

TV REVIEW

Mrs. Oswald's 'Fatal' Conspiracy Theory

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It's the eve of the 30th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. So brace yourself for TV's inevitable fusillade of J.F.K. memorabilia over the next eight days.

Tonight it's NBC's mildly interesting "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald," with the widow of Kennedy's presumed assassin recounting her brief time with the mysterious American she knew as "Alik" when they began dating in the Soviet Union in 1961.

Airing at 9 on Channels 4, 36 and 39, "Fatal Deception" offers Marina Oswald's own vague, unsupported conspiracy theory about Oswald being "caught between powerful forces we still don't understand."

These "forces" are defined fuzzily, if at all. In one scene, for example, Steve Bello's script has a Soviet acquaintance assuring Marina (Helena Bonham Carter) in the United States, where the fractious couple had emigrated, that better times are ahead for the unemployed Lee (Frank Whaley) because "there's an important job waiting for him in Dallas." Soon, the Oswalds are living in Dallas, where a suspicious-acting Lee is employed at the Texas School Book Depository, and history takes over.

The Kennedy murder and its fallout stamped Marina and her two daughters as indelibly as the

assassination itself scarred the nation, and much of "Fatal Deception" makes the case (which no one appears to have disputed recently) that Oswald's wife was herself conned and victimized by her secretive, bizarre-acting husband. The tenderness of their Minsk courtship is contrasted here with the ranting Lee's smacking around of his young wife when they begin living in the United States and she questions him about his odd behavior.

Clues that he's up to something mount, the biggest one being his claim to Marina that he was the one who attempted to assassinate Gen. Edwin Walker in New Orleans. Then comes that fateful Nov. 22 when Kennedy is murdered, and two days later, when Oswald himself is gunned down on national TV by Jack Ruby.

Carter, the excellent young British actress who saw better days in such period pieces as "A Room With a View," "Howards End" and "Where Angels Fear to Tread," gives her sympathetic Marina an authentic-sounding Russian accent. And Whaley presents a humanizing portrait of Oswald under the direction of Robert Dornhelm.

Yet "Fatal Deception" appears to say nothing that hasn't already been said ad infinitum during the nation's nonstop dialogue concerning Kennedy and his assassination. All in all, it seems like just another bump on a very long log.