

## In the Fade

One of the more prominent current faces of European film is Fatih Akin, a Hamburg-born son of Turkish immigrants. His films as writer-director have typically treated the intersection of German and Turkish life in striking ways (see “The Edge of Heaven,” “The Cut”), but his newest film, “In the Fade,” takes a more domestic tack by concentrating fully on one German character (though with a cross-national partner) and embracing a wholly German cultural and political environment. This effort has resulted in a picture that many German authorities have indicated is their best this year: the film is the country’s official entry in the Academy Award sweepstakes.

“In the Fade” (titled in German “Aus dem Nichts”) is mostly a taut thriller set in contemporary Hamburg. Its story turns on Katja (Diane Kruger) a tough-minded and headstrong woman who is committed both to her ex-con Kurdish-German husband Nuri (Nurman Acar), and their sweet violin-playing son Rocco. However, early on in the film she witnesses their murder in a Neo-Nazi terrorist bombing of her husband’s tax office. She finds herself bereft, facing both her own grief and some menacing probing from legal authorities about her own and her husband’s backgrounds (his previous criminal background had been as a drug dealer).

Katja must undergo a grueling investigation of the case—where suspicion falls on Nuri himself—followed by the fraught trial of the suspected bombers, a smarmy young couple of radical bent (Ulrich Brandhoff and Hanna Hilsdorf). Under some duress, she is also called upon to testify. Though her case is capably represented by her family friend and lawyer Danilo (Denis Moschitto), the prospective terrorists are exonerated through the resolute machinations of the pair’s persistent (and threatening) defense council (Johannes Krisch). Katja is crushed and, at her wit’s end, begins to think about enacting her own personal revenge, first tracking the malefactors and then pondering how to confront them to finally assuage her angst.

After an effective buildup, the film’s last chapters are its weakness: practical Katja being transformed into an obsessed and intrepid stalker lacks credibility, and the finale seems facile and unbelievable given the film’s overall earnest tome. Subtleties are lost.

German-born Diane Kruger is known as both a glamorous and versatile actress on both sides of the Atlantic. She has been a pretty face in epics (“Troy”) and in American fluff (the two “National Treasure” films), played tough on US cable TV (in “The Bridge”) and provided a sultry presence in international films like “Joyeux Noel,” and “Inglourious Basterds.” “In the Fade” offers her a chance to perform in her native German for once and to stretch her acting range, both as a flawed character and as a reluctant seeker of vengeance, and she mostly pulls it off (she won a Cannes Festival award for this role). For director Akin, he shows he can pull off an effective crime procedural—but only up to a point.

*(Rated “R,” “In the Fade” runs 106 mins.)*

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