

Mongrel Media
Presents

Bethlehem

A film by Yuval Adler

Official Israeli Academy Award® Submission
Best Foreign Language Film
Winner 6 Ophir Awards, Including Best Picture
Official Selection Telluride Film Festival
Official Selection Toronto International Film Festival

Running Time: 99 minutes
Color

Language: Hebrew/Arabic w/ English subtitles

Distribution



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High res stills may be downloaded from <http://www.mongrelmedia.com/press.html>

CREW

Director	Yuval Adler
Writers	Yuval Adler, Ali Waked
Producer	Talia Kleinhendler
Producer	Osnat Handelsman-Keren
Producer	Diana Elbaum
Producer	Sebastian Delloye
Producer	Steve Hudson
Producer	Sonja Ewers
Executive Producer	Ephraim Gildor
DOP	Yaron Scharf
Art director	Yoav Sinai
Costume & Wardrobe	Lee Alembik
Makeup	Orly Ronen
Casting	Liron Zohar & Naama Zaltzman
Editor	Ron Omer
Music	Ishai Adar
Sound Designer	Francois Dumont
Mixer	Dirk Bombai
Production Company	Pie Films, Entre Chien et Loup, Gringo Films

CAST

Shadi Mar'i	Sanfur
Tsahi Halevy	Razi
Hitham Omari	Badawi
Tarek Copti	Abu Ibrahim
Michal Shtemler	Einat
Hisham Suliman	Ibrahim
George Iskandar	Nasser
Yossi Eini	Levi
Efrat Shnap	Maya
Karem Shakur	Abu Mussa
Ibrahim Sakala	Tyson

LOGLINE

"Bethlehem" tells the story of the complex relationship between an Israeli Secret Service officer and his teenage Palestinian informant. Shuttling back and forth between conflicting points of view, the film is a raw portrayal of characters torn apart by competing loyalties and impossible moral dilemmas, giving an unparalleled glimpse into the dark and fascinating world of human intelligence.

SYNOPSIS

"Bethlehem" tells the story of the complex relationship between Razi, an Israeli Secret Service officer, and his teenage Palestinian informant Sanfur.

Sanfur is the younger brother of Ibrahim, a highly wanted Palestinian militant. Razi, determined to capture or assassinate Ibrahim, recruited Sanfur when he was just 15, investing all his energy in the kid and developing a very intimate, almost fatherly relationship with him.

Sanfur, who has always lived in his brother's shadow, thrives on Razi's attention. Now 17, he struggles to navigate between Razi's demands and his loyalty to his brother, living a double life and lying to both.

When the Israeli Secret Service discovers how deeply involved Sanfur is in his brother's activities, Razi is accused of crossing professional lines and is ordered to sacrifice Sanfur in an upcoming attempt to assassinate Ibrahim. As preparations for the military strike are underway both Razi and Sanfur are forced to make choices that will irreversibly change their lives.

Co-written by Israeli director Yuval Adler, and Ali Waked, an Arab journalist who spent years in the West Bank, and based on extensive research, "Bethlehem" transcends perspectives, revealing the impossible situations and moral dilemmas associated with the dark and fascinating world of human intelligence.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

An Israeli secret service agent once told me: “the key to recruiting and running informants is not violence, or intimidation, or money; the key is to develop an intimate relationship with the informant, on a very human level. It’s not just the informant who is confused about his identity and loyalties. The agent, too – and especially the good ones – often experience a blurring of the lines.”

The research and writing of “Bethlehem” took years. My co-writer, Ali Waked, and I came from very different backgrounds. I’m an Israeli Jew who served in the army intelligence. Ali is a Muslim journalist and activist who worked for many years in Ramallah and Gaza. It wasn’t easy getting Palestinian militants from al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and Hamas to open up. And it was even harder to get a handle on the tradecraft of Shabak, the Israeli secret service. But eventually we did, and the process formed our screenplay in ways that exceeded our expectations.

The story of “Bethlehem” moves between Palestinian and Israeli societies. It shifts from intimate scenes of intelligence gathering, to explosive large-scale military operations. As director, I attempted to embrace and accentuate contrasts, not fight them. The one unifying visual element is the landscape. All characters, though living in completely different realities, actually dwell in close proximity in this ancient and contested biblical land.

The three main roles in the film are played by non-professional actors whom we discovered during the casting process. We looked for people whose lives somehow relate to the characters they’re playing. Tsahi Halevy (Razi) served in the Israeli Army in an elite unit – most of his service was in the West Bank. When he auditioned for us, we were amazed by how natural he was in front of the camera and by his remarkable combination of strength and vulnerability. Hitham Omari (Bitam) is a Palestinian living in the contested Kfar Aqab area between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Hitham lived through two intifadas and personally knew Palestinian militants and leaders like the one he portrays in the film. He is charismatic and fascinating – and we ran into him completely by accident! Shadi Mar’i (Sanfur), a 17 year old from Nazareth, is nothing short of a boy genius, and brought the most difficult role in the film to life: a fragile, confused, and violent youth, trapped in an impossible situation.

The characters in “Bethlehem” are compromised, extreme, and not always easy to like. Our one of a kind cast makes it possible to see the world through their eyes. As director, I tried to bring their contradicting viewpoints into a single whole without taking sides, and without judging them.

Yuval Adler

PRODUCER'S NOTES

When I first read the script for "Bethlehem" I was blown away. It drew me in completely and I knew that I had to make this film. I was further convinced by the extensive research that had been put into the project, the meticulous attention to details on every level.

Unlike many other films dealing with "the conflict" – films that always take one side or another or try to relay some message – the script of "Bethlehem" is constantly moving from one point of view to another. It is true to each character's perspective for as long as we are with that character and this is what makes it so authentic. We struggled to maintain this veracity throughout the process of making the film, from the casting choices, locations, and through the experts we had on set to make sure we got everything right.

But perhaps what drew me most into the story were the complex human interactions it depicts. We see the conflicting layers in the relationship between Razi and Sanfur already in the first scene in the Secret Service Safe house – a relationship that is the foundation for the entire film. They are flawed characters, using each other for different reasons, each getting something from this bond. Both are aware of this and both play along. The price Razi pays for the information he's getting from Sanfur is caring for him. Really caring, not faking it. Did he cross the line or is he just very good at this job? Razi's superiors are suddenly not sure. We, as audience, are not sure. Even Razi himself is not sure.

For Sanfur, giving information to Razi, having to live this double life, is the price he pays for having someone care about him. When his brother is assassinated by the Israelis, Sanfur feels guilty and betrayed, but he still needs Razi, and still need Razi to need him. This is the point where they are both tested.

What I think is important about this story is that it never attempts to give a clear answer about right or wrong. All the characters in Bethlehem are flawed, all are vulnerable. There is no black and white in this film, only painful shades of gray – like the reality we all live in here.

Talia Kleinhendler

YUVAL ADLER – WRITER/DIRECTOR

Writer/Director Yuval Adler studied Mathematics at Tel Aviv University and later moved to New York where he received a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Columbia University. Yuval also studied sculpture and photography at Columbia during this time and participated in various high profile art shows in New York City before switching full time to writing and directing film.

Yuval went on to study acting at the Lee Strasberg Theater School in New York, and there he learned not only how to work with actors, but he also wrote, directed, shot, and edited experimental shorts getting hands on experience in all aspects of the craft.

“Bethlehem”, which he wrote together with Ali Waked, is his first feature film.

ALI WAKED - WRITER

Writer and Journalist Ali Waked studied political science in Aix En Provence in France before returning to Jaffa to work as a journalist on Palestinian affairs. During the Intifada of 2000 Ali moved to Ramallah and reported extensively about al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and the Palestinian Authority.

Until recently he was the senior writer on Palestinian issues for popular online paper Ynet, and currently works for a non-profit organization focused on joint citizenship between Arabs and Israelis.

“Bethlehem”, which he wrote together with Yuval Adler, is his first feature length script.

TSAHI HALEVY - RAVI

A Musician and actor, Tsahi Halevy lived in several different countries throughout his childhood, and speaks five languages. He returned to his native Israel to complete his military service. Tsahi performed for more than a decade with the critically acclaimed dance group *Mayumana* in Israel and around the world. He was also one of the top three finalists in the Israeli production of the hit reality show "The Voice" and released his debut solo album in 2012.

SHADI MAR'I - SANFUR

Shadi lives in Mashhad near Nazareth and is the youngest of four brothers. He was cast in “Bethlehem” at the age of 17. At the age of 14 he began participating in a local theatre group run by Hisham Suleiman (who plays his brother Ibrahim at the film).

After graduating high school he worked at the Children's Theater at Usufiya and now he plans to study professional acting.

HITHAM OMARI - BADAWI

Hitham has been a news cameraman for over 12 years. He lives in Akeb in East Jerusalem and is married with four children. During the last decade he worked for Al-Arabiya (part of the media group MBC). Hitham was cast in the film after Yuval Adler met him by chance during one of the location scouts and invited him to audition.



“BETHLEHEM” – Information Sheet

Shabak . Israel’s internal security service – also known as the Shin Bet. Shabak is responsible chiefly for providing intelligence on militant Palestinian organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. Shabak officers are tasked with recruiting, developing and running Palestinian informants (“human assets” or “collaborators”). The organization’s intelligence gathering capabilities are perhaps the most crucial component of Israel’s counter-terrorism efforts and targeted assassination policy.

Bethlehem: A city in the West Bank. Bethlehem and Jerusalem are only a couple of miles apart, and are separated by a valley which is featured prominently in the film. The proximity between the two cities became a natural geographic flashpoint between the Israeli Army and various Palestinian resistance organizations. There are both Muslim and Christian Arabs living in the city.

Second Intifada: The second Intifada erupted in 2000 and peaked around 2002 – the time of the siege of the Church of the Nativity. The film “Bethlehem” is set in the year 2005 in the aftermath of the Second Intifada. In that period, hostilities were markedly less but still ongoing and tensions between various Palestinian organizations and the Palestinian Authority rose.

The Palestinian Authority (PA): Nominally controls areas of the West Bank including Bethlehem, the PA has a few security apparatuses but they are no match to the Israeli Army which operated freely in Palestinian areas. During the second Intifada, many members of the PA broke off to form al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades.

Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades: a paramilitary group whose members were typically secular and identify themselves with Fatah, the main political party of the PA. During the Second Intifada they lead the fight against Israel and were supported implicitly, and explicitly by the PA, but in the years that followed they became more and more fragmented and often clashed with the Palestinian Authority on which direction the resistance should take.

Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement dominant primarily in Gaza but active also in the West Bank. Hamas and al-Aqsa Brigades were competing organizations, but in the aftermath of the Second Intifada Hamas started

funneling money to elements of al-Aqsa Brigades to ensure the continuation of the military struggle and to break them away from the PA which, at the time, was trying to reach partial cease fire agreements with Israel.