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For downloadable images, visit <http://pressroom.pbs.org>

For the program companion website, visit [pbs.org/independentlens/wham-bam-islam](http://pbs.org/independentlens/wham-bam-islam)

**TENTH SEASON OF PBS'S INDEPENDENT LENS PREMIERES  
ON THURSDAY OCTOBER 13 WITH *WHAM! BAM! ISLAM!***

*Can a comic book challenge Western prejudices, stem the tide of extremism, provide positive role models for Muslim children, and make a profit as well?*

(San Francisco, CA) — [Wham! Bam! Islam!](#) follows one of the most intriguing recent stories to come out of the Middle East: the creation of *THE 99*, the first Muslim superhero comic book created by Kuwaiti entrepreneur Naif Al-Mutawa. *Wham! Bam! Islam!* follows the tumultuous journey of *THE 99* from concept to reality, from acclaim to censure by Muslim religious leaders, from the edge of bankruptcy to plans for theme parks, as Al-Mutawa dodges cultural minefields and doggedly pursues his vision amidst obstacles only a superhero could surmount. Directed by Isaac Solotaroff, *Wham! Bam! Islam!* will kick off the tenth season of the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* on Thursday, October 13, 2011 at 10 PM (check local listings).

In 2003, Dr. Naif Al-Mutawa — a Kuwaiti psychologist, graduate of Columbia Business School, and father of four boys — had a unique idea: create a comic book series with roots in Islam and Islamic culture. Al-Mutawa came up with the concept of *THE 99*, a team of superheroes who each exemplify one of the 99 attributes of Allah and fight together against evil. He saw *THE 99* as not only a smart business model, but as an idealistic social endeavor. Believing that “Muslim children need new heroes,” Al-Mutawa’s *THE 99* would reinforce the traditional Islamic virtues of compassion, understanding, and tolerance, and provide a positive alternative to some of the extremist messages fed to young Muslims. He also hoped that *THE 99* would help improve the image of Islam in the West.



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Despite facing a daunting task that had never been attempted (comics were relatively unknown in the Arab market except for a few Western imports), Al-Mutawa managed to raise \$7 million in initial capital from 54 investors across four continents. He even lured a team of Marvel comic veterans to the creative team for *THE 99*. But when the first issue is released during Ramadan 2006, the initial positive media whirlwind is offset by suspicions from cultural gatekeepers who ban the comic in Saudi Arabia, causing rumors of a possible *fatwa* to surface.

Al-Mutawa then faced an even more vexing nemesis: the global marketplace. With *THE 99* missing its projected sales numbers in the Middle East, Al-Mutawa turned to theme parks and animation, hoping that he could salvage his fledgling brand through these more lucrative platforms. Realizing that *THE 99* will not survive if focused solely on the Middle East, Al-Mutawa targeted an international and predominately non-Muslim market. However, in doing so, will he be forced to abandon the underlying ideals of *THE 99* in order to make it financially viable?

Engrossing and fast-paced, *Wham! Bam! Islam!* is a fascinating look at what happens when ideals, money, religion, and pop culture collide in the global marketplace.

The film is part of Diverse Muslim Voices, a multi-year media initiative to build awareness and improve understanding in the U.S. of diverse Muslim societies. Funding is provided by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.

To learn more about the film and the issues involved, visit the companion website for *Wham! Bam! Islam!* at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/wham-bam-islam>. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

### **About the Filmmaker**

#### **Isaac Solotaroff (Director)**

Isaac Solotaroff has worked as a documentary producer and editor since 1998. His work has been nominated for an Emmy® and has received a special commendation from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. His last film, *Visioning Tibet* (2005), was acquired by American Public Television and selected for over 30 international film festivals. Solotaroff's other films include *Los Romeros*, which was nominated for an Emmy in 2002, and his first film *Belief Amended, Faith Revealed*, which was chosen as "one of the outstanding documentaries" of 1999 by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

### **About *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the

Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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