

Film Review ...  
False Prophet

A Prophet won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival and the Best Film award at the London Film Festival in 2009. This year it won a Bafta for the Best Film Not in the English Language. It has also been nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar. Here are five reasons why the film does not deserve the plaudits.

1) A Prophet is 155 minutes long. That might be excusable for Martin Scorsese or Paul Thomas Anderson, or any director who knows how to build tension. But Jacques Audiard simply throws in a few moments of shocking violence to compensate for the lack of any real suspense.

2) A Prophet contains a scene where the central character, Malik, masturbates to pornography. I'll say it again: A Prophet is 155 minutes long. I wonder if anyone suggested cutting the wanking scene to shorten the film to a more reasonable length during the edit, and, if so, why Audiard felt it was indispensable.

3) A Prophet wants to have its cake and eat it. Prison is rough and bad and traumatising, right? Sometimes, inmates are raped by other inmates, right? Well, just to prove the authenticity of the depiction of the prison in the film, Malik gets raped. In a dream. Why? Because if he was raped for real he would be too soiled to be heroic, obviously, and that would never do. Cowardly filmmaking.



4) If, and I am not saying this was his intention, but if, Audiard meant A Prophet to be viewed as a state-of-the-nation piece rather than a genre exercise, its message is lazy and deliberately inflammatory. There has been a changing of the guard in the criminal underworld, don't you know; the Muslims are now in charge.

5) Male pornstars fall into two categories: the viewer's ideal self, and those the viewer feel he can emulate without major surgery. The first is well-toned and has no major facial disfigurements, a huge sh-long and incredible sexual endurance. The second is skinny or fat, lacks penis-girth and has a stupid haircut. Porn viewers would be confounded and possibly unable to masturbate if Malik, the prophet, turned up in a porn film. We are on safe ground with him at first – he can't read, wears unfashionable tracksuits and grows a weedy-looking moustache. Ok, thinks porn-lover number one, I could be him. But just as he's unzipping his trouser-fly, BOOM! Malik is literate, multilingual, shows Macchiavellian cunning and can predict the future. Instant detumescence.

Jacques Audiard directed the wonderful *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*. With this follow-up he seems to have fooled the world, but do not be taken in. This is not a patch on his best work.

By Peter Crowe