



FILM RACKET MOVIE REVIEWS



Review

RIDERS OF JUSTICE



Written by [Cynthia Vinney](#) May 13, 2021

The plot description of the Danish film *Riders of Justice* makes it sound like a traditional revenge thriller in the vein of *John Wick* or *Kill Bill*. Mads Mikkelsen's career military man Markus returns home to care for his teenage daughter Mathilde (Andrea Heck Gadenberg) after his wife Emma (Anne Birgitte Lind) is killed in a horrific train wreck. However, when Otto (Nikolaj Lie Kaas), a survivor of the accident and scientist working on a model to predict seemingly random events, seeks him out with evidence that indicates the accident was actually a targeted attack by a criminal gang called the Riders of Justice, Markus goes on a bloody mission targeting those he believes are responsible.

Although that broad-strokes synopsis suggests the film will be a straightforward tale in which the wicked are punished and the wronged get justice, that's not the story writer-director Anders Thomas Jensen is telling. Instead, his film deconstructs the revenge genre while making larger points about coincidence, family and healing after tragedy. When the story begins, neither Mathilde nor Otto can accept that what happened was random, and Markus, who seems to have spent a majority of his daughter's life deployed overseas, latches onto the idea that there's a reason behind his wife's death. All three are looking to take back control and find meaning in a senseless act, and it takes them down dark paths that often seem like they'll unfold one way only to veer in a different direction.

While Mikkelsen plays Markus without a hint of humor, many of the other characters are surprisingly funny. In particular, Lennart (Lars Brygmann) and Emmenthaler (Nicolas Bro), the co-workers and buddies Otto enlists to help on his and Markus' quest for vengeance, frequently provide comic relief, although there are hints that their bizarre behavior and eccentric personalities are the product of traumatic pasts. The humor gives *Riders of Justice* a unique tone, and while it sometimes undercuts the film's suspense, there are still several gritty action sequences that are all the more tense because they put this strange but endearing group of oddballs so out of their depth. That said, not all the jokes land. It could be a problem with the translation offered by the English subtitles, but some of the jokes shade into offensive, and therefore, periodically make it difficult to focus on the narrative.

Nonetheless, Mikkelsen is wonderful as Markus, turning in a nuanced performance as an emotionally cut off man who has no idea how to process a sudden, inexplicable tragedy. Mikkelsen uses some of the well-honed menace he's showcased in projects like *Hannibal* to convey how dangerous Markus can be, but he also slowly peels back the layers to show the sadness and fear lying beneath his hard exterior. Together, he and the other actors create believable relationships while also maintaining the core of each their characters.

Riders of Justice is a fascinating take on a revenge thriller that subverts the genre as a means to comment on it. Markus isn't a typical avenging angel, Instead, he turns out to be something far more human — and so does the movie.



RIDERS OF JUSTICE



RATING

8.0/10

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