

# Wadjda

Cert PG Saudi Arabia 2012 97 mins

## Crew

Director/screenplay Haifaa Al-Mansour  
 Cinematography Lutz Reitemeier  
 Film Editing Andreas Wodraschke  
 Original music Max Richter

## Cast

Reem Abdullah Mother  
 Waad Mohammed Wadjda  
 Abdullrahman  
     Al Gohani Abdullah  
 Ahd Ms. Hussa  
 Sultan Al Assaf Father

## Synopsis

*Riyadh, the present. Ten-year-old Wadjda dreams of owning the green bicycle that she passes in a shop every day on her way to school. She wants to race against her friend Abdullah, but riding bikes is frowned upon for girls and Wadjda's mother, pre-occupied with marital problems, refuses to buy it for her.*

*Wadjda concocts a plan to earn enough money to afford the bike by secretly selling 'illicit products' in her school playground. But her plans are soon exposed, leaving her with one last chance to raise the money she needs: a Koran recital competition with a big cash prize...*



- Haifaa Al-Mansour is the first female filmmaker from Saudi Arabia, Wadjda is her first feature film and it is the first feature film ever shot in Saudi Arabia.
- The film took over five years to make. Most of the time was spent trying to find financial backing, and getting filming permission. Despite innumerable difficulties, Al-Mansour insisted on filming in Saudi Arabia for reasons of authenticity.
- The film script was developed when Al-Mansour attended the Rawi Sundance Writers' Lab, which led to financial backing from Germany via Razor Films, who co-produced such films as *Paradise Now* and *Waltz With Bashir*.



## Reviews

"A woman's voice reveals her nakedness," scolds Wadjda's teacher, as she and a friend run laughing from a Riyadh sidestreet into their school playground. "What if a man had heard you?"

Well, plenty of men will hear her now. *Wadjda* is the first film to have been entirely filmed within Saudi Arabia, by that country's first female director, no less. It tells the story of this ten-year-old schoolgirl, and many like her, and it is the best thing I have seen at this year's Venice International Film Festival so far.

Haifaa Al Mansour's picture has a kind of neorealist clarity and simplicity that feels like a welcome splash of ice water ...[she]reveals in the film's production notes that she often had to direct from her production van via walkie-talkie when filming in more conservative areas, but *Wadjda* offers the hope that for the next generation of Saudi women, things might be different.

Modest as it may look, this is boundary-pushing cinema in all the best ways, and what a thrill it is to hear those boundaries creak.

**Robbie Collin, *The Telegraph*, July 2013**

... Mohammed's central performance is commendable as the rebellious, angel-faced tomboy with a cheeky façade and a skewed moral compass: she presents a refreshingly optimistic view of youth in revolt. *Wadjda* naturally employs some underhand manipulation tactics in her bid for glory which in turn generates many of the film's standout comedy moments.

The subject of female oppression in Saudi Arabia is still considered a top-ranking taboo, making this something of an insouciant filmmaking milestone, not simply in terms of its dissection of female status and discrimination, but the courageousness of writer/director Al-Mansour, who operates in the face of incessant adversity and torrents of hate mail.

Al-Mansour describes the film's central premise as one of "hope, embracing change and moving ahead", messages powerfully apparent by the film's gracefully poignant conclusion.

**Rebecca Ellis, *Little White Lies*, July 2013**

Speaking about *Wadjda's* entry in competition for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, Sultan Al Bazie, head of the Saudi nominating committee, said: "*We are proud of the film as an authentic representation of our country and culture and are pleased to see the themes of the film resonate with audiences well beyond our borders*".