

## Alois Nebel [15] 2011 | Czech Rep/Germany | 120 min

UK release date	<b>festival release only in the UK</b>
Director	<b>Tomáš Luňák</b>
Screenplay	<b>Jaroslav Rudis &amp; Jaroslav Svejdik</b>
Cinematographer	<b>Jan Baset Stritezsky</b>
Cast	<b>Miroslav Krobot (Alois Nebel); Marie Ludvíková (Kveta); Karel Roden (Nemy)</b>

Endless train timetables. Russian border patrol. Patches of forest that swallow you up. A thick fog that brings memories of a time long gone. Anything but an ordinary film, Tomáš Luňák's interpretation of Jaromir99's graphic novel trilogy about the train dispatcher Alois Nebel is a full-length, animated drama, playing at a pivotal moment of Czech history: 1989, when communism came to an end. Yet the film focuses on a region, where time seems to stand still, Sudetenland at the Czech-Polish border. Largely inhabited by Czechoslovakia's German population until 1945, when they were expelled from the country after decades of controversy and conflict, this is a site of contentious national histories, many of which remain to be unearthed. Nebel re-experiences this with foggy blurs of memory, when the expelled return after being ripped away from their homes and lives, often with deadly consequences...

The story is unexpectedly dark for an animated film, but it manages to capture different things correlating, in all their complexity, to the demise of communism. Open borders, smuggling, supposed democracy overshadowed by 'friendly pacts', a nation united under Václav Havel – and a historical change that also meant a reconsideration of identities and stories past.

Not just the storyline, but also the way it's told seem 'typically Czech', drawing on a history of animation (Luňák studied at Zlín, the country's centre of animated film) and the importance of cinema more generally in Czech history-telling: focusing on a little man, who witnesses great events from the sidelines.

The film should be praised, alongside the comic it originates from, for its depiction of the odsun, the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, which remains

a touchy issue in the Czech Republic to this day – far more complex than the ‘they were all Nazis’ rhetoric still dominating debates.

Evidently, reviving animation film is an important feature in the Czech tradition, and one successful abroad too: Alois Nebel won the European Film Award for Best Animated Feature in 2012. What’s more important is the film’s allusions to a story that has been spoken of with only the greatest reluctance for the last half-century. Luňák explained how people were now visiting the Sudetenland again, how happy the locals were their remote region was in a film.

Yet only focusing on how Alois Nebel was made showed blissful indifference to a controversy from one of the most contentious periods of Czech history, unwittingly subscribing to half-baked notions of Czechoslovakia as a peaceful and ‘innately democratic’ country. While the film included new techniques ripe for discussion, the exclusive focus here poignantly highlighted just how much of Central Europe still remains to be explored in the ‘West’ – and that, apparently, not even a brilliantly outspoken film like Alois Nebel awakens enough curiosity about the matter for it to be discussed more openly.

From: **Screen Talk with Tomáš Luňák, part of the Craft of Film season at the Barbican (22-28 February 2017)**

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