

# Traumas and wounds of Palestinian refugees in 'Tower'

LOS ANGELES, June 12, (RTRS): "The Tower," the debut of Norway's Mats Grorud, features out of competition at Annecy's main showcase. Produced by Tenk TV (based out of Baerum, Norway), Les Contes Modernes (Bourg-Les-Valence, France) and Goteborg-based Cinetic Film, the animated film revolves around the Palestinian diaspora since the creation of Israel in 1948, seen from the eyes of Wardi, an 11-year-old Palestinian girl living with her family in the refugee camp where she was born.

Grorud worked as an animation teacher in the Bourj el-Barajneh refugee camp, established by The League of Red Cross Societies to host Palestinian refugees from northern Israel. Based on his experience and research there, he created the story of "The Tower." Children living in Bourj el-Barajneh represent around 43% of the camp's total population, which is close to 21,000 (in addition to 20,000 recent Syrian refugees), all living within one square kilometer. "The Tower"'s international sales are handled by Paris-based Jour2Fete.

**Question:** Why did you choose the point of view of an 11-year-old Palestinian girl to depict such a long and painful conflict?

**Answer:** Living in a camp, I witnessed a session where a group of elders told the young about what happened to them in 1948. Everybody was crying together. It touched me a lot. The traumas and wounds of 1948 remain and will be there as long as people are stuck in the camps.

I chose the point of view of an 11-year-old, as I wanted to raise the question of how and if it is possible to find hope in the situation the Palestinians find themselves in. And if so, these questions could only be illuminated by a young person at the start of life, when we all have dreams and hopes intact.

**Q:** And why did you choose to make an animated movie?

**A:** We worked with the language that we thought was appropriate. Animation can be a way of distancing oneself from something and still present an original take on it. Animation is one way of recreating spaces that have been erased as a consequence of the expulsion of Palestinians from their lands. A different way of looking. Animation is not just for kids. It can add lyricism.

**Q:** You were born in Norway. What was your personal link with Lebanon, because "The Tower" seems a very heartfelt film.

**A:** My mother worked as a nurse in Lebanon during the 1980s. She would go and come back, and I and my siblings would see pictures of the camps. During the First Intifada in 1989, we lived for a year in Cairo and went to Gaza and Jerusalem. I was 12 years old then, so seeing kids my age on every street corner making "V" signs made a lasting impression on me. Later, I went to live in Lebanon myself in the camp of Bourj el-Barajneh, and I got the idea for the film, which simply was to tell the stories of my friends from the camp and their families. To share the wisdom, humor and warmth that I felt from people. As well

as the ugliness of this fate, forever stuck in camps.

**Q:** You have mixed several techniques - 2D, puppet animation, real photographs. What was the criteria for choosing each one and the challenges to build a coherent whole?

**A:** To me, the tactility and texture of the puppets and sets make it perfect to represent Wardi's real world today. Also, in puppet animation we are used to using whatever we have at hand, and this is exactly what people do constructing their towers in the camp, so it was too good a parallel to be left out. The flashbacks in the film are set in a lot of different environments and had crowds of people. We also pursued the possibility to be surreal in our visuals, dramatizing the experiences people had in their pasts. 2D was both a practical and artistic choice. The pictures came into the film the same way they came into my life as a child. I have used my mother's pictures from the camps, as well as from my friends' private albums. Our main concern about combining the three techniques was how to find the balance between them.

**Q:** What's next?

**A:** I am continuing to work together with Mozambican art director Rui Tenreiro. It will be a modern take on the pirate genre, in which young militants fight for resources against international oil giants. A tale of young heroism and resistance set in the mangrove swamps of the Delta. The idea is in the early development stage.

Film

Variety



This image released by Vertical Entertainment shows John Travolta (left), and Spencer Lofranco in a scene from 'Gotti,' which opens in the US on June 15. (AP)

Film

Bird's sequel set to break more records for Disney

## Family fun in sprightly 'Incredibles 2'

By Lindsey Bahr

**T**he *Incredibles*' writer/director Brad Bird has said that his characters' powers are all born of stereotypes. Dad is strong, mom is stretched in a million directions, teenage girls put up shields, little boys are full of boundless energy and babies are unpredictable. It's why he decided that for the sequel, "*Incredibles 2*," a buoyant and quick-witted romp, he'd pick up right where we left off, in that parking lot after Dash's track meet where a new threat emerges from underground. No matter that in reality, 14 years had actually passed. Animation is not bound by time or aging actors.

For the rest of us, however, 14 years is still 14 years. And in the past 14 years, the business of Hollywood has become the business of superhero movies.

It's hard to remember a time when there weren't a dozen a year. But when "*The Incredibles*" came out in 2004, they were still a bit of an anomaly at the multiplex — its cheeky, mockumentary realism, its jokes about capes, secret identities, "monologue-ing" and the dangers of toxic, obsessive fandom was the perfect introduction (and indoctrination) to superheroes for those who couldn't care less. Pixar magic made superhero believers out of the skeptics. And by 2008, we all thought, sure, let's see about this Tony Stark fellow and someone called Iron Man.

In "*Incredibles 2*," it seems like Bird himself is wrestling with a culture he helped facilitate — not totally dissimilar to what Steven Spielberg did earlier this year in "*Ready Player One*." But instead of nostalgia on trial, it's superheroes and screens.

The villain here is called Screenslaver, who uses screens to hypnotize anyone watching. It's both the most retro plan of all (keeping with Bird's love of the 60s aesthetic) and still somehow utterly modern. Annoyed by how blindly and wholly consumerist everyone has become at the mercy of screens and simulated experiences in lieu of real ones, from movies to video games, Screenslaver has set out to end that, and squash Municiberg's dependence on and obsession with superheroes. As with the first, there are a million ideas at play here (not a flaw, by the way), including evolving family dynamics.

Most of the original voice cast has returned, including Craig T. Nelson as Bob Parr/Mr. Incredible, Holly Hunter as Helen Parr/Elastigirl, Bird as Edna Mode, Sarah Vowell as Violet Parr and Samuel L.

Jackson as Lucius Best/Frozone (the only slight change in the main players is that Dash Parr is now voiced by Huck Milner). And once again, superheroes are still on shaky ground in Municiberg and are put on ice after the Parr family accidentally damages some public property while trying to take down a criminal.

But a wealthy heir and superhero appreciator Winston Deavor (Bob Odenkirk) and his tech savvy sister Evelyn (Catherine Keener) have a plan to rehabilitate their image. Right now, the public only sees the destruction. The Deavors propose outfitting superheroes with body cams to get exciting footage of their feats.

"*Incredibles 2*" provides a bit of a corrective on a micro level to the first film's gender politics by sending mom off to work and making dad stay home (although wasn't that a little antiquated 35 years ago?). The animation is also a heck of a lot better. "*The Incredibles*" looks downright primitive and even a tad ugly in retrospect.

Slow

Although it gets off to a slow start, ultimately it's also quite a bit of fun, from the absurd (Jack Jack's burgeoning powers) to the grounded (Dad helping Dash with his math homework or trying to make up for getting in the way of Violet's date and embarrassing her even further in the process).

Like "*Ready Player One*," however, "*Incredibles 2*," kind of loses the thread by the end. A villain is a villain no matter how salient their point, and Mr. Incredible, Elastigirl and their offspring are our heroes and thus we must root for them even while thinking that Screenslaver might be on to something.

It's still fun to watch smart storytellers like Bird working within the system and using his platform to self-evaluate or comment on what's going on, even if the conclusion is a little flimsy. Bird could have easily just brought back his lovable characters, leaned on Jack Jack's antics and cashed in the check. It makes the effort and care here seem even more incredible.

After a glut of lucrative box office juggernauts from its Marvel Cinematic Universe, Disney is looking to break more records with "*Incredibles 2*," the long-awaited return of a quirky animated superhero family.

The film — which comes out Friday, a full 14 years after "*The Incredibles*" — looks set to score the highest debut ever for an animated film at the North American box office.

Experts are predicting a \$140 million-plus opening weekend for Brad Bird's sequel to his own hugely popular original, which would surpass the \$135 million debut of its Disney-Pixar stablemate, "*Finding Dory*" (2016).

"For a very long time, people have been wanting this film," Jackson, who returns as superhero Frozone, told reporters at last week's glittering premiere in Hollywood.

"I think people who saw the film at a certain age have had kids now, and they're showing them (the original) so they can bring them to this one."

It all goes a bit awry — as it always does — when a new villain emerges with a brilliant and dangerous plot that threatens the world.

"It's kind of like a spy movie — ultra, uber-sophisticated, kind of 1960s, free-wheeling," Hunter told a question-and-answer forum at the AMC Century City movie theater in Los Angeles.

"The movie has so many different influences that are directly from Brad's own passions, his childhood, his parenting. He's kind of thrown it all into the mix in a really personal way."

There may be a 14-year gap, but the sequel starts about five seconds after the original ended, with the Parr family donning their superhero masks, ready to face the new threat. "We left people wanting more at the end of the last film... There was this villain, everyone wanted to see what the outcome was with that fight," said producer Nicole Grindle.

"But I think that's something you can do in animation. You can't do that in live action, just wait 14 years."

Critics and fans who made it to the premiere were allowed to post social media reactions, with most singling out the Parrs' scene-stealing baby for praise.

"*Incredibles 2*" is a blast. It does a great job building on the characters and the world, and it's super funny and action packed throughout," tweeted Eric Eisenberg of CinemaBlend.

"I had my doubts, but was thoroughly impressed. Will go down as one of the best titles of the summer." (Agencies)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2018

LOS ANGELES: British director Tony Kaye has come on board to helm the independent crime drama "Honorable Men." Variety has learned exclusively.

The film is being produced by Life Entertainment with producers Sam Khoze, Justin Steele, and Patrick McErlean along with the Film House and producer Ryan R. Johnson.

Kaye's directing credits include "American History X," "Black Water Transit," and "Detachment." He did not approve of the final cut of "American History X" and tried unsuccessfully to have his name removed as director of the movie, for which Edward Norton received an Oscar nomination. Kaye also received six Grammy nominations for music videos such as Johnny Cash's "... Gonna Cut You Down" and "Runaway Train" by Soul Asylum, which won a Grammy Award.

"Honorable Men" screenwriter Gary DeVore vanished under mysterious circumstances in 1997. His body was discovered a year later with his hands missing. He disappeared while working on a remake of the 1949 "The Big Steal." (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Brandon Sklenar, who starred in "Mapplethorpe," will play a lead role in Jactyn Bethany's upcoming independent drama "Indigo Valley."

The movie is set to start production in August. Bethany will direct and star in film, which is based on her short film and will be produced by Courtney Harmstone and Mikhail Makeev. The story follows a newlywed couple on a hiking trip as they're unexpectedly joined by the woman's estranged older sister, an actress recently released from rehab.

"Harry Potter" thesp Evanna Lynch was attached to play the newlywed sister when the project was announced in November at the American Film Market, but has left the project due to schedule conflicts.

Sklenar previously starred in the Japanese/American co-production "Temple" for Netflix and will be seen in "Magic Lantern," filmmaker Amir Naderi's next directorial effort, and in Adam McKay's Dick Cheney biopic "Backseat" with Christian Bale, Amy Adams, and Sam Rockwell. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Francis Lawrence, who directed the last three

"Hunger Games" movies and "Red Sparrow," will direct and produce "Conspiracy: Peter Thiel, Hulk Hogan, Gawker, and the Anatomy of Intrigue."

Charles Randolph, who won an Academy Award for his "Big Short" screenplay, is attached to write the adaptation for the project, which was unveiled in March by producer David A. Neuman, CEO and part-



Norton



Hogan

ner of Blackrock Productions. Neuman made the announcement Monday and said he is targeting an A-list cast to play the story's principals — Peter Thiel, Hulk Hogan, and Nick Denton.

Published in February, "Conspiracy" outlines the tempestuous legal battle between the pro-wrestler Hulk Hogan (Terry Bollea); Gawker Media and its founder,

Denton; and Silicon Valley titan Thiel — who secretly funded Hogan's successful lawsuit over the publication of a tape involving Hogan. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: European pay-TV giant Sky has acquired three new titles to bolster its slate of original films set for release on its service in

the UK on the same day as the movies' theatrical debuts.

Sky Cinema Original Films has day-and-date rights to Matthew McConaughey-led noir thriller "Serenity"; "Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile," which will star Zac Efron as serial killer Ted Bundy; and multi-generational family drama "Life Itself" from Dan Fogelman ("This Is Us"). (RTRS)