presents

THE DARK VALLEY
A film by Andreas Prochaska

“Tense…[with] a brooding atmosphere of suspicion and menace.” —Indiewire

“The hills are alive with the sound of gunfire in this alpine revenge drama, a superior genre piece.” —The Hollywood Reporter

Austria/Germany / 2014 / Drama
German with English Subtitles / 115 min / 2.35 : 1

Official Film Webpage

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FULL SYNOPSIS

Somewhere high in the Alps, a lone rider makes his way along a hidden path and reaches a small village, tucked away between the steep mountains. This stranger goes by the name of Greider; nobody knows where he’s from and, met with blatant distrust, nobody wants him in the village. The sons of Old Brenner, the village patriarch who holds the entire community under his threatening, violent ways, would have chased him away if Greider hadn’t given them a fistful of gold coins. Greider introduces himself as a photographer, and Brenner’s sons provide him with shelter for the winter at the house of widow Gader and her young daughter, Luzi. Soon to be married to her sweetheart, Lukas, Luzi is full of trepidation as the big day draws near because, in this valley, a wedding comes with a terrible tradition. And whoever opposes this tradition will be subjected to a merciless punishment.

In the depths of winter, the village cut off by snowfall and barely a ray of sunlight reaching the valley, a tragic accident leads to the death of one of Brenner’s beloved sons. When another son is mysteriously killed, it’s clear this is not a coincidence: the time has come for Brenner’s family to pay, and Greider plans to settle a score long forgotten by everyone but him.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A lone rider arrives in a small high mountain village; nobody knows where he’s from and nobody wants him there. Greider introduces himself as a photographer from America, and the town’s patriarch, Old Brenner, provides him with shelter for the harsh winter ahead. The village cut off by snowfall and barely a ray of sunlight reaching the valley, a tragic accident leads to the death of one of Brenner’s beloved sons. When another son is mysteriously killed, it’s clear this is not a coincidence: the time has come for Brenner’s family to pay, and Greider plans to settle a score long forgotten by everyone but him.

LOGLINE

A stranger arrives in a European high mountain village where he’s allowed to stay before the harsh winter. He introduces himself as a photographer from America, but nobody suspects he’s there to settle a score long since forgotten by everyone but him.

ASSETS

Official trailer coming soon

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

WINNER:
Puchan International Film Festival (Korea)

OFFICIAL SELECTION:
Berlin International Film Festival
Stony Brook Film Festival
Scottsdale Int’l Film Festival
Rehoboth Beach Film Festival
Fairhope Film Festival
INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER
ANDREAS PROCHASKA

How did you come across the book "Das finstere Tal"?
It was a Saturday morning and I was reading the literature section of an
Austrian newspaper. I came across a small column about “Das finstere Tal”. When I read the summary of the plot, I thought: “It has everything I typically fall for: western, mountains and revenge.” So I read the novel and afterwards I got in touch with Thomas Willmann.

Could you elaborate on “things you typically fall for”?
I’ve already made two horror movies in Austria, DEAD IN THREE DAYS and its sequel. The first one was basically a US teeny slasher with Austrian actors who also spoke in an Austrian dialect. I was quite surprised that this Austrian genre movie was met with such great international interest and it reinforced my decision to combine an authentic local touch with a particular genre. I’m always looking for stories which allow me to draw on local potential and at the same time have an international appeal. And from this point of view, “Das finstere Tal” had everything I was looking for.

In the epilogue, Thomas Willmann says that the inspiration for this book came from Ludwig Ganghofer and Sergio Leone – and it’s exactly this combination of a typical western and Heimatfilm that lured me. And besides, name one film director who wouldn’t love to make a western. This is my childhood dream come true!

Spaghetti westerns pretend that Europe is North America. This film doesn’t do anything of the sort. I wanted to make a film in which the story’s setting is as central as the protagonists themselves. Usually people shoot their films in English hoping this will help sell the film on the international market. We did it exactly the other way round: the film is in a German dialect and our lead actor Sam Riley, an Englishman, speaks German in this film. The plot literally forced this solution on us. Greider is coming back from America to this remote valley “to settle” something.

What makes genre stories so interesting for you?
Personally, they’re something I like to watch and to make. Plus you can integrate other topics into the framework of a genre movie. You can kind of foist them on the audience and entertain them at the same time. I want to make movies that I’d like to watch as well. That means horror movies, thrillers and comedies. I like telling stories where I can provoke an immediate reaction from the audience. If a horror movie is well made you can feel the suspense in the room and hear the little cries of terror from the audience. With a comedy, too, you can get immediate feedback. If your audience laughs at the right moments, you’ve got it right.

THE DARK VALLEY is definitely more mature than my previous movies and I’m really curious about how the audience will respond to it. I saw one or two tears at the test-screenings, so I was quite pleased.
While preparing for this film, how deep did you delve into the subgenre of snow westerns? Naturally, I watched everything I’d already watched again. I can’t even remember how many western movies I watched in the past six months.

What makes THE DARK VALLEY so special is that it’s not just a western set in the snowy Alps. There are also some elements of a psychological thriller, and it’s also about the quest for identity. And at the same time it’s a Heimatfilm, a drama and, of course, there’s some action as well. So I’d say it’s a western with added value.

**In the German-speaking world, any genre apart from comedy is a tricky issue. Is there a higher degree of authenticity in Austria than in Germany because it’s a more clearly defined cultural area?**

In terms of genre, I view myself as a kind of pioneer in Austria. Before DEAD IN THREE DAYS there were only a few low-budget films, but not a single real genre movie which had been produced professionally and wasn’t a spoof film. DEAD IN THREE DAYS was a huge step in Austria and opened up a whole new range of possibilities.

Every country has its own sinister stories and in our small country, where people like to block out uneasy issues, you don’t have to dig too deep to find really sinister abysses. And yet you’re surrounded by beautiful landscapes that make every tourist’s heart leap for joy.

Nature can be enchanting and hauntingly beautiful, and at the same time deadly. And in my opinion, this side of it has been overlooked in films ever since the era of the Heimatfilm.

I think the reason that genre cinema has such a hard time in Germany might be because everyone collectively watches crime series on TV every Sunday evening. The audience mistrusts local filmmakers – obviously they don’t believe we can produce the goods. It used to be the same in Austria and every film that dares to enter uncharted waters faces problems. But you mustn’t give up!

**Does it maybe have anything to do with everyone trying to be “American” as soon as it comes to genre stories?**

Yes. I often have the impression that they’re not just eyeing America, but really staring hard at it. They try to be more American than the Americans themselves. And that’s obviously a losing game.

THE DARK VALLEY was filmed during winter in a valley in South Tirol. Did you realise what challenges this would involve at the beginning? The sequel of DEAD IN THREE DAYS was also shot in the snow during winter. So I had some idea of what was in store and knew that it would be a huge challenge. Our budget wasn’t that small, but it still didn’t leave any room for manoeuvre in our schedule. Three quarters of the shoots were outdoors, so we were really exposed to the elements – and this created huge obstacles for everyone involved. In snow everything takes longer. For example, even transporting the camera from A to B was a problem, because
we had to keep the snow on the sets intact and couldn’t leave any tracks in
the snow. So in the end the entire team made up for what we lacked in time
and budget by putting in a huge joint effort. A lot of crew members told me
that projects like THE DARK VALLEY are the reason they do this job. And
this enthusiasm got us through the winter.

**Can you talk about your casting choices?**
Usually everyone tries to conquer the international market by shooting in
English and they even get German actors to speak English. But we did it the
other way round: we cast a British star, Sam Riley, as Greider and had him
speak German. I found this idea very appealing, because it meant we could
target both markets through our casting. The stranger is, so-to-speak, from
the Wild West. He doesn’t have to fake the accent when he speaks German.
And there’s a very specific kind of tension when the stranger meets the
Austrians.

And just as the stranger in the story is played by a “real stranger”, it was
important to ensure that the inhabitants of the valley weren’t from far away
either. It was quite interesting during casting: I realised very quickly that it
wouldn’t work if the actors weren’t from the region. And in fact, apart from
Clemens Schick (Luis Brenner) and Paula Beer (Luzi), all the other actors
are from Tirol or Bavaria.

It was a long process and quite difficult to cast the part of Luzi, because it’s
not easy to find a young actress who can convey this virginal virtue. We
needed someone who seems strong and confident enough to fit into this
rough world, but without giving the impression that she’s already had five
lovers and would fit in better in the clubs of a big city. Paula Beer embodied
this idea very well and at the beginning I didn’t realise how important her
part would become during the shooting process.
INTERVIEW WITH SAM RILEY (GREIDER)

What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you think of shooting THE DARK VALLEY?
Snow! It was really cold. That’s actually the first thing that comes to my mind. The snow and the cold. I had never been to the mountains before, so everything was quite new to me. I’d say it was like a wonderful shock.

So how did it feel to be in the mountains for the first time?
It was really breathtaking. Although you’ve seen backdrops like that in the movies, when you’re actually standing there, you’re spellbound. Everything is so pure and clear: nature, completely untouched by humans. But it took quite a while before I got used to the climate up there in the mountains.

Altogether, you spent almost three months up there, spread over two trips. Yes, it was a very intensive time. Up there, you don’t have that many options for going out doing something. Luckily, we all stayed in the same hotel – a very nice place run by a family. But there was nothing but the hotel restaurant and the bar. And the Internet reception was very poor, so sometimes you really felt like you’d gone back to another era.

THE DARK VALLEY is not only a western set in the Alps...
I must confess that this was a childhood dream come true. As a little boy when I was playing with my brothers, I used to fantasize about being a silent, mysterious stranger riding around on his horse with his gun. So it was really great for me to play this part. After all, you don’t get offered a part in a western that often, so it was a great opportunity for me.

Actors often talk about having played cowboys and Indians in their childhood...
Yes, I think I was lucky to be born before the Playstation era. I did play a lot on the Playstation, but that was in my twenties. As a child, I used to play outdoors a lot and I used to take the role plays much more seriously than my friends. I used to have a box full of costumes of Robin Hood, Superman, cowboys etc. And whenever I’d seen a movie, I’d play the parts in our garden wearing the costumes. When I was ten, I went around dressed as Lawrence of Arabia for a whole month and my parents found it quite amusing. Professional acting is obviously much more complicated. When you play different roles, you have to get into character and put aside your own personality to be able to convince yourself and others that it’s real. You have to forget the camera and everything around you and just play the part.

Are you into western movies?
I’ve always loved western movies. My father doesn’t work in the film business, but he’s a huge film buff. He showed me and my brothers the films he’d liked as a kid. And that’s why I grew up with all those spaghetti westerns starring Clint Eastwood and my heroes were people like Richard Burton. And my father often quoted “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid”. That’s why I’m really into this genre and before shooting THE DARK VALLEY, I watched all of those films again to get some inspiration for my part. Later
on I realised that Andreas Prochaska and I have very similar tastes when it comes to films – and not only western movies.

**How much of a true western hero do you see in Greider?**
We had this joke on the set: They called me “Pale Greider” after a Clint Eastwood movie from the 80s, “Pale Rider”. That film is also about a very taciturn, mysterious stranger, who comes to a town and saves a girl. THE DARK VALLEY definitely has the characteristics of a western, but it’s also a thriller with a regional touch, set in the Austrian mountains. It’s a bit like the Wild West where people used to live according to their own particular rules. And yet the story is very authentic.

**But Greider is also more than a mysterious stranger and avenger.**
Yes, he’s not only a tough guy. From a psychological point of view, I find his background story very intriguing. What fascinated me about Greider was that he wasn’t just this cool, cigar-smoking guy, but also a deeply disturbed character, who has this cold sense of determination, but doesn’t necessarily have a cold heart.

**You often play characters who are mavericks – Greider fits into this list perfectly.**
I’ve been so lucky with the parts I’ve had the chance to play. And although I’m not really the maverick type, these characters are often very interesting. I’d definitely play the part of Greider all over again. I told Thomas Willmann this as well, but I don’t know if he took it seriously. I’d love to, anyway.

**What was it like speaking German in the movie?**
It was quite a challenge and I really enjoyed it. I was the only foreigner in the valley, and although most of the people on the set speak English very well, I didn’t want everyone speaking English just because of me. It was a great opportunity for me to polish up my German. So I learned German and horse-riding – and sometimes I actually felt like the taciturn stranger in the valley. One day I decided to have my riding lesson in costume to see what it felt like. Afterwards, on our way back to the hotel I asked the driver to stop at the petrol station so I could buy some cigarettes. So I went into the place in full gear – it was just like in a movie. It was hilarious. It went really quiet and the people from the valley who were having a drink there just stared at me and probably thought: “What’s that guy doing buying cigarettes in a cowboy costume?” No one said a word and I thought: “Perfect, now I really feel like Greider.”
CAST & CREW BIOGRAPHIES

ANDREAS PROCHASKA, DIRECTOR & SCREENWRITER
Andreas Prochaska was born in 1964 in Vienna and grew up in Bad Ischl, Upper Austria. He made his first forays into film as a production runner. After various other jobs, he worked as assistant editor and editor on a number of films, such as Michael Haneke’s THE CASTLE and FUNNY GAMES.

His breakthrough came with THE THREE MAILROBBERS, which was based on a novel by Christine Nöstlinger. This success was followed by a number of TV films and episodes of various crime series.

In 2006 his horror-thriller DEAD IN 3 DAYS was the most successful Austrian film at the box office. In 2008 he made the sequel, DEAD IN 3 DAYS – THE SEQUEL.

In 2010 the comedy THE UNINTENTIONAL KIDNAPPING OF ELFRIEDE OTT was the most successful Austrian film at the box office and won numerous awards, such as the Austrian Film Award for Best Movie, Best Screenplay and Best Music, as well as two Romy Awards for Best Cinema Director and Best Screenplay.

In 2012 Andreas Prochaska’s TV film A DAY FOR A MIRACLE won him the Bavarian TV Award for Best Directing. A DAY FOR A MIRACLE was also nominated for the Grimme Award and won the International Emmy Award 2013.
At the 35th edition of the Bavarian Film Awards Andreas Prochaska won the award for Best Director for THE DARK VALLEY.

Andreas Prochaska lives near Vienna.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY
2013 THE DARK VALLEY
2011 A DAY FOR A MIRACLE (TV)
2010 THE UNINTENTIONAL KIDNAPPING OF ELFRIEDE OTT TRACES OF EVIL (TV)
2008 DEAD IN 3 DAYS – THE SEQUEL
2006 DEAD IN 3 DAYS
1998 THE THREE MAILROBBERS
SAM RILEY (Greider)

Sam Riley, born in 1980 in Leeds, made his debut as an actor with his portrayal of Ian Curtis, the lead singer of the band Joy Division in Anton Corbijn’s CONTROL. His performance in this film, which involved singing, won him numerous awards, including the British Independent Film Award for Most Promising Newcomer and Best Actor at Edinburgh International Film Festival and at the London Critics Circle Film Award. He also got a BAFTA Rising Star nomination.

In 2011 he starred in Rowan Joffe’s gangster thriller BRIGHTON ROCK (based on the novel of the same title by Graham Greene) alongside Helen Mirren and John Hurt.

He also starred in Walter Salles’ film ON THE ROAD together with Viggo Mortensen, Kristen Stewart and Kirsten Dunst. The film was nominated for the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival 2012.

Sam Riley also featured in 13 (2010, directed by Gela Balbuni), alongside Mickey Rourke and in FRANKLYN (2008, directed by Gerald McMorrow) together with Eva Green and Ryan Phillippe. In Detlev Buck’s hit comedy RUBBELDIEKATZ he made a cameo appearance together with Matthias Schweighöfer and Alexandra Maria Lara.

He recently finished shooting the Disney production MALEFICENT where he featured alongside Angelina Jolie. In February 2014 Sam Riley will be on the big screen as Greider, his first major lead role in a German-language production, in Andreas Prochaska’s screen adaptation of THE DARK VALLEY.

Selected Filmography
2014 THE DARK VALLEY directed by Andreas Prochaska
2014 MALEFICENT directed by Robert Stromberg
2012 ON THE ROAD directed by Walter Salles
2011 BRIGHTON ROCK directed by Rowan Joffe
2008 CONTROL directed by Anton Corbijn
FROM THE NOVEL TO “THE DARK VALLEY”

"Das finstere Tal" is Thomas Willmann’s debut novel. It was published by Liebeskind in July 2010. The first printing sold out within two weeks - since then, more than 100,000 copies have been sold in hardcover and paperback (published by Ullstein). It won the Stuttgarter Krimipreis (Stuttgart Prize for Crime Fiction) for Best Debut Novel.

The novel "Das finstere Tal" cites as its patron saints Bavarian "Heimatautor" Ludwig Ganghofer and the director Sergio Leone. It combines to great and violent effect the archetypes of the Western and the German "Heimatroman" genres with archaic language inspired by novels of the 19th century and Biblical motives. Thomas Willmann was born in 1969 in Munich, where he still lives. He has an M.A. in musicology and is a film and music critic for various publications, as well as a translator. He is currently working on his second novel.

THE DARK VALLEY on the big screen

"A page-turner”, says the Austrian producer Helmut Grasser who, together with the director Andreas Prochaska, managed to secure the film rights to the book. “Being a film critic, the author had a very clear idea of what the screen adaptation should be like. In other words, he chose the director. There were a lot of production companies in Germany and Austria trying to buy the film rights to this book, but he didn’t sell. And finally, he went for Andreas Prochaska.”

“The novel itself follows a very filmic narrative”, says Stefan Arndt (producer), “but Martin Ambrosch and Andreas Prochaska did a fantastic job with the screenplay. The idea of turning Greider, the painter, into a photographer is an example of their great work. It’s not a big change, but photography is more tangible and more film-like. This was an inspired idea in two respects: on the one hand, photography fits into a western very well and, on the other, we didn’t have to decide what kind of painter Greider was.”

The most fundamental difference in the film is the change of narrative perspective. In the screen adaptation, Luzi, the daughter of the widow Gader, played by Paula Beer, recalls that fateful winter when Greider came to the high valley. In the novel, the gloomy foreshadowing of the dramatic events is discernible between the lines; in the film, however, it feels more immediate through Luzi’s narration.

“The authors of the screenplay came up with this idea right at the beginning”, says Helmut Grasser. “Having her telling the story was the most splendid idea for the screen adaptation.”

“The audience gets to see the incidents through the eyes of a single character who is saved in the end”, says Prochaska. “We didn’t just want to make another movie about revenge. We also wanted to tell the story of the deliverance and emancipation of the villagers. So it was only logical to choose Luzi as our narrator.”
CREW

**Director**  
Andreas Prochaska

**Screenplay**  
Martin Ambrosch  
Andreas Prochaska

**Based on a novel by**  
Thomas Willmann

**Producers**  
Helmut Grasser  
Allegro Film  
Stefan Arndt,  
X Filme Creative Pool

**Commissioning Editor**  
Heinrich Mis  
ORF & Daniel Blum  
Reinhold Elschot  
ZDF

**In co-operation with**  
SamFilm, ZDF, ORF

**Cinematography**  
Thomas W. Kiennast

**Production Design**  
Claus Rudolf Amler

**Costume Design**  
Natascha Curtius-Noss

**Makeup Artists**  
Helene Lang  
Roman Braunhofer

**Editor**  
Daniel Prochaska

**Music**  
Matthias Weber

**Casting**  
Nicole Schmied  
Nessie Nesslauer

CAST

**Greider**  
Sam Riley  
Paula Beer

**Luzi**  
Hans Brenner  
Tobias Moretti  
Luis Brenner  
Clemens Schick  
Hubert Brenner  
Helmuth A. Häusler  
Otto Brenner  
Martin Leutgeb  
Rudolf Brenner  
Johann Nikolussi  
Edi Brenner  
Florian Brückner

**Brenner**  
Hans-Michael Rehberg  
Carmen Gratl

**Luzi’s mother, Gardner**  
Thomas Schubert

**Luzi’s groom, Lukas**  
Franz Xaver

**Franz**  
Xenia Assenza

**Greider’s mother, Maria**  
Erwin Steinhauer

**Father Breiser**