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In The Fade (18)

dir: **Fatih Akin**

Starring: **Diane Kruger, Denis Moschitto, Johannes Krisch**

sponsor: **Dr Roderick Ørner**

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Synopsis: Hamburg, the present. Nuri and Katja are married while Nuri completes a prison sentence for drugs offences. On release they settle down and become model citizens, with their son Rocco. One day, while Katja is at the spa, Nuri and Rocco are killed in a bomb blast. Katja is distraught. She is questioned by police, who suspect the blast is drugs related. Katja denies this, believing neo-Nazis are responsible. She attempts suicide. Two suspects are identified and arrested. Katja is determined they will face justice but in spite of convincing evidence, they are acquitted. Katja tracks down the suspects and discovers a sympathiser friend of theirs whose evidence helped secure their acquittal. She decides to impose her own justice, in spite of pleas from her lawyer not to do so, killing the suspects and herself with a bomb.

The great filmmakers have style, the worst have affectations. Fatih Akin, who by almost every measure ranks in the second category, has never encountered as scene that he can't belabour to death with the help of his DP, and over the course of *In the Fade* he empties out the whole trunk load of emphatic camera moves: a dolly zoom 'Vertigo shot' to accompany a moment of terrible revelation, some highly significant rack focuses, a split dioptré or two and a howler of a final heavenward crane shot.

There's nothing wrong with the filmmaker using the entirety of the toolkit at their disposal, of course, but Akin muffles any possibility of achieving expressionistic oomph under several layers of drab naturalistic padding, including the requisite grey-blue palette, the formal wear of the respectable festival film. Such instances of competing impulses at odds with one another can make for extraordinary and vivacious work - take, for instance, the filmography of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, animated as it is by seemingly contradictory impulses. Only a little over a decade ago, around the time of his *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin was routinely garnering comparisons to Fassbinder, presumably by virtue of the fact that he was a German director whose films are self-consciously contemporary in their subject matter, and that Hanna Schygulla was seen in that woebegone production. But where Fassbinder managed to synthesise the direct, emotional appeal of popular cinema and the removed, intellectual approach that characterized European modernism without appearing to betray either, Akin seems to vacillate. His films feel less like fields for confrontation and reconciliation between disparate elements of occasions than occasions of triangulation, splitting the difference.

In the Fade is a melodrama made by a director serenely convinced that there is nothing so moving to an audience as a

leading lady sobbing her guts out repeatedly and at length, and accordingly star Diane Kruger is given plenty of lingering, tear-streaked close ups. The part won Kruger a best actress prize at Cannes, and she does indeed give a jagged, harrowing performance of grief, often undermined though it is by Akin's insistent directorial interventions, such as the absurd prettification of a bathtub suicide attempt, revealed when the camera glides underwater to capture goutts of blood blossoming from open wrists then gloried over in a God's eye-view shot. The flashy bad taste of such a decision isn't the issue - it's the presentation of tawdriness with an air of sombre solemnity. One almost wishes Akin would just embrace his crassest impulses, for somewhere swimming in this prestige package there's a tough, dirty thriller - and, in fact, the last chapter of the movie, when it switches gear into revenge mode and the score by Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme comes to the fore, is it most effective. (There are chapters, announced by on-screen title cards, a dunning reminder of Akin's formalist fronting.)

The set-up goes like this; Katja (Kruger), loses her Kurdish husband Nuri (Numan Acar) and her 5 year old son in a targeted bombing. The tragedy sends her into a tail-spin - and here, as well as in the later trial scenes, Akin's script does capture something about the nature of processing the violent death of a loved one, the degree to which the indignity of their physical violation becomes an *idée fixe*. The loss, as well as the posthumous character assassination of her husband, is almost too much for Katja to bear, but when she receives a vindication of sorts in the news that the culprits are native-born Nazis, she composes herself to face them down in the courtroom. Despite a preponderance of evidence of their guilt, the killers go free, and so Katja follows them to Greece, where she plans to exact justice on her own terms.

The conflict en route to the film's explosive finale is largely confined to Katja's breast. There is a suggestion of some tetchiness between Katja's family and Nuri's, but this is quickly moved past. Her domestic life, seen briefly in the present tense and then remembered in smartphone videos, was one of blue skies unruffled by a single cloud, and her grief and fidelity to the memory of the departed is accordingly absolute. (If Akin has lost some insights into sorrow, his imagination of happiness is fatuous in the extreme.) Further simplifying matters, those responsible for the destruction of Katja's family unit are unquestionably evil and deserving of termination - Akin even grants them a snarling Nosferatu of a defence lawyer, guilty by association. In this absence of

complication, it takes a goodly bit of lugubrious pacing and contemplative compositions to pad things out before the final ka-boom, a bang of an ending for a whimper of a movie.

Credits

Katja	Diane Kruger
Danilo Fava	Denis Moschitto
Haberbeck, Advocate	Johanne Krisch
Birgit	Samia Muriel Chancrin
Nuri	Numan Acar
Jörgen Möller	Ulrich Tukur
Knacki	Adam Bousdoukos
Rocco	Rafael Santana
Director	Fatih Akin
Screenplay	Fatih Akin
Director of Photography	Rainer Klausmann
Editor	Andrew Bird
Production Design	Tamo Kunz
Original score	Josh Homme
Sound	Tamo Kunz
Costume	Monique Akin
	Germany/France/Italy 2017
	106 mins

Another View

Is it possible to separate a good performance from a bad movie? Can you surgically slice around it and toss away the excess? Or maybe engage in a form of selective myopia, where you just focus on the elements that you want to see, and ignore the unsightly stuff around it? *In the Fade*, the latest from the prolific (but erratic) German director Fatih Akin, is quite awful as a movie, as a political statement, and as a nuanced piece of storytelling.

However, it does have one ace up its sleeve, and that is Diane Kruger, who not only decides to invest her central character with a level of sensitivity that's undeserving of this schlock material, but decides to run with a storyline which is, by turns, idiotic, offensive and, by the end, completely farcical.

And farcical is not what you want when the intention is a stern state-of-Europe address on racially-motivated violence and an exploration into the unwieldy baggage of forgiving those who have sinned against us. Kruger plays Katja, an ex-drug addict married to a one-time dealer who has served time for his crimes. Now they have a precocious young scamp in designer specs and a legitimate business, one that nobly serves the local immigrant community of Hamburg.

This ramshackle idyll comes tumbling down when a young woman on a pushbike drops a fertiliser bomb outside their shop front just as Katja is on her way out. The highs of familial harmony suddenly meet the lows of grief and desolation. Reasons to stick around on this mortal coil become more sparse by the minute.

And then, at the very precipice of her pain, Katja is dragged back to sanity as the culprits are caught – now, at least, she can live to see them punished by the state for their atrocious crimes. The film's mid-section bundles us into a stuffy courtroom where a pair of pasty neo-Nazis are in the dock, and it takes on the conventional tone of a teatime TV drama.

Akin's slipshod writing signposts where everything is heading, though during these scenes the film positively haemorrhages the small measure of credibility it had managed to accrue. In the knowledge that the film still has about 45 minutes left on the clock, it's fairly obvious what happens next, and Akin duly obliges with a shock twist so laboured, you wonder why the cast and crew didn't just down tools and dash for the exits.

The English title, *In the Fade*, infers that Katja might be operating in some kind of moral grey area when she makes her subsequent life choices. Yet the reality is, this is little more than a female-fronted

rehash of *Death Wish* dressed up in vaguely arty duds. It appears as if Akin's intention may have been to pose a provocative conundrum about how best to deal with the realities of murderous xenophobia, but his decision to paint Katja as a morally tainted albeit righteous avenging angel lends it the feel of a retrograde polemic and an insidious endorsement of quid pro quo violence over compassion. Leaves an almost medicinally bitter taste in the mouth, this one.

David Jenkins: Little White Lies

Our next screening: Friday January 25th, 7.30pm The Florida Project (USA 2017. Cert 15)

Following his striking 2016 debut feature *Tangerine*, director Sean Baker presents us with a portrait of another group of America's marginalised. Rather than using the streets of Hollywood however, Baker takes us to the playground of Disneyworld - or rather, its outskirts - where we find Halley, a young single mother and her daughter Moonnee struggling to make ends meet. Shot in vivid colours and with excellent performances from the cast - especially Willem Dafoe and Brooklynn Kimberley Prince - *The Florida Project* provides a thought-provoking look at the reality of life whom the system has failed.

Reminders:

Would the audience please allow some 30 seconds at the end of tonight's film before leaving their seats, to allow those who wish to do so time to read the credits? Thank you

The Membership survey is still available on the Society's website. We encourage people to complete it and share with us your thoughts on how best to take the Society forward