



# Nick Prescott's Reviews

## **Paradise Now (DVD)**

Talent: Kais Nashef, Ali Suliman, Lubna Azabal, Amer Hlehel.

Date of review: Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2006

Writer/director/editor: Hany Abu-Assad

Duration: 90 minutes

Classification: M (Mature)

We rate it: Five stars.

As the horrifying troubles in the Middle East continue to dominate the western media, it is timely to examine a film that dramatises, in extraordinarily powerful and personal fashion, that which for most of us would be unthinkable: young men's decisions to become suicide-bombers.

Told through the eyes of two young Palestinian men, Khaled and Said (played wonderfully by Ali Suliman and Kais Nashef respectively), *Paradise Now* tells a story to which any human being could relate; it is a story of a fight to halt injustices and to redress an imbalance in power, and a drama about the shared desire for freedom. Alongside these recognisable elements is a far more troubling series of ideas about violence as the only means of justice in extreme situations, and the triumph of religious zealotry over love and compassion.

If it is difficult to review a film like *Paradise Now* without being seen to choose a side in the real-world conflict that the film uses as its backdrop, it must surely be even more difficult to make and release a film of this kind without setting oneself up for accusations of bias and propagandising. Writer-director Hany Abu-Assad has done what must have been nearly impossible in his situation; he has constructed a film that is immensely powerful and moving precisely because it considers each side of the many arguments it dramatises. The young men at the centre of *Paradise Now* are indeed Palestinian, and within the film's narrative they are fighting against generations of violence directed at their country by Israel, yet the decision to resort to suicide bombing rather than "legal" or recognised warfare is what is ultimately at issue; the film depicts the passionately held positions of all of the characters engaged in the debate about fighting and peace, without once resorting to false emotionalism or unexamined religiosity.

The film plays out as an unusual kind of thriller, as the young friends are chosen by a representative of the Palestinian resistance to go over the border and carry out a suicide mission. Will Khaled and Said go along with this? Do they believe in what

they have been asked to do? Are they afraid of death, or of abandoning their families, or are they convinced by promises of post-mortem heroism and eternal paradise? Complicating factors include revelations about both men's families, and, for Said, a growing attraction to a beautiful and highly intelligent young woman whose own background is immensely complicated. If he leaves her behind in order to carry out his mission, how will she react? Will any of the actions and decisions being considered by the characters at the centre of the drama have any ultimate meaning or significance in the face of the larger conflict they are a part of?

These are all deeply troubling and depressing questions, and Abu-Assad's intelligent, powerful and moving film studiously avoids providing easy or reassuring answers. The beautifully produced DVD of *Paradise Now* also includes a fascinating documentary about the production of the film, as well as a commentary by Abu-Assad. A film about one of the most enduring of the world's many conflicts told in humane and thought-provoking ways, *Paradise Now* is a harrowing, affecting, timely and important film.

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