

FILM MOVEMENT®

presents

## Theeb

A film by Naji Abu Nowar

"A classic adventure film of the best kind, and one that's rarely seen these days!"

– Jay Weissberg, *Variety*

"Theeb is a jewel!"

– E. Nina Rothe, *Huffington Post*



Jordan, UK, United Arab Emirates, Qatar/ 2014 / Drama, Adventure / Arabic with English Subtitles  
100 min / 2.39 : 1 / Stereo and 5.1 Surround Sound

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## Select Press for THEEB

"This beautiful film follows the exploits of a Bedouin boy named Theeb in 1916, the same year as LAWRENCE OF ARABIA....You'd never know THEEB was a debut feature from Mr. Nowar's confident technique, and I found it astonishing, given the perfection of the performances, that all but one of the actors were Bedouin villagers who had never acted before.....More than style, though, it's the substance of THEEB that's memorable." – Joe Morgenstern, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Nowar ... has described THEEB as "an Arabic western" in the tradition of Sergio Leone. The movie is that and more." – Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

"Told from the point of view of a young Bedouin boy, this tale unfolds very much in the timeless, spare world of the desert. But these are not the sensuously undulating, lunar dunes of David Lean's masterpiece; rather, the desert in THEEB feels intimate, rough, real. You can run your hands through the sand and feel the flies on your face. That realism extends to the characters as well, thankfully." – Blige Ebiri, *New York Magazine's Vulture*

"THEEB is an arthouse gem that celebrates world cinema through a Middle Eastern perspective, and as an unfamiliar approach to familiar themes, should be lauded and sought out by those in the mood for some serious, and seriously good, cinema." – Nikola Grozdanovic, *Indiewire's The Playlist*

"A beautifully simple and stunningly elegant film....Naji Abu Nowar's delightful THEEB is a striking film, old-fashioned in tone and structure but always watchable and modestly powerful." – Mark Adams, *Screen Daily*

"It is a spectacularly epic film with a wonderfully intimate human story. It possesses everything that allows me fall in love with cinema, again and again...THEEB is...the kind of film that grabs a hold of you and doesn't let go." – E. Nina Rothe, *Huffington Post*

"A quietly gripping adventure tale...Naji Abu Nowar's THEEB is classic storytelling at its finest....Eid (Jacir) carries this concise and unsentimental film on his young shoulders with amazing assurance." --Ryan Lattanzio, *Thompson on Hollywood*

"...the story takes several surprising turns, confounding viewer expectations throughout. This combination of unhurried exposition and unexpected plot twists is a testament to the confidence of the filmmakers' vision and their faith in the strength of the material...THEEB might herald the inauguration of a new film genre: the Bedouin western." – Oleg Ivanov, *Slant*

"The ace cinematography, courtesy of Wolfgang Thaler...isn't interested so much in the beautiful landscapes as such but rather in how they can help suggest emotional states and elevate the struggles and accelerated coming-of-age of little Theeb to a higher plane. Jerry Lane's music is equally tuned into the material, imbuing the story with grandeur where necessary but also not afraid to play it small if small means heartbreaking; a mournful strings solo when Theeb dedicates himself to a terrible task involving sand and stones is haunting exactly because it's so bare bones. – Boyd van Hoeij, *The Hollywood Reporter*

"As for the quality of the film, it resonated on many levels. The script stood out because it not only told a sensitively intimate story from the perspective of a 10-year-old Bedouin boy, but it insightfully spoke to the tapestry of tribal life and brotherhood in 1916 Arabia as World War I loomed. Beyond that, the film has a timely quality due to the chaos that seems to constantly brew in the post-colonial world of the Middle East, which has caused generations of suffering and injustice. All of this comes across with a patient, delicate hand." – Hans Morgenstern, *Independent Ethos*

"The biggest surprise for me at ND/NF was the Jordanian film THEEB. A crackling adventure, a sharp critique of colonialism, and a remarkable account of a child surviving in the wilderness, THEEB draws on everything from Anthony Mann westerns to *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Black Stallion*, even Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy. But director and co-writer Naji Abu Nowar has his own distinct voice and a knack for capturing a child's point of view. He also never lets abstractions get in the way of telling his story. Wolfgang Thaler contributes gorgeous cinematography." - Daniel Eagan, *Film Journal International*

## **FULL SYNOPSIS**

1916. While war rages in the Ottoman Empire, Hussein raises his younger brother Theeb ("Wolf") in a traditional Bedouin community that is isolated by the vast, unforgiving desert. The brothers' quiet existence is suddenly interrupted when a British Army officer and his guide ask Hussein to escort them to a water well located along the old pilgrimage route to Mecca. So as not to dishonor his recently deceased father, Hussein agrees to lead them on the long and treacherous journey. The young, mischievous Theeb secretly chases after his brother, but the group soon find themselves trapped amidst threatening terrain riddled with Ottoman mercenaries, Arab revolutionaries, and outcast Bedouin raiders. Naji Abu Nowar's powerful and assured directorial debut, set in the land of Lawrence of Arabia, is a wondrous "Bedouin Western" about a boy who, in order to survive, must become a man and live up to the name his father gave him.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

1916. While war rages in the Ottoman Empire, Hussein raises his younger brother Theeb ("Wolf") in a traditional Bedouin community that is isolated by the vast, unforgiving desert. The brothers' quiet existence is suddenly interrupted when a British Army officer and his guide ask Hussein to escort them on a treacherous journey. The young, mischievous Theeb secretly chases after the travellers, but they soon find themselves trapped amidst threatening terrain riddled with mercenaries, revolutionaries, and outcast raiders, forcing Theeb to live up to the name given to him by his father.

## **LOGLINE**

Arabia, 1916. A young Bedouin boy named Theeb ("Wolf") ventures on a treacherous journey across the desert, encountering mercenaries, revolutionaries and raiders as he tries to survive and live up to the name his father gave him.

## **ASSETS**

Official Trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIvVjX4LkQ4&feature=youtu.be>

Downloadable hi-res images:

<http://www.filmmovement.com/filmcatalog/index.asp?MerchandiseID=419>

# CREDITS

## CAST

<b>Theeb</b>	Jacir Eid
<b>The Stranger</b>	Hassan Mutlag
<b>Hussein</b>	Hussein Salameh
<b>Edward</b>	Jack Fox
<b>Marji- The Guide</b>	Marji Audeh

## CREW

<b>Director</b>	Naji Abu Nowar
<b>Writers</b>	Naji Abu Nowar Bassel Ghandour
<b>Producers</b>	Bassel Ghandour Rupert Lloyd
<b>Co-Producers</b>	Nasser Kalaji Laith Majali
<b>Executive Producer</b>	Nadine Toukan
<b>Line Producer</b>	Diala Al Raie
<b>Associate Producer</b>	Yanal Kassay
<b>Music by</b>	Jerry Lane
<b>Cinematographer</b>	Wolfgang Thaler
<b>Editor</b>	Rupert Lloyd
<b>Production Designer</b>	Anna Lavelle
<b>Production Manager</b>	Diala Al Raie



## **Naji Abu Nowar, Director**

Born in the UK, Naji Abu Nowar began his filmmaking career when he was accepted into the 2005 RAWI Screenwriters lab held in association with the Sundance Institute, where he developed his first screenplay, *Shakoush* (Hammer). He then wrote and directed the short film *Death of a Boxer* (2009), which screened at international film festivals, including the Palm Springs International Shortfest, the Dubai International Film Festival, the Miami Short Film Festival and the Franco-Arab Film Festival. *THEEB* is his feature film debut.

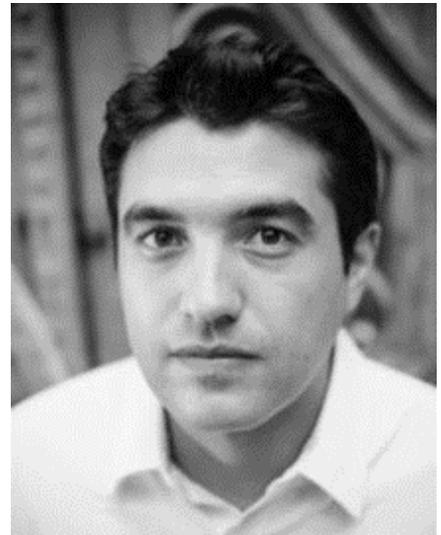
### **Director's Statement**

In Bedouin law, if a stranger arrives at your tent requesting refuge, you must grant him protection until the threat can be peacefully resolved. This is known as the law of *Dakheel* and it is considered a sacred duty for a host to protect his *Dakheel*, no matter what the circumstance. Indeed, there are many stories of a host granting protection to his guest only to discover the *Dakheel* has killed a member of the host's own family. But surprisingly this will not deter the host from his duty; he will protect the killer until peace has been made between them. A man's reputation is defined by what he does in such difficult circumstances. The more impossible the situation the more respect he receives for upholding the law.

Bedouin customs like this have grown from their environment, the desert. They are renowned for their generous hospitality because in the desert you must be able to rely on the kindness of strangers to survive. The terrain is too harsh, water and food too scarce for selfish behaviour. People need to help each other to ensure their mutual existence. It was the combination of a culture of cooperation for survival and a *Dakheel* type moral dilemma that formed the initial idea for *Theeb*. What would happen if you were stranded with your worst enemy but needed their help to stay alive? How would this relationship develop?

To overcome such a merciless predicament, a person would have to develop incredible strength of character. In Bedouin culture, a boy who endured such an ordeal would be called a *Theeb* [Wolf]. If someone calls you a wolf, you have earned their respect as a man of daring and cunning, a person who can achieve impossible feats. The wolf is an ambiguous creature both revered and feared, it is both a pack animal, loyal to its tribe, and a strong individual capable of existing by itself. So to be named *Theeb* at birth is to have the expectation of greatness placed upon you. To survive the boy must live up to the name his father gave him. But his success would be tainted by the tragic loss of childhood innocence.

-Naji Abu Nowar, June 2014



*Director Naji Abu Nowar*

## Naji Abu Nowar on Casting

When you think of epic first person narratives you picture iconic leading men like Toshiro Mifune, John Wayne and Omar Sharif. We too needed a powerful personality to fill our screen. It was crucial because our story centers around one young character, Theeb. The whole film is told from his perspective. And his experience is so dramatic, the predicament so unforgiving, that we needed to capture a real life wolf to portray our fictitious one. The whole film hinged on finding the boy who could portray both man and child; who could be timid at one moment and indomitable in the next; a wolf in sheep's clothing.

We were incredibly lucky to find Theeb very early on in the process. To gain funding, we decided to shoot a mood board to pitch potential financiers. We asked our Bedouin contact Eid Suweilheen to help us find a young boy to play Theeb. Eid sent us his son Jacir to help out. It was more a matter of convenience than any notion that we were going to cast him. But as soon as we got him on camera we knew Jacir had something special. He had real screen presence.

Casting the adult roles in the film proved much more difficult. Bedouin society does not traditionally hold the performing arts in high esteem. But I wanted authentic actors who knew Bedouin culture and closely resembled our characters. It was important they spoke the Bedouin dialect in the Bedouin accent. Jordan doesn't have a film industry let alone a tradition of film acting. It's almost impossible to find professional actors that would make the kind of commitment to live with the Bedouin and do the necessary research. We believed the best way to gain that kind of realism was to develop the locals into actors. And so the hunt for our cast began in early 2012. We invited all the Bedouin from the villages surrounding Wadi Rum to an open casting call. All in all we interviewed about 250 people.

We conducted one-on-one discussions to see if our potential actors had an active imagination, evaluate their willingness to share emotion, and most importantly their eagerness to indulge in something new. We narrowed 250 individuals down to 20 who showed the most promise. These 20 were given a weekend acting workshop to test their potential. Of the 20, only 11 were selected to participate in the principal acting workshops that would continue for almost eight months until principal photography in October of 2012. With the exception of Jack Fox, the entire cast were non-professional actors.

This lengthy process was crucial because we had to locate the right people to form Theeb's key relationships. For the role of Theeb's brother Hussein, we cast one of Jacir's cousins. During the workshops we discovered that the real life Hussein was just like an older brother to Jacir and therefore all we had to do was capture their natural relationship on camera. Finding the ruthless Stranger was a much tougher proposition. The Stranger needed to be terrifying but also required a hidden sensitivity. When we met Hassan he was very intimidating and you could see the potential for terrible violence in his eyes. But during the process, he began to open up and shared a deeply personal story that almost brought us to tears. The Stranger's character needed that duality.

The decision to cast the Bedouin was one of the most rewarding of the filmmaking process. The authenticity they gave to the roles is ingrained on screen.

## **Selected Cast & Crew Biographies**

### **Jacir Eid - “Theeb”**

Jacir Eid is the only cast member who wasn't born into nomadic life. He is part of the new generation of his Bedouin family who grew up in the Shakiriya Village of Wadi Rum, Jordan. A quiet, unassuming child, Jacir split his time between school and following his father as he guided tourists throughout their tribal territory in Wadi Rum. Jacir almost didn't win the part of Theeb, as Naji Abu Nowar found him too shy and inhibited to tackle the role. To raise financing for THEEB, the filmmakers shot a mood board to show investors what they could do. By chance, Jacir was sent as a stand-in because they couldn't find another child at such short notice. As soon as Jacir went in front of camera, it was immediately clear that he was a very special talent. In order to play the part of Theeb, Jacir had to re-engage with his culture and learn how to survive in the desert as a nomad. He was taught how to ride, track and hunt, and has since developed a love for his way of life. He also had to learn how to swim, which is an unusual hobby to learn in the desert and something he greatly enjoys. Today, having completed THEEB, he has shot another American feature film and splits his time between school and acting. At 13 years of age, Jacir is now considered a man in Bedouin culture and must help his family with their trade of guiding tourists through the desert.

### **Hussein Salameh – “Hussein”**

Hussein Salameh was born a natural athlete and showman. From early childhood he trained to race camels and has been successful in many long and short distance races held every year in the southern Jordanian deserts. His family also knows how to breed thoroughbred racing camels, and Hussein has been part of producing some of the most elegant thoroughbreds in the community. He was cast as Theeb's elder brother because the director saw his brotherly relationship with Jacir (his actual cousin) in real life and felt it was perfect for the film. This combined with his natural athleticism and grace made Hussein the ideal candidate to take on the role of the princely son of a Bedouin Sheikh. Insecure at first, Hussein gradually grew into a powerful actor with great timing. He has now acted in two more films since finishing THEEB. He splits his time between acting and working as a tour guide in the Wadi Rum Desert of Jordan.

### **Hassan Mutlag – “The Stranger”**

Hassan Mutlag grew up on a mountain plateau looking over the Wadi Rum desert valley. He spent his childhood living there as a nomad before joining the Jordanian Army as an adult. Hassan's nomadic lifestyle gave him a natural ability to handle the physical challenges of soldiering. After a career in the army he found a job as a truck inspector in the Aqaba customs terminal, married and settled down to a quiet life. One day when Hassan was visiting his local bakery he saw a casting call for THEEB. Intrigued by the possibility of acting, he turned up to the auditions and immediately impressed the director with a combination of strong masculinity and sensitivity. He looked like a fierce warrior, but in person was a kind and gentle man. The ambiguity of his ability to physically intimidate and yet illicit immediate empathy was just what the character of The Stranger needed. Hassan was reluctant to act at first, finding the workshop games too strange and actually stopped attending the workshop after the first week. Naji Abu Nowar had to convince him to continue and now Hassan has developed a great love for the craft of acting. He is now fully committed to pursuing a career as a professional actor. So far Hassan has performed in three international feature films (UK, Canada and USA) and a Jordanian TV drama series. He has also gained work in the costume and production design departments of other films and TV series. Hassan lives in the Guerra Village of Wadi Rum, Jordan.

## **Bassel Ghandour: Writer/Producer**

Bassel started as a production assistant on a number of feature films including the Academy Award-winning film THE HURT LOCKER. He later studied Cinematic Arts at the world-renowned University of Southern California, graduating in 2010. Most recently, Bassel wrote and produced the feature film THEEB, which won the Orizzonti competition's Best Director award at the 2014 Venice Film Festival. He also shares two screenwriting awards for THEEB from the Miami International Film Festival and the International Film Festival, Belgrade. Bassel also runs Bayt Al Shawareb, a production company in Amman, Jordan, which produces regional content and provides various production services.

## **Rupert Lloyd: Editor/Producer:**

Rupert is the producer and editor of the internationally-acclaimed feature film THEEB [WOLF], a Bedouin-Western shot in Wadi Rum, Jordan (where Lawrence of Arabia was filmed). To date THEEB has won 15 awards, including a Lion for 'Best Director' at the 71st Venice Film Festival, and has been released in 37 screens across the Arab world. Before becoming a producer and editor Rupert worked in post-production. During this time he worked as an assistant editor on the six-time Academy Award-winner THE HURT LOCKER; Disney's THE CRIMSON SING: THE MYSTERY OF THE FLAMINGOS (IMAX); as well as editing Mahmoud Al-Massad's award-winning second feature, THIS IS MY PICTURE WHEN I WAS DEAD. He has also cut commercials for global brands such as IKEA, Dulux, Cadbury's, & Cancer Research.

## **Wolfgang Thaler: Director of Photography**

Since 1990 Wolfgang Thaler has had a prolific career shooting over 50 films. During this time he has worked on numerous occasions with world-renowned director Ulrich Seidl. His work with Seidl has seen them nominated for the Palme D'Or at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival for IMPORT/EXPORT, as well as picking up the Grand Jury Prize at the 2001 Venice film Festival for HUNDSTAGE (DOG DAYS). He has recently wrapped up shooting Ulrich Seidl's latest film PARADIES. During his productive career Wolfgang has also worked consistently with Austrian director Michael Glawogger, winning international accolades for WORKINGMAN'S DEATH and WHORE'S GLORY. In 2009 Wolfgang received the Marburg award for 'exceptional achievements in film aesthetics', joining the prestigious ranks of cinematographers like Raoul Coutard. Eduardo Serra, Frank Griebel, Robby Muller, Slawdomar Idziak and Anthony Dodd Mantle. In between shoots Wolfgang is a Professor of Cinematography at the Vienna Film Academy.

## **FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

Winner – Orizzonti Best Director, Venice International Film Festival  
Sutherland Jury Special Mention, BFI London International Film Festival  
Winner – FIPRESCI Award, Abu Dhabi International Film Festival  
Winner – Best Arab Film, Abu Dhabi International Film Festival  
*Variety* Arab Filmmaker of the Year  
Prospects of Arab Cinema Jury Special Mention, Cairo International Film Festival  
Winner – Best Debut Director, Camerimage International Film Festival  
Student Jury Special Mention for Actor Jacir Eid, Carthage International Film Festival  
Winner – Best Film, Film Fest Belgrade  
Winner – Best Screenplay, Film Fest Belgrade  
Winner – Best Screenplay, Miami International Film Festival  
Winner – Audience Award, Las Palmas International Film Festival  
Winner – Best Debut Film, Beijing International Film Festival  
Winner – Best Film, Malmo Arab Film Festival

### Selected Festivals:

Venice Film Festival  
Toronto International Film Festival  
London Film Festival  
Abu Dhabi Film Festival  
Palm Springs International Film Festival  
New Directors/New Films  
Miami International Film Festival  
SXSW Film Festival  
San Francisco International Film Festival  
Seattle International Film Festival

## **About Film Movement**

Launched in 2002, Film Movement is a full-service North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films, based in New York City. Film Movement has released more than 250 feature films and shorts from 50 countries on six continents, including top prize winners from Sundance, Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Berlin, Tribeca and other prestigious festivals. Film Movement releases its films through numerous distribution channels, including thousands of art-house cinemas, universities and libraries; home video; television outlets; Cable Video on Demand (including its very own branded cable VOD platform—Film Festival on Demand—available in over 40 million US homes); In-flight Entertainment; and broadband outlets. For more information, please visit [www.filmmovement.com](http://www.filmmovement.com).