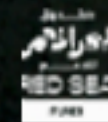




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Locarno Film Festival
PIAZZA GRANDE
OFFICIAL SELECTION

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2026

إركالا حلم كلكامش IRKALLA GILGAMESH'S DREAM



Région
île de France



LIONCEAU
FILMS

مؤسسة الدوحة للأفلام
Doha Film Institute





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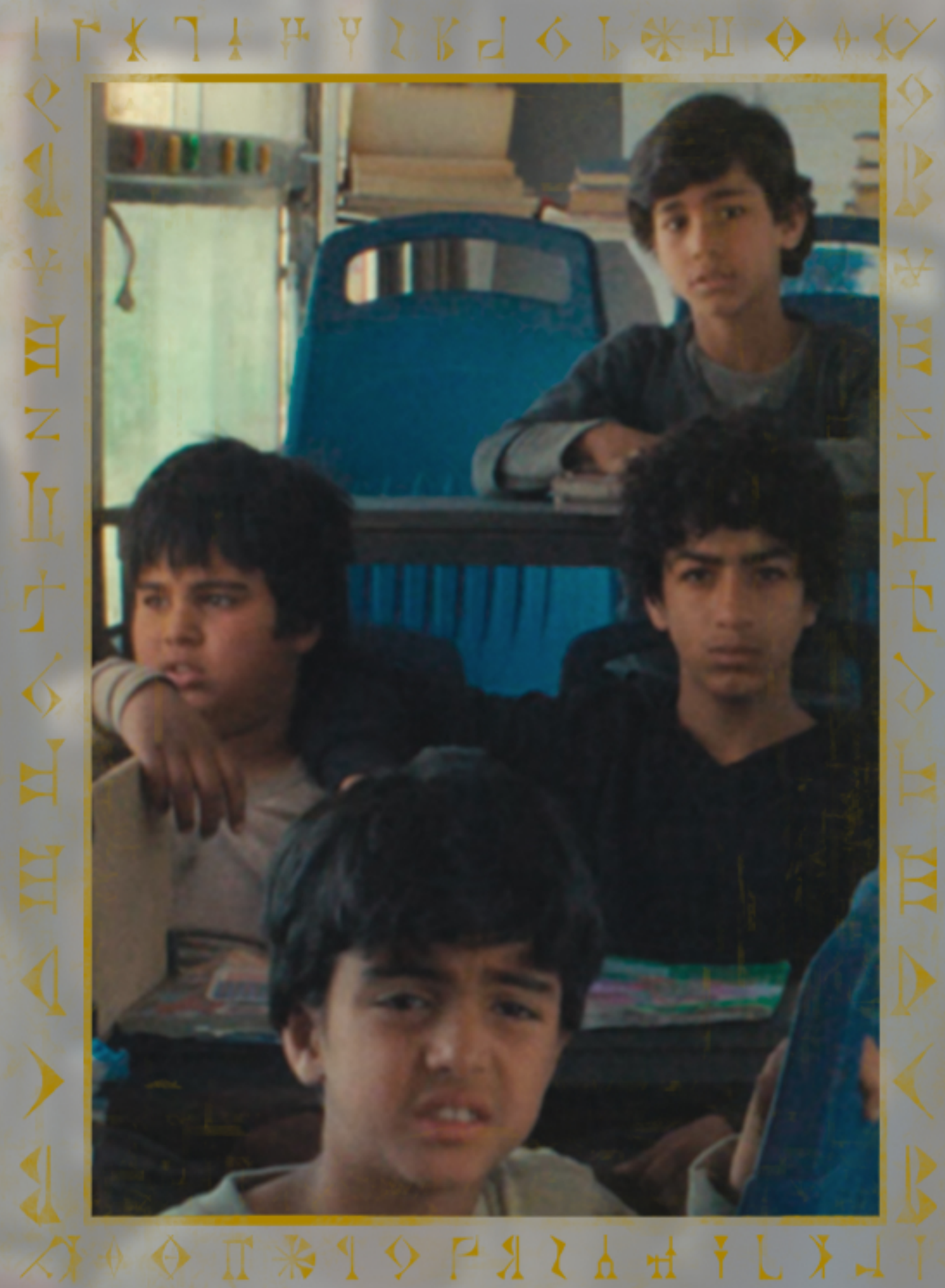
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CONTENTS

Log-line
Short Synopsis
Long Synopsis
Director's Statement
Director's Biography
About the production companies
Cast & Crew



In a burning Baghdad, a homeless boy escapes into myth, seeking to resurrect his parents. As his friend is drawn into violence, Chum-Chum must save him, guided by the shadows of Gilgamesh and the Lamassu in a city that refuses to die.

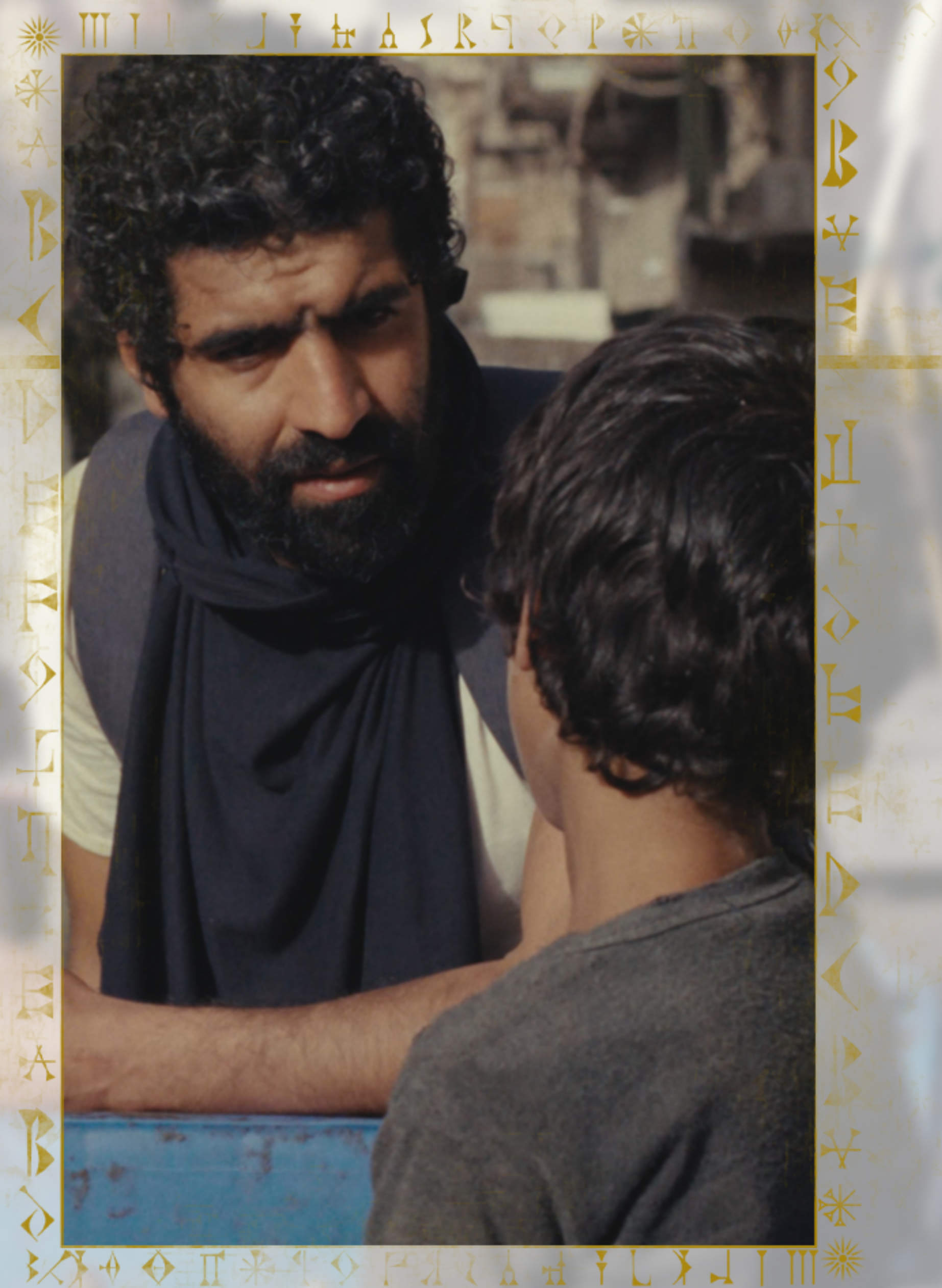




Short Synopsis:

Baghdad, October 2019.

In the streets of Baghdad, Chum-Chum, a homeless and dreamy nine-year-old boy, believes the Tigris hides a gateway to the underworld Irkala, where he can resurrect his parents - an idea sparked by the legend of Gilgamesh. As his friend Moody is dragged into a dark militia plot, Chum-Chum must choose between myth and salvation. A tale of grief, faith and the search for light in a city that refuses to die.





LONG SYNOPSIS

Baghdad, October, 2019. A city simmering beneath the rubble. Uprising looms in the air.

At the heart of this chaos lives Chum-Chum, a homeless boy who sees the world unlike anyone else. He doesn't believe in poverty, in violence or in borders. He believes in one thing only: that myth can save him.

With his closest friend Moody, they wander, steal and breathe the dream of escape. But while Moody longs to flee Iraq at any cost, Chum-Chum dares to go deeper - into the underworld of Irkalla, to bring his dead parents back to life. Just as Gilgamesh once did in the ancient tale he watched on a mobile classroom bus driven by Maryam, a woman who lost everything and now teaches children on the edge of oblivion.

But nothing stays the same.

Moody sinks into the world of militias as Sarah, the girl he secretly loves, dances in the shadows to raise the money they need. And in the streets of Baghdad, the winged bull Lamassu rises from the walls - as if history itself is breaking through the pavement.

When Chum-Chum discovers Moody's link to a crime that forever shattered Maryam's life, something inside him breaks.

But uprisings wait for no one, and destiny roars like an ancient beast.

Irkalla: Dreams of Gilgamesh is not just a story about a boy searching for his family: it is a cry, a myth, a stubborn dream in a city desperate for meaning.

Can legend be salvation?
Or has modern Baghdad drifted too far to be redeemed?





III I L K J I H A S R T O P * II O O K



X O O II * I O G Y S P H A I T X T I III



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In every film I make, I begin from a wound that never healed - from a deep inner certainty that there's a story screaming inside me, waiting for someone to listen. A story that is not just a narrative, but fragments of a nation's memory, a generation's pulse, a pain not seen with the eye but felt with the soul. A story about Iraq, about wounds that never stop bleeding and children who have become mere numbers. Then silence.

Between 2003 and 2015, I made films about the victims of dictatorship, occupation and terrorism. I thought I was documenting the past. But 20 years later, I found myself facing a harsher reality: the victim had become the oppressor. The child who once deserved protection had become a tool of violence, wielding weapons instead of dreams. And so, the tragedy of Iraq repeats - a vicious circle that devours hope and passes down scars.

Irkalla: Dreams of Gilgamesh is more than a film. It is a return to the lost final tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh. That strange, elusive tablet in which Gilgamesh descends once more into the underworld - not to seek immortality but to listen to an unfinished voice, a toy left behind, an echo of laughter, the shadow of what was lost... Enkidu.

I believe this film is that missing tablet, seen through modern eyes, through the soul of a diabetic child named Chum-Chum who doesn't descend to Irkalla for glory, but for a father and mother who vanished before he could even ask "Why?"

He's not a superhero, just a small soul searching for balance, for the Ka of Iraq, for the echo of a warmth that no longer exists in the streets.

And just as the winged bull Lamassu bursts from the walls to guard the dream, Chum-Chum drifts beneath the skies of Baghdad, carrying fragments of myth as his shield. At the heart of this myth, a poem of resistance is born where imagination becomes the final trench - where fleeing into legend is not cowardice, but a soft defiance against a reality that devours spirits in silence.

Beside him, his friend Moody sinks into the world of militias. Maryam, the grieving teacher, stands witness to the thread of blood that binds children to death rather than life.

This film doesn't offer answers. It walks a tightrope between symbol and reality, between myth and politics, between dream and revolution. Through it, I wanted to redefine the Iraqi child - not as a victim, but as a storyteller, a being who creates meaning when the world fails him.

With a language that blends poetry and pain, symbolism and truth, innocence and cruelty, I tried to say these children are not the remains of war, they are the seeds of life. They are not a burden to the future, they are the ones who will write it, if only their voices are heard. A whisper in a city that screams... A final page, maybe, with which we write the end of a tragedy or the beginning of something new.

I dream that audiences will see in this film not just the story of a child, but a reflection of that missing tablet from the epic: a tablet not carved in stone but pulsing with the heartbeat of a child, in a time where the inscriptions have faded. And only longing remains...

Mohamed Al-Daradji



DIRECTOR'S BIO

Born in Baghdad, Mohamed Al-Daradji is an award-winning filmmaker known for his powerful, socially-engaged cinema. He studied Film and Television at the Media Academy in Hilversum (Netherlands) before moving to the UK, where he earned two Masters degrees in Cinematography and Directing from the Northern Film School in Leeds.

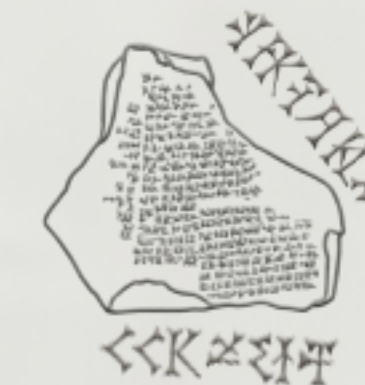
He is the co-founder of Human Film, a UK-based independent production company with producer Isabelle Stead. Human Film's feature productions have received numerous accolades at international festivals.

Alongside his filmmaking career, Mohamed founded the Iraqi Independent Film Center, a pioneering initiative dedicated to nurturing the spirit of independence and creativity among emerging and established Iraqi filmmakers.





FILMOGRAPHY



Irkalla Dreams of Gilgamesh – 2025

Feature film – 106 mins
Writer/Director/Producer

Hijra - 2025

Feature film – 115 mins
Produced by Mohamed Jabarah Al-Daradji
Directed by Shahad Ameen

Mosul - 2020

Feature film – 102 mins
Executive Producer Mohamed Jabarah Al-Daradji
Directed by Matthew Michael Carnahan

Scales - 2019

Feature film – 74 mins
Executive Producer Mohamed Jabarah Al-Daradji
Directed by Shahad Ameen

The Journey (Baghdad Station) – 2017

Feature film – 82 mins
Writer/Director/Producer
Co-produced with Lionceau Films
Received CNC's Aide aux Cinémas du Monde
Awards: Grand Prix & Best Actress - Festival des Cinémas Arabes, Paris 2018.
Festivals: Toronto International Film Festival 2017, Busan International Film Festival 2017, BFI London Film Festival 2017, Dublin International Film Festival 2017
Iraq's official submission for the Oscars and Golden Globes 2018

In the Sands of Babylon – 2013

Feature film – 90 mins
Writer /Director/ Editor
Award for Best Arab Film - Abu Dhabi International Film Festival 2013

In My Mother's Arms - 2011

Feature documentary – 81 mins
Writer/Director/Editor
Co-produced with Al Jazeera English
Official Selection – Toronto International Film Festival
Variety Middle East Filmmaker of the Year Award
Asia Pacific Screen Award 2012 – Best Documentary

Son of Babylon - 2010

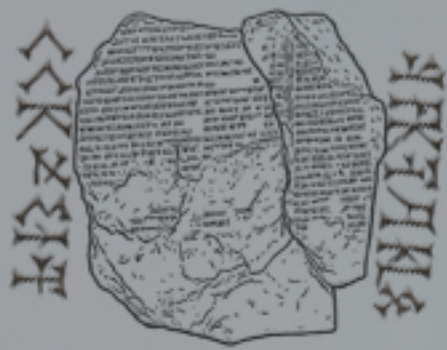
Feature film - 90 mins
Writer/Director/Editor
Produced through the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program.
Co-produced with seven countries
More than 50 international awards, including the Amnesty and Peace Prize - Berlinale 2010
Iraq's official submission for the Oscars and Golden Globes 2011

Iraq: War, Love, God & Madness - 2008

Feature documentary - 75 mins
Writer/Director/Editor
Rotterdam International Film Festival

Ahlaam - 2005

Feature film - 110 mins
Writer/Director/Producer
More than 50 international awards
Iraq's official submission for the Oscars and Golden Globes 2007



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Iraqi Independent Film Center (IIFC)

The Iraqi Independent Film Center (IIFC) is a leading cultural and cinematic institution founded in Baghdad after 2010. Established by a group of visionary Iraqi filmmakers, the Center was created to support independent film production in Iraq and to empower young Iraqi talents through storytelling.

Mission and Vision

IIFC was built on the belief that cinema is a powerful tool for change. It offers a free and independent platform for Iraqi filmmakers to express untold stories, often reflecting the country's complex social, political and cultural realities. The Center fosters a vibrant film community that encourages experimentation, dialogue and artistic freedom.

Activities and Programmes

Intensive training workshops in directing, screenwriting, cinematography, editing and sound design.

Development and production of socially-engaged short and feature films.

Mentorship and production support for emerging filmmakers.

Partnerships with international film festivals and cultural institutions.

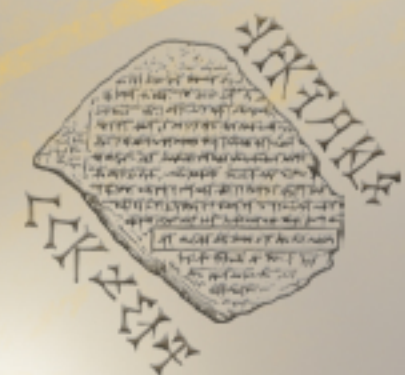
Key Achievements

One of IIFC's landmark productions is *The Journey* (Baghdad Station, 2017), the first Iraqi film to be released in local cinemas after 27 years of absence. The Center has supported numerous award-winning films that have premiered at prestigious international festivals, including Berlin, Venice and Toronto.

Cultural Impact

IIFC has played a central role in revitalising Iraq's independent cinema movement. Its commitment to storytelling, talent development and international engagement has made it a crucial hub for cultural resilience and cinematic innovation in Iraq and the region.





ABOUT THE PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Human Film (UK)

A UK-based production company dedicated to authentic, socially-engaged cinema. It develops and produces award-winning fiction and documentary films, while actively supporting emerging Iraqi talent through international workshops and real-life storytelling.

Image Nation Abu Dhabi (UAE)

A leading content studio in the Middle East renowned for its Oscar, BAFTA and Emmy-winning productions. The studio is committed to amplifying regional voices and bridging powerful local stories with global audiences.

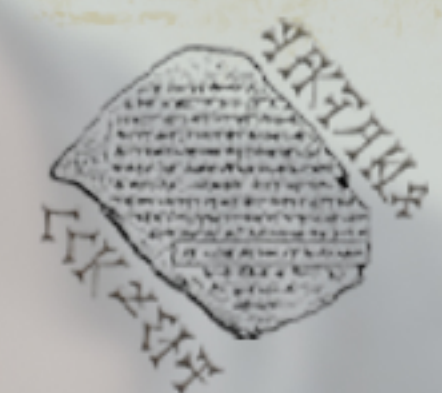
Lionceau Films (France)

A French production company focused on bold, internationally-driven storytelling. It produces fiction, documentary and co-productions, with a strong commitment to culturally rich narratives that resonate around the world.

Beit Amin Productions (Saudi Arabia)

Based in Jeddah, Beit Amin Productions is dedicated to telling authentic Arab stories. Its films are rooted in regional heritage and identity, with a vision to create cinema that carries both local depth and international impact.





KEY CAST AND CREW

Writer/Director/Producer
Mohamed Jabarah Al-Daradji

Cast

Chum-Chum – Youssef Husham Al-Thahabi

Moody – Hussein Raad Zuwayr

Mariam – Samar Kazem Jawad

Mohammed - Amere Jabarah

Sarah - Lujain Star Naimat

Supported by

Région Ile-de-France

Doha Film Institute

Red Sea Fund

Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC)

French Embassy in Iraq

Screenplay by Karim Traïdia
Co-written by Shahad Ameen & Hasan Falih

Directors of Photography
Nikzat Saed
Mohamed Jabarah Al-Daradji
Salam Salman

Production Designers
Chris Richmond
Ali Saad

Executive Producers
Ben Ross
Derek Dauchy
Ali Al-Daradji
Isabelle Stead

Co-Producers
Hélène Cases
Salam Salman/ Talal Adel Al Asmani

Associate Producer
Saif Ali Jabarah

Line Producer
Shahad Ali Jabarah

Wardrobe Manager
Tamara Al-Nouri

Edited by
Mathilde Muyard

Original Music by
Fabien & Mike Kourtzer

Recording Mixer
Laurent Chassaigne

Sound Editor
Olivier Laurent

ADDITIONAL RE RECORDING MIXER
ROLAND VAJS

Additional Re-recording Mixer
Roland Vajs

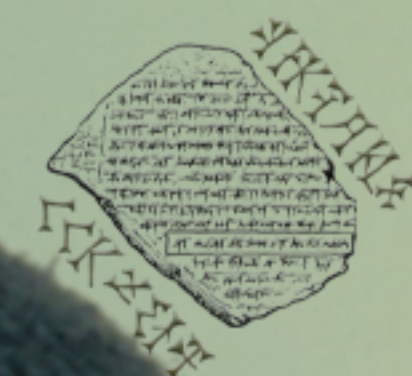
Artistic Advisors
Hervé de Luze
Karim Traïdia

Post-Production VFX Supervisors
Filippo Robino
Pietro Coco

Pre-Production VFX Supervisors

Jawad Matouri
Mohammad Fartosy





IN A CITY THAT REFUSES TO DIE, A CHILD DARES TO RESURRECT LOVE