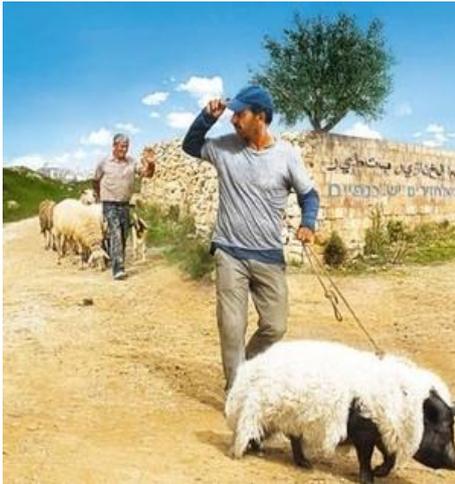


# When Pigs Have Wings

**Director:** Sylvain Estibal  
**Country:** France/Germany/Belgium  
**Date:** 2011

A review by Bernard Besserglik for *The Hollywood Reporter*:



When Jafaar, a Palestinian fisherman, finds a live 100-pound pig in his nets, he knows there's trouble in store. From this simple premise, working on a shoestring budget, debuting director **Sylvain Estibal** has conjured up a political parable with satirical bite. A Franco-German-Belgian co-production, *When Pigs Have Wings* is not one for the multiplex but should fare respectably in its home territory, at selected arthouses elsewhere and at niche festivals.

Jafaar is played by **Sasson Gabay**, the Iraqi-born actor who starred in *The Band's Visit* (2007), a movie with which *Pigs* has some affinity, notably a determination to use humor to debunk Arab-Israeli differences. The action is set on the eve of Israel's voluntary disengagement from Gaza in 2005, although the chronology is deliberately left hazy.

The pig's arrival complicates life for Jafaar, who first attempts to hide it from his wife Fatima (**Baya Belal**) and then unload it onto a choleric United Nations official (**Ulrich Tukur**), until he is persuaded by his local barber (**Gassan Abbas**) to gain some commercial advantage from this unexpected windfall. He proposes to sell it to Yelena (**Myriam Tekaia**), a young Russian-Jewish farm worker with whom he communicates through a wire fence. She insists that what she needs is not the pig itself but its sperm for pig-breeding purposes.

Cue a series of sperm-related gags, including Miss Piggy pinups and a Palestinian policeman who confiscates Jafaar's flask and quaffs its contents, taking it to be medication when in fact it is the results of the pig's pleasuring. The humor here, as for most of the first half of the film, is broad, bordering on slapstick.

The gloves come off in the second half when local Islamist militants, learning of Jafaar's activities, accuse him of siding with the enemy on the grounds that the pigs Yelena is breeding are used for demeaning purposes. They seize Jafaar and the pig and he finds himself being lined up as a suicide bomber, with both of them fitted out in dynamite waistcoats.

Estibal skewers both sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict impartially, with a keen eye for absurdities and class disparities. As a former reporter from the region currently based in Uruguay, he brings an outsider's eye to the Middle East conflict. If the why-can't-we-all-just-get-along message is simplistic, the film, shot in Malta, and occasionally rough-hewn, has its heart in the right place and is worth 90 minutes of anyone's time.

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