

## PARADISE NOW



Show Time:  
27 July 2006, Thursday  
10.00 am



"Paradise Now," a taut, ingeniously calculated thriller, fixates on the flashpoint where psychology and politics ignite in self-destructive martyrdom. Said (Kais Nashef) and Khaled (Ali Suliman), best friends from childhood, belong to a terrorist cell in Nablus on the West Bank that is about to undertake its first suicide mission in two years. The film, directed by Hany Abu-Assad, an Israeli-born Palestinian, from a screenplay he wrote with Bero Beyer, the film's Dutch producer, follows them over the two days leading up to the climactic deed. Beginning shortly before they are tapped by an unidentified Palestinian organization to carry out the mission, the movie culminates less than 48 hours later in a denouement whose outcome remains uncertain until the last second. Along the way, "Paradise Now" sustains a mood of breathless suspense. Politics aside, the movie is a superior thriller whose shrewdly inserted plot twists and emotional wrinkles are calculated to put your heart in your throat and keep it there. — Stephen Holden, The New York Times.

## BARAN



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2.30 pm



After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, over 1.4 million Afghans fled to Iran seeking sanctuary and work. In this extraordinarily spiritual drama by Majid Majidi (*Children of Heaven*, *The Color of Paradise*), the plight of these refugees is vividly portrayed. They are strangers in a strange land forced to make do in dire circumstances after the loss of everything near and dear to them.

Memar (Mohammad Amir Naji) employs a large number of Afghans on a construction site. This raises the ire of many Iranians including Latif (Hossein Abedini), a quick-tempered youth. After an Afghan worker is injured, Soltan (Hossein Mahjoub Abbas Rahimi), a family friend, arrives with the man's son Rahmat (Zahra Bahrami). Memar gives this youth Latif's job of serving tea to the construction workers. He responds by smashing up the tearoom and even dumping water on Rahmat when he arrives for work.

However, all this anger and jealousy is turned to compassion when Latif discovers that Rahmat is actually a woman in disguise. The boy immediately becomes her protector on the site and even lands in jail after defending her when she's grabbed by two government inspectors.

Memar is forced to let all the Afghan workers go. Latif takes some time off, tracks down Soltan, and learns that Rahmat is working near a river with other women hauling heavy rocks. Trying desperately to save her, Latif hands over his salary to Soltan with the request that it be given to her father. But Soltan keeps the money for his own return journey to war-torn Afghanistan.

The Dalai Lama has written: "Don't you go letting life harden your heart . . . we can let the circumstances of our lives harden us so that we become increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder. We always have the choice." Latif makes the second choice. In his single-minded efforts to protect and clear a path of freedom for his beloved he is also imitating Jesus. *Baran* depicts the alchemical process whereby a perceived enemy can be transformed into a loved one. Latif's final act of selflessness will take your breath away, showing just what the heart can do in a milieu where poverty, loss, and dehumanization reign.

## TURTLES CAN FLY



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Like John Boorman's *Hope and Glory*, which presented a view of London during the Blitz from the vantage of a young boy, the Iranian film *Turtles Can Fly* offers a sometimes lyrical, sometimes gut-turning portrait of war seen through the eyes of children.

In this case, the youth are Kurdish refugees living in the rubble of the hill country of northern Iraq. It is the eve of the U.S. invasion, in the aftermath of years of abuse and violence inflicted by Saddam Hussein and the Republican Army. Children who have lost their limbs in minefields wait with the village elders to hear news. Satellite (Sorani Ebrahim), an enterprising 13-year-old with a fancy bicycle and a gift for bartering, has returned from the marketplace with a TV dish that will bring images of the impending conflict - breaking news from Fox and CNN - to the community.

The third feature from director Bahman Ghobadi, who apprenticed under the great Abbas Kiarostami, *Turtles Can Fly* is marked by moments of heartbreaking childhood enterprise: the cool precision of an armless boy who roots out un-detonated land mines with his nose (the mines are used to trade for weapons and other supplies), or the stoic determination of a beautiful girl (Avaz Latif) who abandons her scrubby compound, and her tiny, rape-spawned son, for a hilltop aerie.

## RABUN



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Rabun is surely one of the better Malaysian Movies in a long while. As far as I can remember, the last good Malaysian movie was made by a certain Tan Sri, Tan Sri P. Ramlee himself. It has a simple story line about the director's parent and it leaves you feeling nice at the end. Some very charming and romantic moments are captured by the rookie director. In the beginning, I was expecting some art film with a profound statement but to my pleasant surprise, the film does not go up this route that is so often taken by "indie directors". There are some moments that I feel could move along faster but in the end one is at least rewarded by the touching end scene. Worth the 90 minutes of my time.



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