

‘In Darkness’ Illuminates Another Horror of the Holocaust

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The subject of the Holocaust has become an entire film genre onto it’s own, embracing many different styles. The latest Holocaust film, “In Darkness,” feels like a disaster movie, and iconic Polish director Agnieszka Holland has steered it to a Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

Based on a true story, it begins with the self-serving nature of human beings and evolves into their better angels. In the harboring of Polish Jews within a wretched sewer system, it also becomes emblematic of the whole evil of the Holocaust, the banishment of living human beings into the darkness of a hole in the earth, constituting a form of hell. Although many tales of these events have made into narrative films, to think about the reality of what actually happened is almost too much to fathom. This realization of hell is another bitter reminder of what humanity has had to consume.

Leopold Socha (Robert Wieckiewicz) is a sewer worker and petty thief in 1943. He is trying to survive with his wife in Lvov, Poland, during the teeth of World War II. He has a friend named Bortnik (Michel Zuraski), who is a high ranking Nazi Ukrainian officer. Bortnik offers favors to Socha if he will find Jews hiding in the sewers of Lvov and turn them in. Emboldened by the idea, Socha actually comes across a group of Jews within the dank confines of the world below. But the tables are turned, and the group offers Socha money to harbor them.



The Light Above: Milla Bankowicz (Krystyna) and Robert Wieckiewicz (Leopold) for “In Darkness”
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Seizing opportunity, Socha agrees to the arrangement. What begins as a mercenary mission, becomes something deeper as he observes the courage of sheer survival. As the boot of suspicion pushes down, Socha first considers abandoning his charges, but then gets even more

involved when he helps one of the group, Margulies (Benno Fürmann), with a rescue attempt in a concentration camp. When the money runs out from the starving sewer dwellers and floods threaten them, Socha will understand the true light and meaning of what he is protecting.

Director Agnieszka Holland has explored the subject of the Holocaust before, most notably in her previous Oscar nominated films, "Angry Harvest" (1985) and "Europa Europa" (1990). As she postulated in [an interview with HollywoodChicago.com](#), [13] she feels a need to actualize the questions surrounding it, and she succeeds in this film by using elements of dark and light to illustrate the view of the good and evil inherent in the disaster.

And not to trivialize the events, but the theme of this style of Holocaust film felt like a disaster movie, the survivors and their facilitators versus a challenge like a burning building or a sinking ship. In this instance, it was the disease of genocide, with a clinging to a foul sewer as a delicate lifeline. There is the same intrigue, guile and decisions for the greater good that permeate this story, just as it drives a disaster movie.

The director herself brought up a good point regarding the Holocaust theme. It is a survivors story, the millions who died cannot tell their tale. The survivors will not lie about what they went through, for how does an event like the Holocaust never happen again if the bitter truth does not come to light. "In darkness" may exist the oppressed, but the light will be shined on the oppressors, if only the truth can rise to the surface.



Benno Fürmann is the Prisoner Margulies for "In Darkness"
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Symbolism, intentional or not, is also a major element for the film. There is a pregnancy and birth for a survivor in the sewers, which in essence is the ultimate dark to light experience we all participate in. When the survivors come back into the "world" through a small, street level hole (in this case, it cannot be called a "manhole"), the rebirth becomes more important than an original birth. This is because it brings with it a truth to tell, an evil to suppress.

Ultimately the high drama and harsh bearing of the Holocaust has been the burden of all the generations that have followed, because we have difficulty processing the sheer senselessness of it all. It does take films like "In Darkness" to continue to remind us that this level of hate and cruelty is ongoing, and can easily create another black hole to devastate our own species.

"In Darkness" continues its limited release in Chicago on February 17th. See local listings for theater and show times. Featuring Robert Wieckiewicz, Benno Fürmann, Agnieszka Grochowska, Maria Schrader and Herbert Knaup. Adapted screenplay by David F. Sharmoon and directed by Agnieszka Holland. Rated "R"



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