

Plan A Review: Where Revenge Fantasy Meets Reality

Paz Brothers' film opens 2022 Toronto Jewish Film Fest

by Pat Mullen | June 9, 2022

Once upon a time, in Nazi occupied France, Quentin Tarantino blew some SS scum to smithereens. In the recent past of *Plan A*, the Paz brothers tell of a Nazi revenge fantasy that nearly became reality. This inspired-by-a-true-story tale, which opens the 2022 Toronto Jewish Film Festival, is a thoughtful consideration of the power of choosing peace over violence. Anchored by a commanding performance by August Diehl (*A Hidden Life*), *Plan A* dramatizes the story of Holocaust survivors who nearly obliterated a camp of Nazi soldiers in a therapeutic tit-for-tat. Brothers Yoav and Doron Paz make a notable shift from their genre cinema roots while bringing this history to the screen. After making audiences jump with the scares of flicks like *JeruZalem* and *The Golem*, they find true horror in the aftermath of war.

Diehl stars as Max, a Holocaust survivor who emerges shell-shocked from Auschwitz into a world he no longer trusts. A group of Jewish soldiers from the British Army encounters him as they tour war-torn Germany in search of survivors. Max quickly proves what they're looking for. He's a strong young man, saved by his faith, yet connected with little else in this world. He therefore has nothing to lose, which makes him an ideal candidate to aid their mission to help Holocaust survivors migrate to safer lands in Palestine. Michael (Michael Aloni) recruits Max to infiltrate a group known as "Nakam." They're plotting revenge on Germans—Nazis and civilians alike. The theory of the banality of evil drives them. Every German is guilty in their eyes, either through active involvement with Hitler's army or complacency.

Diehl Delivers

Max learns that the group plots to poison the water supply and avenge one nation through the lives of another. This grim tale unfolds less as a thriller and more as a moral fable. Max and fellow survivors like Anna (*Blade Runner 2049*'s Sylvia Hoeks) confront survivors' guilt knowing that their tormentors are unlikely to be brought to justice. *Plan A* navigates the moral burden of enacting street justice for millions of souls. Anna, for one, awakens screaming night after night. Max, meanwhile, finds himself confronted with charges of passivity. A soldier asks him why he and other prisoners didn't fight back then, but feel compelled to do so now. All around them, Germans continue to deny the Holocaust and collude to ferret out Jews trying to rebuild their lives. Survival is a daily battle for some and a given for others.

As Max, Diehl gives another quietly introspective performance as he surveys the abyss around him. Max sees little in this world worth saving, yet his own reasons for surviving hell invite him to reconsider the lives he devalues. Diehl's compelling turn does most of the heaving lifting in *Plan A*. It carries the weight of judgment on the shoulders of a man who knows the burden of being unfairly tried.

An Inglorious Shadow

The story unfolds methodically, albeit predictably. For a film with considerable gravitas, little surprises dramatically in *Plan A*. The weary weight may be too brittle for some audiences.

Plan A inevitably invites comparison to *Inglourious Basterds* with its Nazi revenge fantasy—especially since Diehl appears in the Tarantino flick—and may suffer by inviting similar expectations. Whereas *Basterds* offered a thrill with its completely unexpected twist of revisionist history, this ‘what if’ scenario goes exactly as expected. It loses a fair bit of steam in its mid-section before a gripping finale. This is a grim and sober drama, and the Paz brothers don’t have Tarantino’s gonzo energy. Instead, they handle their fictionalization of the story with restraint and respectfulness. *Plan A* unfolds somewhat stiffly, but it finds understated power in Diehl’s performance and the realization of post-war horror that feels unflinchingly, soberingly accurate. There’s a shot in which Max imagines the plan’s success and streets strewn with bodies. A gut-punch of an image arises as the camera tilts to account for a death march that expands to the horizon. Tarantino, admittedly, has never even tried his hand at something so audaciously real.