FADE IN:

EXT. DIRT FIELD - DAY

A dry white bone lies in the dirt. TAHIR DINAR, a sturdy ten-year-old African boy, slides into view and picks it up.

Sprints away. Other children chasing him, laughing, engaged in a game of anshel, an African version of rugby.

Tahir races across the field beaming with the joy of sport.

He darts between two boys, breaks into the open, in sight of the goal, which is just a line in the dirt, when from out of nowhere a tall teenage girl runs him down.

Holds him until the others catch up and tackle him in a pile.

Tahir laughs. Clings to the bone. Tosses it away. The pack of children race after it and Tahir rolls over onto his back, breathless.

IN THE SKY

A speck of an airliner leaves a contrail in the stratosphere.

TAHIR

Shields his eyes from the sun. Watches the plane for a moment then hops up and rejoins the game.

LATER

The game ends. The children disperse from the playing field.

A group of boys pass the skeleton of a dead donkey. One of them throws the bone back where it came from.

EXT. GRASS FIELD - DAY

Tahir walks across the camel-colored grasslands of West Sudan toward a cluster of huts on an open plain. A beautiful tableau of a boy walking beneath an acacia tree silhouetted against a setting crimson sun.

EXT. ACACIA TREE - DAY

Tahir lifts a stone at the base of the tree and takes out a colorful bracelet wrapped in a cloth. Pulls a tiny blue stone from his pocket and attaches it to the bracelet.

EXT. HUT - NIGHT

A goat roasts over an open fire.

Tahir's MOTHER, an attractive woman in her late twenties, cooks the evening meal.

Tahir walks up and drops a load of firewood beside the flames. Squats down next to his mother and adds a branch to the fire.

Mother stands and arches her stiff back.

MOTHER
Tahir, watch this for Mama. Don't let it burn.

She gives him an affectionate squeeze on the shoulder and turns to leave.

A mangy, three-legged dog approaches the fire in a crouch.

Tahir's mother picks up a stone and throws it at the dog, running him off.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Go on, get away. Go!

Tahir watches the pathetic dog hobble off into the darkness.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

Tahir eats dinner with his mother and FATHER - a tall, raw-boned man of thirty. They sit on reed mats before a low, flat table with a half dozen bowls of food before them: goat, mashed fava beans, millet porridge, salad and hot sauce.

Mother picks up a jebona, a Fur coffee pot, and fills tiny cups for her husband and herself. Tahir's bracelet of multicolored stones on her wrist.

She puts it on display for Tahir. Subtly flaunts it and smiles at her son, pleased with his gift.

She leaves the table and Tahir takes the opportunity to slip a piece of goat into his pants pocket.

His father notices.

Tahir concentrates on his dinner, his father's eyes upon him. After a moment he glances up at his father who gives him a reproachful look.

EXT. HUT - NIGHT

Tahir slips out the entrance of his home. Walks around to the back of the hut, to a grass field draped in darkness where he whistles softly.

Moments later the three-legged dog comes out of the dark wagging his tail.

Tahir removes the piece of meat from his pocket.

TAHIR
(feeds the dog)
Here, Amirock, your favorite, goat.
I saved it just for you.

Tahir sits down beside the dog and gazes up an orchard of stars, listening to the music of the CRICKETS.

His father appears from around the side of the hut.

FATHER
Wasting goat on that dog again?

Tahir turns, caught.

His father smiles.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Better not let Mother find out or she'll give you nothing but millet for a month.

He sits down beside his son.

FATHER (CONT'D)
What do you see in this ugly dog?

TAHIR
He is my friend.

FATHER
You have lots of friends.

TAHIR
Yes, but he doesn't.

The comment strikes a chord with his father and he takes a long look at Tahir, assessing him.

FATHER
You have a good heart, Tahir, very big, with much room in it, and I want you to keep it so. But you have a good head too, and you must learn to use it. Do not be too kind, for this is not a kind world, and it can be very hard on people like you.

TAHIR
Yes, Papa, but Amirock was hungry and he especially likes goat.

FATHER
Does he now.

He rubs his son's head affectionately. Pulls him a little closer and they sit quietly like this staring out at a sliver of moon on the horizon and the distant dark peaks of the Jebel Marra Mountains.

On one of the mountains, the red glow of a large fire, like a beacon in the night.

TAHIR
That fire must be very big.

Tahir's father stares at it, his face strained and worried.

TAHIR (CONT'D)
What for could they need such a big fire, Papa?

His father smiles, masks his concern.

FATHER
Perhaps theirs is a big family and they have much food to cook.

TAHIR
No family is so big.

Father looks again at the distant fire.

FATHER
There is great trouble in Sudan, son, great trouble.

TAHIR
This trouble, it is far away?

His father doesn't answer, lost in a burgeoning fear. He breaks free of it, turns to his son.

FATHER
Better say "good night" to your friend. It's time you went to sleep. I'll need your help tomorrow after school and a tired boy cannot learn and carry millet.

TAHIR
I will fight with you, Papa. I am not afraid.

They stand. His father puts his arm around Tahir and guides him back inside.

FATHER
No? That is good. Now I feel much safer. I'll have you at my side — the boy who runs from bats.

TAHIR
I don't run from bats.

FATHER
Ah, but I do. Look! There's one.

Tahir jumps back. His father runs past him.

FATHER (CONT'D)
He's going to get you!

Tahir chases his father, laughing. Amirock watches them go.

INT. SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Tahir and a dozen other students sit on a large mat spread beneath an open-air structure with a thatched roof and thin tree trunk rails in place of walls.

A young Fur woman, their teacher, goes over a lesson on a chalkboard, English and Fur sentences side by side.

STUDENTS
The big, white cloud is high. The small, red bird is sleeping. The angry, old lion is...

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Tahir, walking ahead of other students, comes home from school carrying his slate.

He passes a group of women at the village well. Hauling up water. Carrying it away in pots placed on their heads.

He reaches his home and enters.

INT. HUT - DAY

His mother kneels at the table stitching a torn jalabiya. She greets him with a smile, keeps a governing eye on him while he puts away his things from school.

Tahir takes chalk from his pocket and carefully lays it and the slate beside his sleeping mat. Glances furtively at his mother then takes out a beetle and puts it in a cup beside his mat with other beetles.

MOTHER
Another cousin?

Tahir looks up guiltily and holds back a smile. His mother grins and waves him on his way - it is a joke between them.

She resumes her mending and Tahir hurries out.

Once gone, his mother looks after him, following him with her eyes as he runs off through the village. It's in her eyes: he is the light of her life.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Tahir's father works the fields, cutting millet with a sickle. In the distance comes Tahir hustling down a dirt path.

He joins his father and moves seamlessly to work beside him.

Gathering millet. Tying it into bunches.

LATER

They work beneath a blazing hot sun. Tahir stops and rests. Looks around at the blue cloud-swept sky.

His father walks by drenched with sweat.

Tahir watches him pass, thoughtfully, then resumes his work.

LATER STILL

Father and son rest in the shade of a tree, sharing a jug of water and a melon. Tahir is up to his cheeks in a piece. He tosses aside the peel, wipes his face and looks out across the golden field.

In the distance other families labor in the sun.

TAHIR
Will I always work our field?

FATHER
You are how old now, ten, and already you tire of it?

TAHIR
No, I'm not tired. But what for do I go to school if all my life I am to grow millet.

FATHER
Maybe you don't grow millet. Maybe God sends a drought and all the millet dries up. Then what?

Tahir ponders the thought.

TAHIR
Someday I would like to see a city. I think that would be something to see.

His father turns to comment but pauses, his thoughts interrupted. He looks around, listening.

All's quiet and terribly still. So still not even a blade of grass bends in the wind.

Suddenly Tahir's father springs to his feet, wary of some unseen menace.

FATHER
Come, Tahir. Come, we must go!

TAHIR
No more work today, Papa?

Father pulls Tahir to his feet and rushes away.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Tahir runs with his father along the dirt path between the fields doing all he can to keep up.

He trips and falls and calls to his father.

TAHIR
Papa!

His father turns back, gets him to his feet, then freezes and looks behind them.

A flock of birds burst from the millet field and take flight.

Tahir turns and looks.

EXT. REGISTRATION TENT - REFUGEE CAMP - DAY - CLOSE ON

Tahir's face - dusty, eyes glazed, exhausted.

A crowd of refugees queue up before a table set in front of a large canvas tent where NGO (non-governmental organization) officials process newly arrived refugees.

Tahir stands among towering Sudanese men and women with an empty plastic container in his hand. Several of the women carry infants. An old man in front of him clutches a suitcase.

Tahir looks to be in very rough shape - his clothes are in tatters, small cuts and scratches cover his arms and legs, his face is bruised and he's coated with dust, like he just came through a long haul through the desert on foot which, we will later learn, he has.

He gets to the table, to a CHADIAN MAN seated beside a white NGO OFFICIAL, presumably a European aid worker.

CHADIAN MAN
Tatakallam al-arabiya?
(subtitle: Do you speak Arabic?)
Do you speak English?

Tahir nods "yes"?

CHADIAN MAN (CONT'D)
Name?

Tahir stares at the white man.

CHADIAN MAN (CONT'D)
What is your name, boy?

TAHIR
Tahir. Tahir Dinar.

CHADIAN MAN
Where are your parents?

Words form on Tahir's lips, but die there. He looks at the man unable to answer.

The Chadian man and the NGO official exchange knowing glances as if they've seen this before.

NGO OFFICIAL
We'll put your name on this list. That way if anyone is looking for you, they can find you. What region are you from?

Tahir gets a questioning look.

CHADIAN MAN
Are you Massalit?

TAHIR
No, I am Fur.

The Chadian man writes this down.

NGO OFFICIAL
Are you hungry?
(doesn't wait for an answer)
You can get some food at the CARE kitchen, it's the next tent over. They serve meals twice a day, just after sunrise and before sunset.

The NGO official looks him over.

The many cuts and scratches on Tahir's arms and legs.

NGO OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
You can get treatment for those cuts at the Red Cross clinic. It's across the way, over there.
(he points)
Just beyond that tent.

Tahir looks in the direction of the clinic, back at the man.

TAHIR
Thank you.

He turns to go.

CHADIAN MAN
Boy!

Tahir stops and turns around.

CHADIAN MAN (CONT'D)
You are in Chad now as our guest. Make no trouble and don't steal anything or we'll send you right back to Sudan. Understand?

Tahir nods.

CHADIAN MAN (CONT'D)
And no work. The people of Chad are poor themselves, any jobs here are for Chad citizens only. If we catch you working, back you go.

Tahir's eyes go to the European, his look giving voice to the inconsistency of the remark. He turns and walks away.

INT. RED CROSS CLINIC - DAY

Tahir sits on a chair. An ICRC African nurse applies antibiotic ointment to one of the cuts on his arm.

She lifts his shirt.

Tahir's back is covered with cuts and scratches.

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - DAY - FOLLOWING

Tahir walks through the twists and turns of the refugee camp carrying his plastic container, a waif among the multitudes.

He passes...

Naked toddlers.

Emaciated men, women and children.

The maimed, wounded and dying.

He comes to a long line before an NGO supply truck, where people crowd together at the truck bed, reaching up desperately for Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs) dispensed from atop the tailgate of the truck.

Tahir stops and observes the melee, assessing his chances of getting anything among that throng. He moves on.

EXT. CLINIC - REFUGEE CAMP - DAY

He passes a make-shift clinic where a dozen or so teenage girls lie on stretchers and thin mats.

Nurses tend to them, many of the girls with bandages around their loins, a tell-tale sign of a victim of gang rape.

Tahir glances down at a girl no older than himself who lies there staring blankly into space.

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - DAY

Tahir waits on a long line of refugees carrying assorted empty containers for water.

He gets his turn. Hands his plastic container to a man who fills it with water from a pump.

LATER

Tahir waits on another long line for a meal.

Reaching the front, he is handed a bowl of rice.

He finds a place to sit away from the crowd and digs in with his fingers.

A gang of boys approach. They stop and surround him.

The GANG LEADER, a tall wild-eyed boy of fifteen with small ceremonial scars on his temples stands over Tahir.

GANG LEADER
Hey, boy! What you think you're doing? This our place. Who said you can sit here?

Tahir looks around at the tough little faces filled with hate, each with small quotation-shaped scars on their temples, marking them as male members of the Zaghawa tribe. Tahir tries to stand. The gang leader pushes him back down.

GANG LEADER (CONT'D)
Hey, you don't listen. This our place. Who said you can go?

TAHIR
Leave me alone.

GANG LEADER
Leave you alone?

He knocks the bowl of rice from his hand.

GANG LEADER (CONT'D)
How's that? Now you have no food. So you are all alone.

He lets out an exaggerated laugh. As if on cue the other boys join in, laughing at Tahir.

Tahir looks up with a challenging glare in his eye.

GANG LEADER (CONT'D)
What? You going do something?

He kicks Tahir in the ribs.

GANG LEADER (CONT'D)
What you going do?

He kicks him again, viciously in succession.

GANG LEADER (CONT'D)
Huh! Huh!

Tahir grabs his plastic container and tries to run. The other boys push him to the ground, join in with Gang Leader kicking him. Tahir clambers away on all fours. Gang Leader coming after him.

GANG LEADER (CONT'D)
Go on, little dog, run. Run!

He kicks Tahir's backside. Tahir falls face first into the dirt. Scrambles forward onto his feet and runs away.

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - NIGHT

Tahir wanders the camp, bruised and walking with a limp.

A piece of blue tarp blows past him like a tumbleweed. He picks it up. Tucks it under his arm.

Turns down an ALLEY between two NGO tents.

Beds down for the night behind a stack of rusty fifty-five gallon drums, covering himself with the tarp, keeping his plastic container of water safely within his arms.

EXT. ALLEY - REFUGEE CAMP - DAY

Morning. Tahir stirs and stares for a moment at a hazy red sun over the horizon.

He folds up his tarp and hides it and his container of water behind one of the drums. Leaves his resting place.

EXT. NGO KITCHEN - DAY

He waits on the food line again.

An African NGO worker ladles a green puddle of food into a bowl and hands it to Tahir.

Tahir stares at the unappetizing meal.

He steps out of line and spots the gang of boys harassing another orphan and turns quickly in the opposite direction.

Ducks into an alley among the tents and frightens birds that peck at bits of cornmeal on the ground.

The birds take to the air.

Tahir watches them rise, their wings fluttering.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Tahir and his father in the earlier scene, on the path when the birds take flight.

Tahir turns and looks...

As first a great black shadow and then a huge, white Antonov Mi 24 helicopter sweeps overhead and makes straight for his village.

INT. HELICOPTER - SAME

A machine gunner fires a .50 caliber from an open doorway, chewing up everything in sight...

Huts. Animals. Fleeing villagers.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Janjaweed horsemen pour into the village from all sides, weaving between the huts, armed with guns, machetes and torches.

Two trucks loaded with Sudanese soldiers arrive with them. The soldiers hop out of the truck beds, AK-47s and rocket propelled grenade launchers (RPGs) in hand.

They open fire.

Mowing down villagers.

Blasting huts.

Spraying the livestock with gunfire.

A Janjaweed marauder pours a bottle of gasoline onto a hut. Another hits it with a torch and it bursts into flames.

A village man charges them with a sickle.

A government soldier guns him down.

Nearby, a woman scoops up her child and races from a hut. A Janjaweed warrior shoves her to the ground, drags her back inside by her hair. Two comrades follow him in, past the wailing child lying in the dirt.

EXT. FIELDS - SAME

Tahir races through the millet fields with his father.

Runs across the dirt where the kids play anshel into the

VILLAGE

Where his father darts into the family hut. Emerging with a rifle, an old carbine.

He loads the weapon, focused, making certain each cartridge enters the magazine.

Other armed village men arrive and gather around him. One carries a rifle, another a handgun, all the rest machetes, spears or clubs.

They mount a defense, firing at the helicopter, rushing headlong at Sudanese and Janjaweed soldiers who sweep through the village in a coordinated attack.

Tahir shadows his father in a crouch.

Pancakes himself to the ground as an RPG round explodes a few yards away.

He looks up and through the dust his father is there shouting at him. Tahir can't hear a thing.

Suddenly he's on his feet, dragged by his father behind a nunu, a large clay pot used to store millet.

FATHER
Run, Tahir! Run!

Tahir's father points toward brush beyond the huts.

Tahir is too stunned to move.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Go! I must find Mama.

TAHIR
(tearful)
No, Papa!

He grips Tahir's shoulders.

FATHER
No, Tahir,listen to me. Run! Hide in the brush. I will find you. But I must get mama.

Father points to a line of brush fifty yards away.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Hurry!

Tahir runs off, making for the safety of the brush.

With his son heading for safety, Tahir's father takes on the attackers. He guns down a soldier and runs off into the heart of the village, firing as he goes.

Tahir approaches the brush when an RPG explodes near him. He falls to the ground. Rises and turns, sees...

A group of soldiers armed with Kalashnikovs spitting lead.

A woman holding an infant runs with two children. All four of them mercilessly cut down by the men.

Tahir turns from the horror and runs into the...

BRUSH

just ahead of another explosion from an RPG.

Tahir runs for his life through the bushes and trees.

Scrambles up a SMALL HILL where he stops and looks back, completely out of breath.

WHAT TAHIR SEES -

His father at one end of the village firing up at the helicopter, the bodies of village men, women and children lying around him.

The helicopter banks.

Turns toward his father and fires a rocket.

In the next moment a huge blast erupts right where Tahir's father stands. When the smoke clears there is nothing there but a bloody stump of a leg left in a sandal.

Go to Tahir's reaction, to his eyes and TRANSITION to

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - DAY

Tahir staring at his reflection in a pool of water.

He is back in the refugee camp, outside a tent before a tin wash tub filled with black water with a layer of dirt floating on its surface. He washes himself, leaves.

END OF WEBSITE EXCERPT. If you'd like to read the entire script reach out to johnroyan@tahoefilmgroup.com.