



# A PROPHET Un prophète

France, Italy | 2009 | 149m | 15tbc | sub-titles

**Director:** Jacques Audiard

**Producer:** Martine Cassinelli

**Screenplay:** Thomas Bidegain, Jacques Audiard, Abdel Raouf Dafri, Nicolas Peuffaillit

**Cinematography:** Stéphane Fontaine

**Original Music:** Alexandre Desplat

**Editor:** Juliette Welfling

**Leading Players:** Tahar Rahim, Niels Arestrup, Adel Bencherif, Hichem Yacoubi, Reda Kateb, Jean-Philippe Ricci



Having picked up the Grand Jury prize at Cannes for tonight's film, Jacques Audiard was entitled to look extremely assured, in sharp suit and pork-pie hat, at London Film Festival a couple of weeks ago. With a roster of five acclaimed features to his name (*See How They Fall*, 1994; *A Self-Made Hero*, 1996; *Read My Lips*, 2001; *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, 2004; *A Prophet*) he now stands as one of France's top film-makers, and his works are eagerly awaited. Unfortunately we can't present the man himself (nor even his hat itself), but below are some highlights from an interview he gave for the film's production notes.

The film... Condemned to six years in prison, Malik El Djebena can neither read nor write. Cornered by the leader of the Corsican gang who rules the prison, he is given a number of missions to carry out, toughening him up and gaining the gang leader's confidence in the process. Just 19 years old, he appears younger and more fragile than the other convicts, but Malik is brave and a fast learner, daring to secretly develop his own plans...

*Q: Through the character of Malik, the film conveys the idea that the knowledge and know-how give access to power. JA: Yes, and it's this that I find the most interesting. This type of person breaks the mould, he's not your usual hooligan. Following Malik, we see his mind at work, a mind that shows phenomenal adaptability, that this character will use for any opportunistic possibility, at first to save his skin, then to survive and improve his lot, and finally to reach another level of power.*

*Q: This dimension of the film evokes another of your characters, Dehousse in A Self-Made Hero. JA: Yes, you could say that these characters are models of a certain type of education. The initial principal is to introduce these people their greatest destitution then giving them an opportunity, a possibility to construct an heroic personality. The story of A Prophet, depicts someone who reach-*

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es a position that he could never have attained had he not gone to prison. Here lies the paradox.

*Q: How did you structure this desire to turn Malik into a hero?* JA: In part from following the image of Arabs in cinema which is either stupid – and sees them represented as terrorists or simply naturalistic, in a sort of social realist context. It was this that brought me very quickly to the question of the choice of actors. For the role of Malik, we needed someone extremely polymorphic who would correspond perfectly to the theme of identity in the film. A young man, who has no history, yet will write one before our very eyes. From early on we knew this role couldn't be filled by a known actor precisely because it's a story of a rise to power, to visibility.

*Q: There is a trend in current cinema for darker, more damaged heros. In A Prophet you take someone who is damaged yet lead them toward a kind of redemption.* JA: And with tools that wouldn't be recommendable. There is always a default way of making anti-heros. This doesn't interest me so much. Me, I like my heros to learn something, to put it to use. I find that cinema has that function: it looks at the real to teach us how to use it. Perhaps the lesson which strikes Malik is paradoxical, but it's this which interests me.

*Q: In any case it says that you have to learn...* JA: To learn, to be attentive, to not open ones mouth all the time, to be reserved and most of all to not make the same mistake twice because the third time you'll be dead.

*Q: Is A Prophet, according to you, a moral film ?* JA: Yes, what would have been immoral would have been to create a character without conscience. However he is conscious of both good and evil precisely because evil has been done to him.

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#### **Turn It Loose**

Alastair Siddons | UK | 2008 | 96m | 12A+bc | sub-titles | [turnitloosemovie.com](http://turnitloosemovie.com)

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