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## SXSW Film

*Interviews and reviews*

BY [SHAWN BADGLEY](#)

### Light and Dark: 'Shadow Company'



Nick Bicanic

It comes as no surprise that one of the more controversial documentaries at SXSW Film 06 homes in on one of the more controversial issues of a more than controversial war in Iraq. Private Military Companies – Private Security Companies, if you prefer, or soldiers of fortune, of hire, or mercenaries – are the subject of Croatian-born, Vancouver-dwelling Nick Bicanic's self-financed study of the not-so-new warriors in a "new kind of war." Conveying a tremendous amount of information mainly by way of interviews with the likes of Globe Risk Holdings President Alan Bell, PMC veteran Cobus Claassens (who still lives where he fought, in Sierra Leone), and adventurer/author Robert Young Pelton, along with well-timed and -rendered graphics and archival footage ranging from *The A Team* to the remains of a carbombing, *Shadow Company* shocks and awes while alienating and appealing. The director offered his perspective on the response – some have called it a recruiting film, others a trivial put-down; one-dimensional, admirably multifaceted – over coffee a couple of days after the film's world premiere.

**Nick Bicanic:** I imagine that one of the unique things about Austin is that you're going to get that kind of thing from the general audience, whereas I imagine there's a lot of other places where we could have premiered that

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BY LOUIS BLACK  
South by Southwest 2005 is upon us. Please don't tell us to relax.

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[The Perfect Ride](#)  
John Hyams' ode to rodeo stays on for a surprising 5,760 seconds [03-10-06]

[SXSW Interactive 06](#)  
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people might have just gone, "Awesome! That's great!" and that's it. Here, it felt like people were willing to have a discussion.

***Austin Chronicle:*** *Aside from the Q&A after the screening, I've talked to a few people about the film, and there have been quite a few different opinions.*

**NB:** The idea of how your film is perceived, you'd have to be a fool to not consider that as a filmmaker. So, we considered numerous points: whether it was which interviewees and where exactly they fell in the whole balanced view of things, or when it came to editing. ... We struggled with this a lot. We were very conscious of presenting a balanced view. We had no interest in making a documentary that said, "These guys are evil, and here's why they're evil." But we also, at the same time, had no interest in making something that said, "Look how great Private Military Companies are – everybody should be hiring mercenaries, and here's why." What we wanted to do was present the information as it is and allow people to make up their own minds. There is, obviously, a danger inherent in that approach, which is that if someone is already extremely polarized going into the film, they will assume that we're not revealing the whole truth. If you're a gun-toting fascist and you see this movie, you'll go, "You assholes, why are you negative with these guys?" Likewise, if you're a peace-loving, tree-hugging liberal, you might go, "Hang on a second, these guys are evil, and you guys are being so nice to them." To be honest, I think both extremist views are equally invalid – or, rather, perhaps, equally valid; depends on how you want to look at it. ... It's inevitable that people will go, "What about the animals, what about the maniacs? Why didn't you talk to those guys?" Well, the thing is, they're not very interesting. There's also guys who smoke joints all day and sit on the beach, and we didn't interview them. What difference does that make? The reason why we picked guys the guys we did – yes, they were perhaps more eloquent than other members of the military we could have spoken to – is that those are the guys who get hired to plan the jobs. The guys actually making the decisions. The top levels.

*7:15pm, Alamo South Lamar*

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