

# THEEB

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES/JORDAN 100 MIN

NAJI ABU NOWAR



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If you were a pre-adolescent boy stranded in the desert with a sinister grown-up stranger on whom you depended for your survival, what would you do?

That question, posed in the spellbinding Jordanian adventure film *Theeb*, drives a story set in the farthest reaches of the Ottoman Empire in 1916. The man, who is seriously wounded, and the boy play cat and mouse as they help each other stay alive in a do-or-die struggle.

The movie is set in a period known as the Arab Revolt, when Arab nationalists sought independence from the Ottoman Turks. Events are seen through the eyes of Theeb (Jacir Eid Al-Hwieta), a Bedouin child who has had no contact with the world outside his desert community. During these years, traditional Bedouin culture was disrupted by a railway, nicknamed the Iron Donkey Trail. Connecting Damascus and Medina, it would soon eliminate the need for Bedouin pilgrim guides.

Theeb, whose father has recently died, is the youngest of three sons in a family of guides. The father's stern voice is heard at the beginning of the film giving Theeb cryptic, cautionary advice: "He who swims in the Red Sea cannot know its true depth. And not just any man, Theeb, can reach the seabed."

The story begins in Theeb's traditional Bedouin desert community, where, in the middle of the night, a blond British Army officer, Edward (Jack Fox), and his Arab

sidekick, Marji (Marji Audeh), appear out of nowhere, seeking a well near the Ottoman train tracks. Edward has a wooden box rumored to contain gold.

Hussein (Hussein Salameh), the second-oldest of the three recently orphaned brothers, agrees to lead the party and instructs Theeb to remain behind. Hussein has already been shown teaching Theeb, a natural warrior who has an avid fascination with weaponry, how to shoot and wield a knife. Theeb's very first question to Edward is how many men he has killed.

*Theeb* is the directorial debut of Naji Abu Nowar, a British-born filmmaker who grew up in Jordan and has described *Theeb* as "an Arabic western" in the tradition of Sergio Leone. The movie is that and more. The wide-open spaces of Jordan, where *Theeb* was filmed, are as awe-inspiring in their breadth and aridity as the vistas in a spaghetti western. The film's acute sense of this unforgiving environment is underscored by a soundtrack in which gunfire and voices ricochet eerily through the spiky canyons and arid mountain passes. Theeb is continually brushing off bugs.

As in Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu*, the otherworldly beauty is inseparable from the dangers that lurk within it.

Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

**WRITERS:** Naji Abu Nowar & Bassel Ghandour **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Wolfgang Thaler **MUSIC:** Jerry Lane

**CAST** *Theeb* Jacir Eid Al-Hwieta | *The Stranger* Hassan Mutlag Al-Maraiyeh | *Hussein* Hussein Salameh Al-Sweilhiyeen | *Edward* Jack Fox

**VOTING FOR A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence** A15 | B32 | C19 | D6 | E14 | Rating 58% | Attendance 98

Next screening | **Alleluia! The Devil's Carnival** | Tuesday 2 May 2017. 8.00pm

'... it's better to party in hell than to even worry about conquering Heaven just yet...'