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Friday January 15th, 7.30pm
The Green Prince (Israel 2014. Cert 15)
dir: Nadav Schirman

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The Palestinian-Israeli conflict matrix of ethical Gordian knots has rarely been elucidated as clearly, and tied as tightly, as in this documentary by Nadav Schirman. Though tacitly Israeli, the film can't help but bristle with the utter impossibility of a situation in which choosing humanitarian principles on the ground is akin to deciphering a koan (sic)*

The subject is Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of firebrand Hamas leader Sheikh Hassan Yousef and for some years the most important undercover informant working for Israel's Shin Bet security service. The set-up smacks immediately of pro-Israeli propaganda but the film dredges up ambivalences by the truckload: a typically radicalised Arab teen spurred by the napalm rhetoric of his father (seen entirely in news footage) and many imprisonments. Yousef is arrested after an eventless gun-run and, after being offered work by the Shin Bet, is sent for six months to the Hamas-run section of an Israeli prison. There, he witnesses Hamas torturing and killing scores of prisoners (they've all been offered espionage as a choice and so are suspected of being traitors). After also being raped, he decides to spy on Hamas and his father to prevent as many suicide bombings and other bloodlettings as he can.

Schirman's film is essentially a two-hander - Yousef, seething with wide-eyed urgency, narrates his tale in English directly to the camera, and his testimony is intercut with that of Gonen Ben Yitzhak, his Shin Bet handler, who waxes artisanally about the nuances of spycraft, recruitment and agent manipulation, but who's ambivalent about his role in his Arab spy's career (Yitzhak violated Shin Bet rules by treating Yousef as a friend and comrade, and was eventually relieved of his duties). This pas-de-deux runs from the late 90s for over a decade of bloody espionage, during which time Yousef matured into a man without a truthful identity of his own, and even had his own father arrested rather than see him assassinated. (He was working to quash the Second Intifada as his father was promoting it at the top of his lungs at public rallies). Of course, the stress is palpable - even "raping your own mother" would not, Yousef claims, be as shameful in his culture as spying for Israel. It's a sentiment that, given the history, you can easily fathom. Frustratingly, the two witnesses, and the film, overlook the larger picture of the widely



condemned injustice of the Israeli occupation and the imperialist conditions that compelled the creation of Hamas in the first place, something only an Israeli or occupation-sympathetic filmmaker would care to do. But the film is intimate enough that you really can't blame the two men. since they lived the war on the secret front lines, and had to live with themselves if their actions and decisions resulted in more or fewer - innocent bodies. Schirman tries to balance the Hamas demonising with occasional news reports of Israel's overwhelming air strikes and invasions, but the narrative's primary position is that Hamas is a homicidal plague and the Shin Bet is merely and humanely trying to control it for everyone's good. The bizarre and fascinating co-dependence of

Synopsis: A documentary about Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of Hamas leader Sheikh Hassan Yousef and for more than a decade the most valuable spy in the Palestinian territories working for Israel's Shin Bet security service. The story is recounted by Yousef himself, and also by his Shin Bet handler, as we follow him from radicalised teen to his decision to turn against Hamas. Having witnessed brutality in a Hamas-run section of an Israeli prison and having been subjected to rape, he decides to start working secretly with the Israeli forces to subvert Hamas's various campaigns of terrorism and suicide bombings. After his handler is fired, Yousef abandons both causes and emigrates to the US.

Credits

Director	Nadav Schirman
Produced by	Nadav Schirman, John Battsek, Simon Chinn
Written by	Nadav Schirman (from the book <i>Sons of Hamas</i> , by Mosab Hassan Yousef)
Cinematography	Gora Bejach, Hans Fromm, Raz Degan
Editing	Joelle Alexis, Sanjeev Hathiramani
Original music	Max Richter
Sound	Alex Claude

Israel/Germany/UK 2014. 101 mins

Yousef and Yitzhak naturally suggests this angle, but it's also the deftest of propaganda feints, the abnegation of political responsibility by homing in on these individuals, as if the micro-experience of the political-ethnic conflict suffices as a model of the whole.

It never does. *The Green Prince* (Yousef's Shin Bet code name) is remarkably gripping, but its two lone voices hardly register even the quandaries about Israel's action that were ruefully entertained by the six retired Shin bet directors in Dror Moreh's *The Gatekeepers* (2012). The 'spy game' is and always has been palpably bewitching if we are dissuaded from considering what the elaborate mechanism is trying to achieve.

* *koan*: a paradox to be meditated upon that is used to train Zen Buddhist monks to abandon ultimate dependence on reason and to force them into gaining sudden, intuitive enlightenment.

Another View - Mark Kermode (*The Observer*)

With just two talking-head interviews, Nadav Schirman's gripping and intimate documentary recounts Mosab Hassan Yousef's extraordinary double-life as the son of a Hamas radical who turned informer for Israel's shadowy Shin Bet. Accepting from the outset that his actions would be interpreted as an unforgivable betrayal (someone who "raped their own mother" would seem less shameful, says Yousef), our edgily eloquent subject explains how he supplied information both to prevent terrorist attacks and also to protect his father, Sheikh Hassan Yousef. Meanwhile, former Shin Bet agent Gonen Ben Yitzhak describes the bond of trust that grew between him and Yousef – a bond that saw the informant's "handler" turned upon by his own organisation, leaving both men out in the cold. It's a remarkable story, told with slick thriller flair, focusing increasingly on the interdependence of its subjects, who chose personal morality over political rhetoric, with isolating results. In the process, the film deliberately sidesteps the wider issues unearthed so alarmingly in Dror Moreh's *The Gatekeepers*, a film that offers intriguing context to this very personal tale of trial and salvation.

Programme change & new releases

The release date for **Mr Kaplan** (scheduled for March 18th) has not been confirmed by the distributors, which means the film is not likely to be available. Consequently, the programming committee has decided to replace it with **Theeb** (Jordan/UAE/Qatar/UK 2014), a beautifully filmed story set in Western Arabia during World War 1.

Theeb is nominated as Best Film in a Foreign Language for both this year's BAFTAs and Oscars. We have 2 other BAFTA nominated films in our programme coming up shortly - **Timbuktu** (January 29th - also Oscar nominated in 2015) and **Force Majeure** (March 11th). Don't miss them.

Our next screening: January 22nd, 2016, 7.30pm

Marshland (Spain 2014. Cert 15)

Marshland (La isla mínima in Spanish) is a striking film. Set in Andalucía 5 years after the end of the Franco regime, it is centred on 2 detectives (played by Javier Gutiérrez & Raúl Arévalo) who are sent to investigate the disappearance of 2 girls

The political context of the film is significant and acts as a constant thread throughout the film. It affects the relationship between the cops (one supports the monarchy, the other is a former Franco-ist), it is palpable in the behaviour of the locals (who are still deeply loyal to the General and used to running their own affairs without interference); even the landscape plays a significant role in the film (superbly photographed, it has been compared with images of the brain, suggesting that it hides secrets that have not been investigated). The whole film reeks of atmosphere, has some great set pieces and manages to craft an ambiguous ending. It's easy to see why it landed so many Goya (the Spanish Oscars) awards.

New Releases

We have also selected the 3 films from those released since the programme was selected, to fill the gaps in the season left for the purpose. The films (subject to confirmation) are

The Wolfpack (USA, 2015): In New York, the six Angulo brothers and their older sister live with their parents in a Lower East Side apartment that they are not allowed to leave because their parents feel the world beyond is unsafe. Home-schooled, they go outside only once or twice a year under strict supervision. Film is their shared passion and, unable to explore the world themselves, they do so via the medium of cinema, making endless lists of films, staging elaborate recreations of their favourites scenes & memorising dialogue. Their inexperience of the world is so profound that when they finally start to get a taste of freedom, the expectations they've built up through film-watching don't always translate to reality; but they are nevertheless determined to escape the prison their father has constructed and leave their inner worlds for the real one.

Tangerines (Estonia, 2013): The first Estonian film to be nominated for a Best Foreign Language Oscar, *Tangerines* takes place during the short but brutal war between Georgia and Abkhazia in 1992. In a neutral Estonian village over the border most villagers have fled the encroaching conflict, but Ivo, an elderly farmer, stays behind to help his friend Magnus with the harvest, before it goes to waste. A deeply affecting anti-war movie, *Tangerines* takes a simple story and weaves it into a rich drama, deftly balancing pathos, black humour and a pacifist critique of unnecessary violence.

The Lesson (Bulgaria/Greece, 2014): Margita Gosheva is excellent as the initially uncompromising Nadezhda, a teacher in a small Bulgarian town who's troubled by petty thefts in her classroom and is trying her best to uncover the culprit. But financial woes are stacking up in her own life, after her unemployed and hapless husband spends money they don't have, and she must utilise all her energy to ensure that their house isn't repossessed.

Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov won the New Directors Award at San Sebastian in 2014 for this hard-hitting social realist drama

The screening dates will be announced as soon as possible