** A man, stranded alone in the Arctic Circle, follows a strict daily routine to survive in the harsh conditions. One day, a helicopter appears but crashes due to stormy weather: the man rescues a badly injured woman from the wreck. With the woman's life in the balance, he attempts to drag her on a sled to safety. After an attack by a polar bear and further injury, the pair are eventually spotted by another helicopter.

*Arctic* is the debut feature from Brazilian wunderkind Joe Penna a filmmaker and musician who rose to prominence with his wildly popular MysteryGuitarMan channel on YouTube. The channel, which boasts about 3 million subscribers, includes Penna's 2015 sci-fi short *Turning Point* in which a lone woman struggles to stay alive in a hostile environment. With *Arctic*, Penna explores the survival theme once more.

Fittingly for the sub-zero setting, the film begins with a man labouring to clear snow from rocky ground to uncertain design, until the camera switches to an aerial view and reveals that a giant SOS message has been carved out. The man, Overgård, (Mads Mikkelsen), has been stranded after a plane crash in the otherworldly cold desert of the far north. He has evidently been here for a significant period of time; he sports a large, unkempt beard and, during limited daylight hours, repeats a time-honoured routine of critical tasks that include maintaining fishing holes in the ice, mapping surrounding terrain and operating a distress beacon.

Ten minutes pass before a word is spoken, and dialogue is kept to a minimum throughout. In fact, minimalism runs through practically every facet of the film. Visual compositions are often reduced to a vulnerable speck moving across an inhospitable white expanse, eschewing the sumptuous but somewhat self-conscious beauty found in comparable films such as *The Revenant* (2015). The presence of daylight shows us that the film is set during a comparatively mild season, but the land offers little for Overgård – only fish to eat and the solitary polar bear searching for its own lunch. Composer Joseph Trapanese's score is suitably restrained outside dramatic high points, dovetailing with the nuanced sound design - the low whistle of the wind heard from within the wrecked plane's fuselage is just one of many well-handled details.

Mikkelsen's performance is subtle and at times, beautifully effective at conveying the character's hope and suffering. We never see the disaster that left him stranded or the life he is hoping to regain, but these omissions allow a more poetic portrait to emerge, a blank figure that the viewer can identify with. Overgård's very survival to this point signifies competence, though his skills are only



a standard deviation or two above those of an average person; there's little of the miraculous and endless problem-solving seen in *The Martian* (2015). Empathy for the protagonist allows miniature moment to shine - we feel the relief as he warms frost-stricken hands on a gas stove, and the rising fear as sunny calm turns to stormy gale.

Penna's tripped back approach neatly sidesteps some well-worn plot devices (most notably flashbacks) yet there are few surprises to be found in this familiar narrative of regaining one's humanity at the edge of endurance. Some scenes are reminiscent of, particularly, Kevin MacDonald's *Touching the Void* (2003), while anyone aware of the dramatic principle of Chekhov's gun will suspect that the alpha predator lurking in the distance during the first act is being readied for a close-up before the curtain falls.

An opportunity for further distinction may have been missed in the failure to include any elements of the Arctic landscape's disorientating effect on human perception of scale. In his classic book on the region, *Arctic Dreams* (1986), Barry Lopez describes a group of people following a polar bear and only realising the creature was in fact an owl when it took flight. Similarly the cinematic potential of the *fata Morgana* mirage, an optical phenomenon common in deserts and polar landscapes and previously explored by Werner Herzog in his 1971 film of that name, is neglected.

YouTube offers its video makers detailed performance analytics, including the precise moment a viewer stops watching. Penna has spoken of using this information to hone his content for the medium through microscopic fine-tuning and attention to detail. Given the substantial promise of this debut and a sci-fi thriller, *Stowaway*, slated as his next project, Penna will hopefully develop just as rapidly in the feature film arena. Past success suggests he is a quick learner.

#### Credits

<b>Overgård</b>	Mads Mikkelsen
<b>Young woman</b>	Maria Thelma Smáradóttir
<b>Helicopter pilot</b>	Tinrinai Thikhasuk
<b>Director</b>	Joe Penna
<b>Written by</b>	Joe Penna, Ryan Morrison
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Tómas Örn Tómason
<b>Editing</b>	Ryan Morrison
<b>Music</b>	Joseph Trapanese

#### Another view

Mads Mikkelsen stars as Overgård, a Danish explorer who is forced to crash-land his aircraft in the middle of the arctic tundra. He strips all available equipment from his shattered plane but, despite his best efforts, the barren landscape offers little hope of salvation. Yet

Overgård perseveres, living by alarms set on his wristwatch that alert him when to carry out the next duty of the day. As is often the way with such films, much of the pleasure is derived from the ingenuity of Mikkelsen's character, be it a fishing line rigged with rattling alarms or the construction of makeshift sledges from plane doors.

Penna, who rose to fame as a YouTube filmmaker, co-writes the screenplay with fellow newcomer Ryan Morrison. Dialogue is near to non-existent, echoing J.C. Chandor's superior *All Is Lost*. Penna's seeming familiarity with the survival genre has been put to good use, structuring the film to hit the right beats at the right times, regularly providing gasp-inducing moments. Early on in the film, we are led to believe that Mikkelsen's character might be promptly rescued, only to watch a helicopter crash during a snowstorm. Rather than being saved, he turns into the rescuer, dragging a young female pilot (Maria Thelma Smáradóttir) from the debris – another life in his hands.

Penna does push the boundaries of credulity at times, with one scene in particular (involving a polar bear) feeling like a big budget advert for Glacier Mints – with added mild peril. In his attempts to build tension, he pushes the situation slightly too far, frustrating for a film that demonstrates a clear, workmanlike ability to satisfy generic convention. Penna is better when utilising the landscape to his advantage, with the barren tundra allowed to speak for itself thanks to the work of cinematographer Tómas Örn Tómasson.

Far from breaking the mould of the survival drama genre, *Arctic* nonetheless offers thrilling moments and entertains throughout, mainly thanks to Mikkelsen's muscular performance as the grizzled Overgård. Penna undoubtedly has talent and, with *Arctic*, displays enough directorial verve to have us interested in what he attempts next.

**Joseph Walsh: Cinevue**

**Our next screening: Friday November 15th, 7.30pm  
Border (Sweden 2018. Cert 15)**

Nordic cinema has produced some rare feats of the imagination in recent years, where mythology and the modern world intersect in bizarre, sometimes comic but always memorable ways. *Rare Exports* imagined the release into the world of an evil Father Christmas, the result of a controversial engineering project, *Trollhunter* had us believe the Norwegian government hires a secret band of hunters to track down and destroy trolls living wild in the mountains; and in *Border*, we have...well, to say more would give the game away. Trust us, though - this film is every bit as remarkable and original as the above examples. Prepare for a night at the cinema you won't forget...

**Programming news**

We're delighted to confirm that the film chosen for November 22nd, the first of our new release slots this season, is the critically acclaimed British film *Bait*, filmed, directed and edited by Mark Jenkin and released at the end of August.

Already nominated in 4 categories for the British Independent Film Awards (including Best Film and Best Director), *Bait* is one of the most talked-about films of the year. We hope you can join us.

*"...an astonishing work..." Andrew Robertson, Eye for Film*

*"Bait ultimately feels as unique as a found object, defying classification. It's a creeping, original British work..." Ian Mantagni, Sight and Sound*