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In the Empty Quarter

by [Ben Downing](#)

The outlandish life of Wilfred Thesiger.

The telltale knocking of opportunity sounds different to each of us, no doubt, but to Wilfred Thesiger it had an especially odd timbre. It was at a dinner party in Addis Ababa—not a place much known for affording opportunities—that he met a representative of the Desert Locust Research Organization. Would Thesiger by chance be interested in going alone to Rub’ al Khali, the notorious “Empty Quarter” of Arabia, to look for locust outbreak centers? Though hardly the sort of offer at which most men would leap, to Thesiger it seemed heaven-sent. He had spent much of his life among various tribes in several deserts, but the Bedouin of Rub’ al Khali were the ultimate desert tribe, wandering the ultimate infernal wasteland; he therefore took the job at once. Lingered long after his locust duties had been discharged, Thesiger ended up spending no less than five years, from 1945 to 1950, in and around t ...

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