

‘Screwdriver’ explores the impact of long-term isolation



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VENICE: Set in Palestine, Bassam Jarbawi’s “Screwdriver” is a compelling story of what torture and isolation can do to a person — in this case Zaid (played by Zaid Bakri), a former basketball champion.

Showcased at the Venice film festival last week, the film revolves around Zaid, whose long incarceration in an Israeli jail shatters his self-esteem and turns him into a psychological wreck.

When Zaid’s best friend, Ramzi, is shot dead by a sniper in the West Bank, he is livid and takes up a gun to kill an Israeli passerby. Arrested and thrown into jail, and abandoned by his friends, Zaid feels a suffocating sense of loneliness and rejection by a society that he was such an integral part of.

His ultimate homecoming after 15 years seems like an exercise in futility, and he feels that his once-upon-a-time friends are merely trying to erase their own guilt — at having forsaken Zaid — by celebrating his return, while an attractive television reporter wants to capitalize on the opportunity that his story can offer. He realizes that he is not even able to connect with his mother, let alone his friends. It is only his admirer, Salma (Maya Omaia Keesh), who appears to have a genuine fondness for him.

A stoic and impressive performance by Bakri helps the movie transcend the blurred lines between hallucination and reality, between a psychological thriller and a social drama, while the narrative provides deep insight into what long-term imprisonment can do to a person.

A time comes when Zaid reacts with rage and panic to the situation he finds himself in, until he finds it difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction.
