



OFFICIAL
SELECTION

INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2024

A FILM BY ULAHA SALIM

ETERNAL

HE WANTED
TO FIND
THE ANSWER
BUT LOST
HIMSELF



SYNOPSIS

Young climate change scientist, Elias falls in love with an aspiring singer, Anita. But when an opportunity arises for him to join a mission researching a dangerous climate change phenomenon – a mysterious fracture on the ocean floor – he chooses career over love. Years later, during his mission, he experiences a vision of what his life could have been like if he made a different choice and his new obsession becomes to get his old life and love back.

INTERVIEW WITH
ULAA SALIM
BY MARTA BAŁAGA

Science-fiction films are still not that common in Europe. Was it a challenge for you?

I think it kind of came naturally. I didn't just sit down one day, saying to myself: "Ok, I am going to write a sci-fi story now." In Denmark, it takes a while to make a film, but there is one advantage that comes with it: you have time to find the core of your storyline.

I don't like to be limited creatively. This is only my second film [after *Sons of Denmark*] but I always say that each time, it has to feel like it's my first and my last. You have to go all in. If there is an idea that works, I want to explore it, without being afraid of its magnitude. Nowadays, as a young filmmaker, you can do so much more than 10, 20 years ago. It's easier to play with others genres.

Still, for me, it all started with that love story. It was that central relationship that paved the way for science fiction, not the other way around.





In Sons of Denmark, you also combined genre elements with something more intimate. Do you find it interesting?

If I feel something has been done before, or that I can't connect with it personally, I just don't see a point. Why should I work on it for so many years? Why should I be the one making it and not someone else?

As a filmmaker, I want to explore my deepest thoughts in my work. I enjoy genre, but I also feel these films can be very predictable. Usually, you know what will happen. But if you put another thing forward, if you look for the heart of the story somewhere else, it can forge its own way. I really believe that at the end of the day, you have to stay true to your own cinematic language.



As you said, it's a love story – the way *Interstellar* is a family drama, for example. Is it hard to strike the right balance between emotion and spectacle?

I hope this film will allow you to discover something you normally wouldn't, but also that you will recognize so many of these conflicting feelings. I like this combination, I guess. The truth is, a story like that would never work without the emotions and the emotions wouldn't hit quite as hard if I would settle for a smaller scale.

Why did you want to talk about parenthood?

When I started writing this film, I didn't know if I wanted kids. Later, my then-girlfriend became pregnant and my son was born. He was about one year old when I started shooting *ETERNAL*. In some ways, this film mirrors all these years of me delving into parenthood.

Suddenly, the story became all about what kind of parent you are, what kind of life you can have with your children. It started to focus on the concept of time, because time changes a lot when you have kids. It's not the same anymore.

Then again, everyone has experienced loss or met someone important and for some reasons it didn't work out. Now, when you think about them, you can easily imagine a whole different existence. I guess that's the most relatable part of this story. Everyone has a "what if?"

Your protagonist [played by Simon Sears] is interesting because you are not trying to make him likeable at all costs. Why is that?

I like these kinds of characters. They are not heroes; they aren't always doing the right thing. But they are not antiheroes either, because human beings are more complex than that. We are somewhere in between.





We make mistakes and often learn our lessons too late. It's so human and when you see that on the screen, maybe it makes you think about your own past? That's life: we are selfish, scared, but we are also very lovable and emotional, and we want to connect with others. It's pretty normal to me, but it's not that normal in many films. In films, people are put into boxes.

I think it was crucial to be in the moment with these characters, also as young people, and to feel for them. When things get more dynamic and more dangerous later on, you get more anxious precisely because it wasn't like that from the very beginning. I was really interested in this couple and in getting to know them over a longer period of time.

At first, she is the protagonist because she has the biggest dilemma. Then it switches and it's his turn. We really see their respective points of view. This man, he wanted to do something good, something big for the world but in fact, he was just being selfish. Also, sometimes it is too late and we never talk about it, especially in films. In films, you can always save someone. He is slowly realizing he missed his chance.

This question about whether it's too late for something echoes throughout the story, as you also address climate change fears.

In some ways, it's still not too late.

Our lifespan is short, but we should always do something about it.

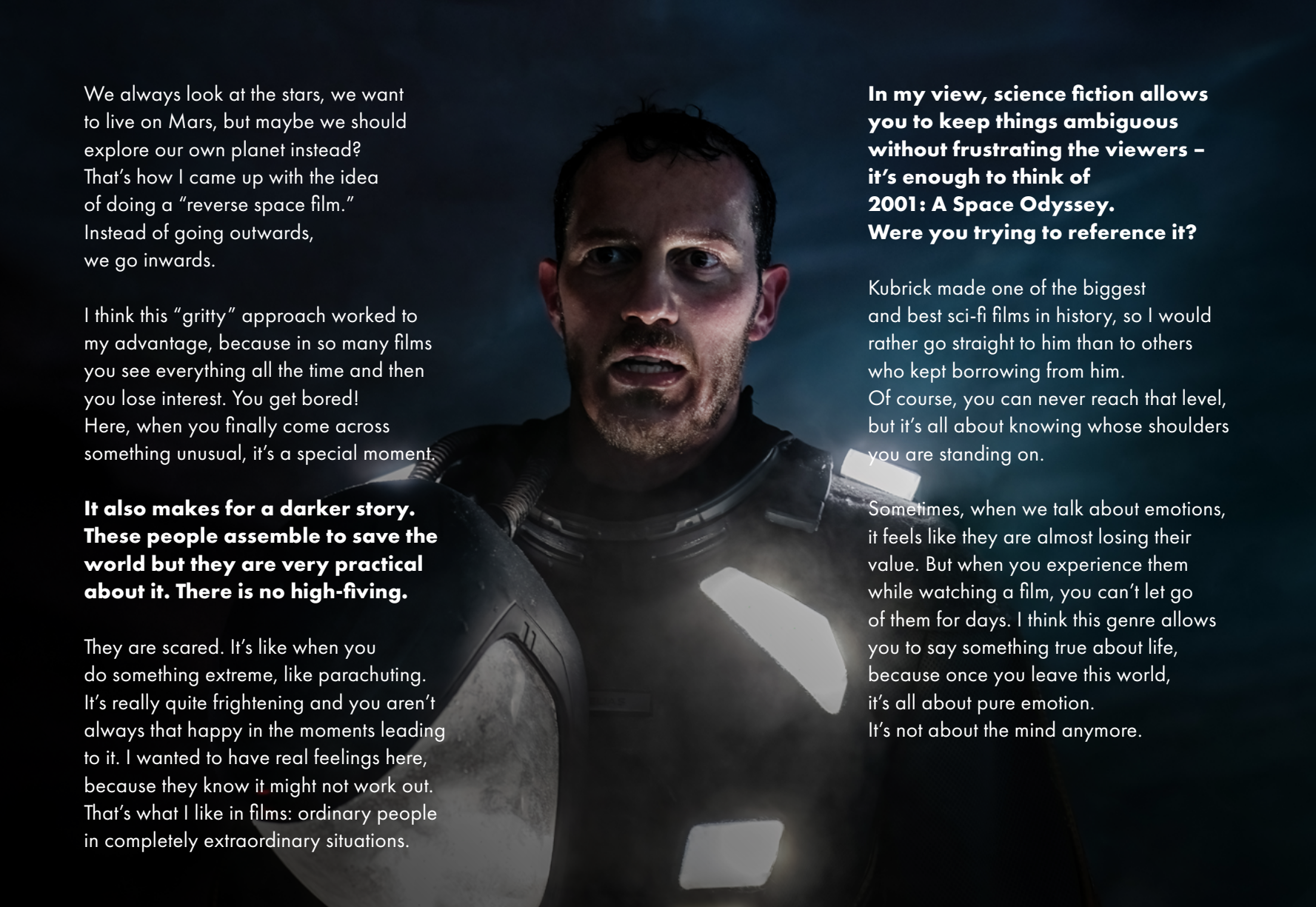
The problem is that for him, this whole endeavor became everything, completely taking over his life. It's the same with accepting death: just because we know it will happen, doesn't mean we should stop living. You should strive to be a good person and have children, even though inevitably you won't always be able to be there for them.

What were you going for when it comes to special effects?

I wanted to make something gritty.

I love space films. I love the feeling of looking at the sky, because it makes you feel so small. But I also felt it has been done before and there isn't a lot of originality left in these stories.





We always look at the stars, we want to live on Mars, but maybe we should explore our own planet instead? That's how I came up with the idea of doing a "reverse space film." Instead of going outwards, we go inwards.

I think this "gritty" approach worked to my advantage, because in so many films you see everything all the time and then you lose interest. You get bored! Here, when you finally come across something unusual, it's a special moment.

It also makes for a darker story. These people assemble to save the world but they are very practical about it. There is no high-fiving.

They are scared. It's like when you do something extreme, like parachuting. It's really quite frightening and you aren't always that happy in the moments leading to it. I wanted to have real feelings here, because they know it might not work out. That's what I like in films: ordinary people in completely extraordinary situations.

In my view, science fiction allows you to keep things ambiguous without frustrating the viewers – it's enough to think of 2001: A Space Odyssey. Were you trying to reference it?

Kubrick made one of the biggest and best sci-fi films in history, so I would rather go straight to him than to others who kept borrowing from him. Of course, you can never reach that level, but it's all about knowing whose shoulders you are standing on.

Sometimes, when we talk about emotions, it feels like they are almost losing their value. But when you experience them while watching a film, you can't let go of them for days. I think this genre allows you to say something true about life, because once you leave this world, it's all about pure emotion. It's not about the mind anymore.

DIRECTOR ULAA SALIM

Danish director Ulaa Salim was born in Denmark in 1987, both parents are originally from Iraq. In his films, he uses his personal experience as inspiration.

In 2017 Ulaa Salim graduated from The National Film School of Denmark and established Hyæne Film with his producing partner Daniel Mühlendorph.

SONS OF DENMARK was Ulaa Salim's debut film followed by sci-fi drama ETERNAL.

FILMOGRAPHY

2024 *Eternal (Feature)*

2019 *Sons of Denmark (Feature)*

2017 *Land of our Fathers (Short)*

2014 *The Pure Heart (Documentary)*

2014 *Our Fathers' Sons (Short)*

2013 *Forever Young (Short)*



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Being who you are, having made the choices you have made, would you then change any of your most significant choices in life?

Eternal is about the choices we make and the choices we do not make.


My ambition with the story is that it should bring us on a journey to places we have not yet seen – a journey through a fracture in the deepest darkness of the ocean.

We must get carried away on the ultimate love trip, to the point where it feels similar to being in love, getting hurt, hating, and learning how to live with it.

I wanted this story to feel like real love with its complexities and unpredictability.

I want the movie to visually express the love through the pictures, the emotions, and all the elements we cannot describe with words, and to depict the sacrifices we make to achieve something unique on our journey through self-realization.





Eternal is an inverted space odyssey, in which we travel to the characters and our planet's core, our dreams, hopes, regrets, and the most important choices we must make in life. It's a story that allows one to emerge into the deep ocean and into a different yet familiar world.

In essence, the journey to the bottom of the ocean will feel like space travel with the fear of mistakes and the hope that it will succeed – we must feel everything that our main character feels.

The film language should make us hold our breath in hopes that he will manage the journey and find the one thing about life you can't possibly describe. I hope the story finds it.

The film has drawn me for many years, and it holds a theme that I have experienced closely throughout my life, both in several of my short films and in my personal life.

A woman with blonde hair is performing on a stage, holding a microphone. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top and dark pants. The stage is lit with warm, red and orange lights. Behind her is a large neon sign that reads "I have a crush on you" in a cursive font. To the left, a DJ is visible behind a counter. The audience is seen from behind, looking towards the stage.

I have a
crush on you

How can we live happily with another person? That is also the strength of this film; this is something that all people, irrespective of upbringing or background, can relate to in their own personal way.

With this story, I intend to translate the language of love into a cinematic work. It is my dream as a director to raise this classical relationship between two people to a fascinating, original, and cinematic level.



S I M O N S E A R S

graduated from the Danish National School of Theatre in 2014 and debuted in the war movie *APRIL 9TH* (2015) and the first season of the DR drama series *FOLLOW THE MONEY* (2016). In 2016 Simon received the talent prize at the Theatre Awards, Reumert, for his performance in the play *AT THE END OF THE DAY WE ARE ALL HUMAN*. In 2017 he played the older brother in Hlynur Palmason's critically acclaimed *WINTER BROTHERS*; the film had its world premiere at the Locarno Film Festival and has gone on to sweep up awards at many festivals, garnering Simon a nomination as Best Supporting Actor at the Danish Academy Awards.

In 2018 he was starring in the big DR drama series *RIDE UPON THE STORM* as one of the lead characters opposite Lars Mikkelsen for three seasons.

In 2020 Simon played the lead in the action thriller *ENFORCEMENT* which opened at Venice Film Festival and won international praise at Thessaloniki Film Festival and at Les Arc. Simon played the Heartrender *IVAN* in the first season of Netflix fantasy series *Shadow & Bone* (2021) and the love interest in the Danish Netflix hit *BABY FEVER* (2022).

In the start of 2023 he played the lead investigator in Viaplay's *THOSE WHO KILL* season 3. Later same year opposite Vicky Krieps in Philippe Van Leeuw's feature film *THE WALL*. In the beginning of 2024, he'll star as a scientist in the love story *ETERNAL* by Ulaa Salim.



NANNA ØLAND FABRICIUS

is a versatile Danish artist.

She stars in Ulaa Salim's highly anticipated sci-fi drama *ETERNAL*, which will celebrate its World premiere at International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2024.

In Kristian Levring's *THE SALVATION* (2014) which premiered at Cannes Film Festival, she starred opposite Mads Mikkelsen.

As the music artist Oh Land, she has released five studio albums and toured globally with icons like Katy Perry and Coldplay. A sought-after songwriter, she has collaborated with Pharrell, Sia, John Legend, and others. Oh Land's musical versatility extends to film, theater, and classical compositions.

Before her entertainment career, Fabricius trained as a ballet dancer, and she remains a dynamic force, leaving an indelible mark with her boundless talent and dedication to artistic expression.



ANNA SØGAARD FRANDSEN

The aspiring acting talent, Anna Sogaard Frandsen, has showcased her skills in a variety of short films, TV series, and feature films.

Her journey began with her debut film role in *WHEN THE SUN SHINES* (2016), which was followed by a supporting role in *DREAM STATE* (2018) and appearances in the TV series *THE SOMMERDAHL MURDERS* (2020).

Her lead role in the short film *LIDT ENDNU* (2019) which also won the Ekko Shortlist Award for "Audience Choice Award 2020", catapulted her to her most prominent film role to date in *ETERNAL* (2024).



VIKTOR HJELMSØE

is a new, Danish talent.

We first saw him on screen in the highly appraised Danish TV series BOYS as the co-lead Nikolaj opposite Dar Salim (THE COVENANT, DARKLAND).

Viktor Hjelmsø will be seen next in DARK HORSE - a modern coming-of-age series opposite Birgitte Hjort Sørensen (BORGEN).

PRODUCER

HYÆNE FILM

We believe in modest megalomania. At Hyæne Film, we have gathered the most promising young talents in Danish film. We have put the new directors side by side with hungry progressive producers, creating a collective ready to conquer the world. The company is owned by director Ulaa Salim and producer Daniel Mühlendorph.

PRODUCED BY HYÆNE FILM

2024: Eternal by dir. Ulaa Salim
2023: Viktor vs. the World dir. Christian Arhoff
2023: Shabholm by animation collective Gigis
2022: Chrysanthemum by dir. Christian Bengtson
2021: Persona non Grata by dir. Lisa Jespersen
2020: The Block by animation collective Gigis
2019: Sons of Denmark by dir. Ulaa Salim





CO-PRODUCER

NETOP FILM

Netop Films is an Icelandic production company created to produce and co-produce feature films and documentaries.

Netop Films has produced critically acclaimed feature films – RAMS (2015), UNDER THE TREE (2017), THE COUNTY (2019), and NORTHERN COMFORT (2023) – that respectively premiered at the Cannes International Film Festival, Venice Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival and South by Southwest.

The films have won over 50 international film awards, including Un Certain Regard at Cannes (RAMS) and Best Narrative Feature Film at the Hamptons International Film Festival (UNDER THE TREE).

PREMIERE

World Premiere:
International Film Festival Rotterdam 2024
Big Screen Competition

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: For Evigt
Genre: Sci-Fi Romance
Countries of production: Denmark, Iceland
Language: Danish, English
Year: 2024
Duration: 102 min.
Picture: Color
Exhibition format (DCP): 2K InterOp DCP
Framerate (DCP): 24FPS
Aspect Ratio: various;
main AR is 1:2.39
Sound: 5.1
Available Format: DCP

CAST

Simon Sears,
Nanna Øland Fabricius,
Magnus Krepper,
Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir,
Zaki Youssef,
Morten Holst

CREW

Directed by: Ulaa Salim
Written by: Ulaa Salim
Cinematography: Jacob Møller
Editing: Jenna Mangulad,
Mads Michael Olsen
Production Design: Gustav Pontoppidan
Sound Design: Rune Kristiansen
Music Composer: Valgeir Sigurðsson

PRODUCER

Production company: Hyæne Film
Producer: Daniel Mühlendorph
Co-production company: Netop Films
Co-producer: Grimar Jonsson

With support of: The
Danish Film Institute,
Den Vestdanske Filmpulje,
The Danish Broadcasting Corporation,
Icelandic Film Centre, Nordisk Film & TV Fond,
Nordisk Film Distribution, RUV,
Sena and Reykjavik Visuals.

from the director and producer of
SONS OF DENMARK
and producers of RAMS



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