

TEMPLE OF DREAMS

Fadi Rahman shot into the media spotlight during the infamous Cronulla Riots. One of a new breed of young Australian Muslim leaders, he runs a youth centre/gymnasium in Sydney's west in what was once a Masonic Temple. The Centre (called ICRA), which has no government funding, is operated by a group of young volunteers. Its aim is to provide a safe haven for Muslim youth, many of whom are disengaged and alienated from mainstream society.

One evening in April 2006, three months after the Centre opens, tragedy strikes. A promising boxer from the gym is killed in a drive-by shooting. Fadi, worried about possible revenge attacks, hits on a plan to bring out from America the former rap star Napoleon, who once performed with the legendary Tupac. Fadi wants to pack out a massive auditorium to inspire them with this born-again Muslim preacher's message of non-violence. The event will also raise much-needed funds for the Centre. However, Fadi needs volunteers to help him. Three young women Alyah, Amna and Zouhour join the ICRA team.

Suddenly on the eve of Napoleon's visit the local Council serves the Youth Centre with an official order threatening to close it down. Allegedly Fadi has changed the use of the Masonic Temple to a gym and youth centre without Council's permission. Fadi believes that he's done the right thing, but Council believes otherwise. It has given the Centre one month to submit a development application (DA). If it fails to do so, it risks legal action and will be forced to close.

While the men are busy with Napoleon, it's left to the women to organise the DA. They also set about refurbishing a room at the rear of the Centre as a meeting space and an area that they themselves can use, knowing full well that it could be months before they get a Council decision. However this comes sooner than expected and the group is shocked to discover that the Masonic Temple stands in a block that two years ago was re-zoned 'residential'. Under this new zoning a youth Centre and gym is not allowed.

In spite of this setback Fadi fights on, negotiating with the Council a short reprieve. He also comes up with a new project - a youth conference - to discuss the problems young Muslims face in Australia. This event is much bigger than anything the group has attempted before, and the stress is taking its toll on their already busy lives. Feisty and argumentative the women share Fadi's aims, but not always agree with his tactics. Meanwhile the Council deadline is looming, with the threat of closure imminent. Will the Conference succeed? Will the Centre survive?