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### Cinema review: Habibi is a tragic, and optimistic, modern love story

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Both tragic and hopeful, Habibi is a modern love story based on the seventh-century Arabic poem *Majnun Layla*

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**GULF NEWS**

Dubai: Both tragic and hopeful, Habibi is a modern love story based on the seventh-century Arabic poem *Majnun Layla*.

In the re-telling of this story, Layla and Qays fall in love while away at university in the West Bank. After being forced to return home by the Israeli government before graduating, they long to be together but their differing circumstances and family backgrounds forbid it.

#### Doctor and a construction worker

She is from a middle class family who wants her to marry a doctor, and he is a construction worker, living with his family in a nearby refugee camp.

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Familiar without being predictable, poetic without being trite, the story is endearing. The characters are brought to life through the relationships between characters that develop through interesting dialogue over the course of the film - especially between Layla and her father.

The stand-out performance is undoubtedly delivered by our heroine, Layla, played by Maisa Abd Elhadi. Whether you agree with Layla's actions or not, you can't help but sympathise and with her and admire her wit and her strength.

Abd Elhadi never falters in her portrayal of Layla.

Today's rendition took nine years to film and due to various complications, had to be re-shot in the West Bank after many scenes had already been filmed in Gaza.

Director Susan Youssef made the movie without any support from Israel or corporate financiers as she wanted to maintain the cultural and artistic integrity of

the film.