

PAINTING ROCKS

The background of the entire page is a soft, golden sunset over a hazy landscape. In the center, the silhouettes of two people are visible, standing on a ridge and looking out over the horizon. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and lens flare effects.

TWO-HOUR FEATURE FILM

A coming-of-age adventure story set against the Ethiopian Famine of 1984-1985.

LOGLINE

A young English volunteer journeys to a Sudanese village in 1984 to teach at a school, but soon finds himself drawn to the Ethiopian border, aiding refugees fleeing the famine. As the crisis deepens, his mission turns into a desperate race across the desert to save one fragile life.

Painting Rocks blends the raw youth of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Beach* with the sweeping scale and emotion of *Lion*.

Images on Slides 1 & 2: *Dune Part II* (2024)

SYNOPSIS

Our story begins in 1984 in the Sudanese village of Medina Arab. A frustrated headmaster struggles to quiet his classroom of teenagers to explain the worsening food shortages and political unrest taking place in Sudan.

This is where we first meet the cheeky sixteen-year-old, Faize. We cut between Faize's family home in the arid village and...

Image: *You Will Die at 20* (2019)



SYNOPSIS

The remote Scottish island of Coll, where eighteen-year-old Charlie from England spends two weeks in training after securing a place on a volunteer programme called Project Trust.

Charlie is sent to Medina Arab to teach at Faize's secondary school, where Charlie has a bruising encounter with a ruthless reporter who questions the value of teaching when the world's worst humanitarian disaster is just over the horizon...



SYNOPSIS

Charlie leaves his post and heads east towards Ethiopia, accompanied by Faize, who has become his friend and star pupil.

Looking for a role in the Famine relief effort, the two boys are rebuffed at first. Then they meet Fred, the head of the region's United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who is desperate for front-line volunteers.

Charlie persuades Fred to give the boys a chance, and Fred tasks them with running one of the transit centres where thousands of Ethiopian refugees escaping the famine can break their journey for food and medical support.

*Image: Into
The Wild (2007)*

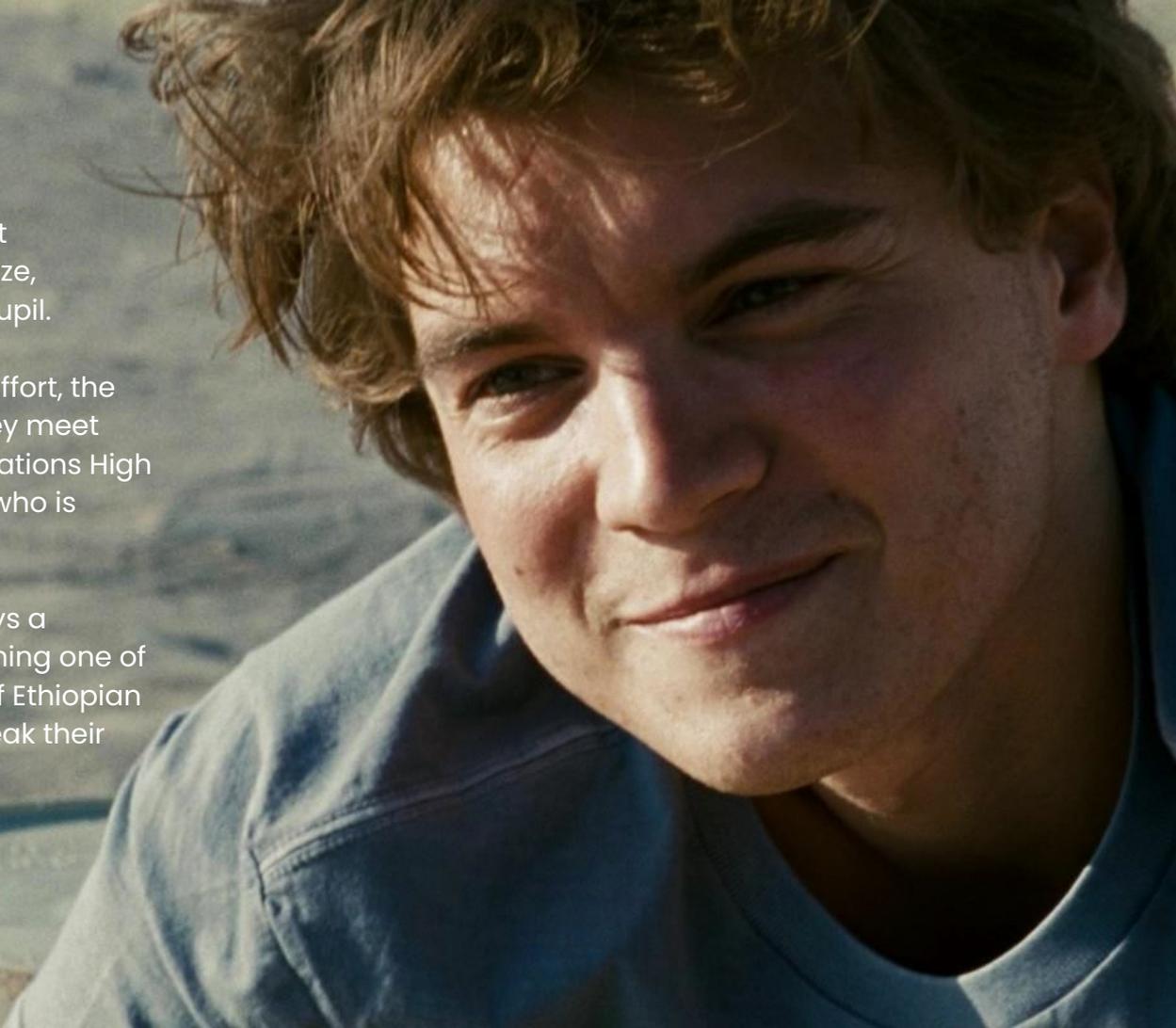


Image: Dune Part II (2024)

SYNOPSIS

With over 1,000 refugees coming into the camp per night, Charlie is overwhelmed by the increasing number of deaths.

Conditions worsen with an outbreak of cholera. Charlie has to log the death of a young girl which leads to a dark night of the soul, and the conviction that he has overreached himself and should give up his post...

Faize and others talk him round and later, when confronted by another seriously ill child to add to the death list, he decides on a mercy mission to the distant hospital.

SYNOPSIS

Accompanied by two Ethiopian women – Aida, the mother of the child and Binuk – who have made the tortuous journey from the notorious Korem camp, Charlie and Faize set off into the night. When they have a tyre shredded by a rock hidden by sand, they find the spare wheel has been stolen, so they are stranded.

The surprise arrival of a pair of British reporters in a light aircraft seems like the answer to their prayers, but the reporters' cynical intervention – in the interests of getting a story to air on UK television – seriously jeopardises the race against time.

It all builds to a highly dramatic sequence, where they reach the hospital just in time. The child is saved.

Image: Emilia Perez (2024)



AFTERMATH

When the adventure is over, Charlie returns to the UK while Faize remains in Sudan. Both boys struggle to readjust to normal life.

While their experiences together during the Famine soon become a memory for Charlie, they remain a daily reality for Faize.

The Famine continues and is never fully resolved.

Image: *Dune Part II (2024)*

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

Unfortunately, extreme hunger is still prevalent today, as a global hunger crisis — brought on by extreme weather conditions, conflict, rising costs, and the ongoing effects of the pandemic — is reversing decades of progress. 319 million people currently face acute hunger across 67 countries.

A total of **1.9 million people are in the grips of catastrophic hunger** — primarily in Gaza and Sudan.

After two years of civil war, NGOs and the UN say the humanitarian crisis in Sudan is “worse than ever before” with wide-scale displacement and attacks on refugee camps.

Our film does not intend to offer a solution but will help to bring this global issue into the cultural sphere. By engaging people through a cinematic and human story, we aim to ignite important conversations about the role of humanitarian aid.



Image: IO Capitano (2023)

Image: **Snowfall** (2017-2023)

COMMERCIAL VALUE

This film isn't just for those tuned into international politics.

Its thrilling journey and our young protagonists make the film easily accessible for younger audiences.

Moments of poignancy are woven amongst the banter between our lead characters, Charlie and Faize.



CAST



CHARLIE

CHARACTER AGE: 18

ATTACHED: **George Osborne**
(*The Pendragon Cycle*,
Contact Hours)

Image: It Takes Balls (2024)

After being praised for his moving performance in the award-winning short film *Contact Hours* (2024), George signed to **Curtis Brown**.

He was also featured in *Revamp* & *BRICKS* magazines.

George is the buzzy young star playing the lead role in this project.

He is a favourite rising actor of casting director **DANIEL EDWARDS**, who we hope to bring on board the project.

CAST

FAIZE

CHARACTER AGE: 16

TARGET: **Mustafa Shehata**
(*You Will Die at 20*)

As Charlie's closest ally in the story, Faize idolises, envies and detests Charlie in different moments.

The banter between Faize and Charlie provides lighter moments and comedic relief amidst the ongoing catastrophe.

We aim to cast a Sudanese actor with the emotional breadth to be both charismatic and vulnerable.



Image: *You Will Die at 20* (2019)

CAST

As we are casting up-and-comers in the lead roles, we plan to cast well-known stars to play our supporting roles.



GLEN

A reclusive and alcoholic Scotsman who builds prosthetic limbs from scrap metal. He joins the famine relief effort and becomes a father figure to Charlie & Faize.

TARGET: **James McAvoy**
(*Atonement*, *Last King of Scotland*, *Split*)

HODGE

A respected Ethiopian leader with one arm, who helps Charlie, Faize & Glen at the transit centre. His ability to speak English means some local workers treat him with suspicion.

TARGET: **Ras-Samuel Welda'abzgi**
(*Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*)



CAST



TARGET: **Liya Kebede**
(*The Good Shepherd*)

BINUK

An Ethiopian woman who loses her husband and has to bury her only child. She leaves her drought-stricken village for Korem Refugee Camp, and plays a vital role in the film's climactic chase sequence.

AIDA

Hodge's younger sister and Binuk's neighbour from the village where they suffered extreme food shortages. She can barely muster the energy to look after her infant son.



TARGET: **Sara Abebe**
(*The Celebration*)

CREATIVE TEAM



**HARRY
RICHARDS**
Director/Producer

Harry is best known for directing and producing the award-winning short film *Contact Hours* (2024). It has received the following accolades so far:

Sunrise Film Festival – Best British Short Film

Sunrise Film Festival – Nominee for Best Director & Break The Stigma

British Short Film Awards – Longlist for Best British Director

Shark Awards – Shortlist for Best Short, Best Writing & Best Performance

Shark Awards – Gold Winner for Best Casting

Unrestricted View Film Festival – Official Selection & Nominee for Best Director

His previous short film *Santi* (2021) was selected for the BFI Future Film Festival 2022 and is now streaming on Minute Shorts. Prior to *Santi*, Harry wrote, directed and produced two other shorts: *Glass People* (2019) and *Year 13* (2016).

Harry shot his debut feature film *Yamas!* in Greece in Autumn 2025. This is a satire of Western attitudes to the refugee crisis, which Harry co-directed and produced with writer Rufus Love under the banner of their production company [Headrush Films](#). The project was featured in [Deadline](#) and [Screen Daily](#). It launches at film festivals in 2026.

CREATIVE TEAM



**SERENA
YAGOUB**

Producer

Serena is an Italian–Sudanese producer born in the UK, who studied at University of Oxford. She has led productions across the UK, France, Angola, Spain and Italy.

From 2019 Serena spent five years at Netflix Spain and Netflix Italy, working in production and post-production on over 100 projects, including global hits *La Casa de Papel* (Money Heist) & *Élite*. In Italy, she coordinated the local slate of films, TV series and non-fiction shows, collaborating closely with producers from 20 of the country's leading production companies, including on the series adaptation of prestigious Italian IP *The Leopard*. Her time at the company involved briefly assisting the Netflix Africa team on Nigeria's early Netflix Originals *A Naija Christmas* and *Blood Sisters*.

Outside of Netflix, Serena developed and kicked off early production for feature documentary *The Shepherd and The Bear*, (prod. Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss) which is currently being nominated and selected by festivals worldwide.

At present, Serena is producing a feature film in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou, set to screen in Europe, the UK and US. She is also executive producer on award-winning director Jack Bradfield's debut film, currently in development.

CREATIVE TEAM

CHARLIE GRAVE

Co-Writer/Exec Producer

Charlie's experiences in Sudan in 1984-1985 inspired the story behind *Painting Rocks*.



SIMON RAE

Co-Writer/Exec Producer

Simon is an author, poet, playwright and prose writer known for his work with *The Guardian*, BBC Radio 4, and for winning the National Poetry Competition. He has published biographies, poetry collections, children's novels, and detective fiction, while also mentoring writers, editing anthologies, and working as a ghostwriter. *Painting Rocks* is his first screenplay.

DEVELOPMENT

Simon Rae immediately saw the potential of Charlie Grave's story and has revelled in the collaborative process of turning it into a powerful screenplay over the last two years (2023 – 2025).

The project so far has received support from British film and theatre producer **JOAN LANE**, primarily known for developing the Academy Award-winning *The King's Speech*. Jane has provided script feedback, alongside theatre producer **SIMON FIELDER**. Both Joan and Simon are Associate Producers on this project.

RICHARD HOLMES has also offered guidance. He spent three years managing production funding for Creative England, where he exec produced 14 features, including the acclaimed & multi award-winning *Gods Own Country*, *45 Years*, *Calibre* & *Jawbone*.

The screenplay for *Painting Rocks* does not shy away from the horrors of the Ethiopian Famine, but it focuses on the humanity and extraordinary capacity for love that people of differing nations and class can generate when working together for the collective good.

Our title reflects this spirit. In the film, the simple act of painting rocks white – so they reflect light – guides refugee trucks safely into the transit camp. This small gesture became a powerful image at the heart of our story.



DIRECTION

Director/producer Harry Richards came on board in March 2025, intrigued by the story's exploration of the privilege held by young Western travellers in developing countries.

Harry brings a sensitive approach to the project, previously shown in his socially-conscious short films *Santi* and *Contact Hours*, which focus on cultural isolation and student suicide respectively.

His direction will focus on creating **a visceral and visually compelling film that avoids sensationalism.**

The families and people affected by the Ethiopian Famine, and those suffering in the current Famines in Gaza and Sudan, will always be front of mind when depicting the refugees and refugee camp on screen.

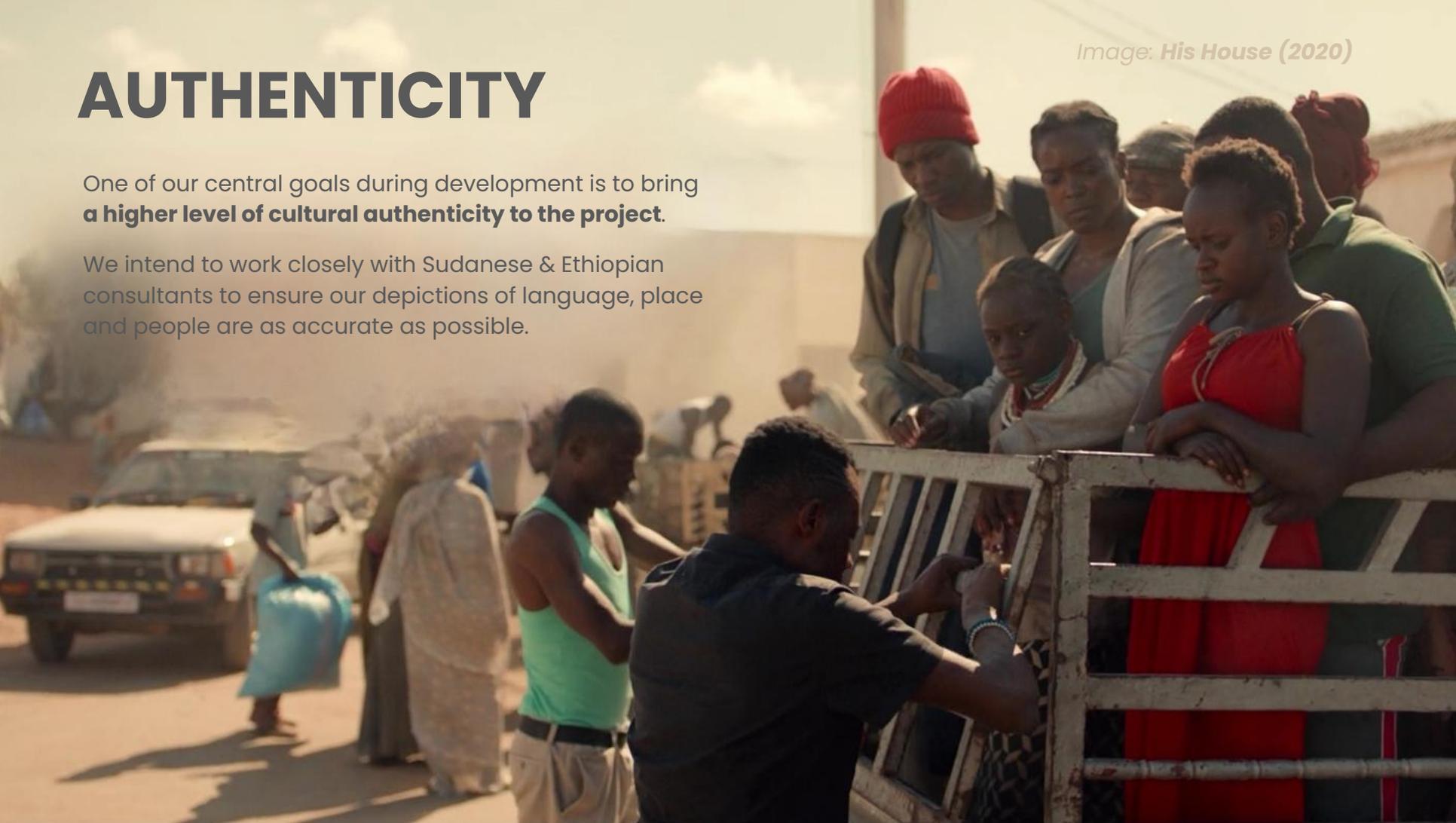


Image: *His House* (2020)

AUTHENTICITY

One of our central goals during development is to bring **a higher level of cultural authenticity to the project.**

We intend to work closely with Sudanese & Ethiopian consultants to ensure our depictions of language, place and people are as accurate as possible.



LOCATION

The film's Scottish segment will be filmed in and around **Breachacha Castle on the Isle of Coll**.

The natural beauty of this island in the Scottish Hebrides provides the perfect backdrop for the opening of our story, before Charlie is thrown into tougher terrain...



LOCATION

Most of the filming will take place in **Erfoud, Morocco**.

Its expansive and arid landscape is an excellent stand-in for the Sudanese & Ethiopian locations in our story.

The country's robust filming infrastructure provides experienced crew and affordable transport, accommodation and logistics.



TIMELINE



DEVELOPMENT

January to December 2026 (12 months)

PRE-PRODUCTION

January to March 2027 (12 weeks)

PRODUCTION

April to May 2027 (8 weeks – 40 days)

Image: IO Capitano (2023)

Image: *Pig* (2021)

PRODUCTION

Production will be helmed by Harry Richards and Rufus Love's UK company **HEADRUSH FILMS**. Their other titles include *Contact Hours* (2024) and *Yamas!* (2026). The company's remit is to create **high-quality films with a social conscience and commercial potential**.

Headrush will partner with Moroccan service production company **UX FILMS**, who are assisting with location scouting and will source kit, local crew, supporting artists... and camels. The Line Producer working on this project is Qualid Zarouala, who most recently worked as Logistics & Operations Coordinator for Sky Studios' British action-adventure TV series, *Atomic*, which filmed in Morocco.

UX Films will also facilitate an application for Morocco's Cash Rebate (30%).

HEADRUSH

Registered Company No. **15780865**



UX FILMS SARL AU

We will similarly partner with a Scottish service production company for the scenes filmed in Scotland.

CREW

**At the helm of our crew will be
First Assistant Director CLAIRE WOLF.**

Claire has worked as an Assistant Producer for major UK broadcasters including the BBC and Channel 4. Her 1st AD credits include *Yamas!*, *Santi* and the award-winning *Contact Hours*.

With an academic background in social justice and human rights, Claire has worked on peacebuilding initiatives and supported refugee charities in the UK — experiences that strengthen her connection to the humanitarian themes in *Painting Rocks*.

Known for her organisation and positive energy, she runs a set that's both efficient and enjoyable to work on. Her deep empathy and experience working in various global film industries (notably Mexico, New Zealand & Spain) will be vital in ensuring a harmonious and productive relationship between British and Moroccan crew.



COSTUME

Since completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Costume at RADA and Warner Brothers' Creative Talent Programme, Jennifer has spent five years working on big studio productions.

Jennifer sharpened her expertise in period design through the BBC Desert Drama *Rogue Heroes*, and Netflix's *Bridgerton* and *The Six Triple Eight*, mastering the sourcing and handling of uniforms, as well as breaking down and aging clothing.

Rising from trainee to costume maker and crowd costumer, she has gained a strong grasp of the costume department's structure and what it takes to deliver at scale – creating and managing costumes for countless actors and supporting artists.

Jennifer's costume design played a huge part in the success of *Contact Hours* (2024). She will take inspiration from Sebastiao Salgado's powerful 1984 images of the refugees in Ethiopia's Korem camp for the costume design in *Painting Rocks*.



JENNIFER PERAULT

Costume Designer

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Our production designer **GREG MCLAREN** (*Contact Hours, Yamas!*) will use his experience working at scale and with period styles to help us build out the world of 1984 Sudan and Ethiopia.

Greg coordinated the design and build of Glastonbury's famous Shangri-La area, consisting of 20+ façades and interiors across 30 tents and frames. This was assembled over 20,000 square metres.

He also led the the design and build of a shanty town for the Chuncheon International Mime Festival in South Korea – 30 tents and frames across 3,500 square metres of land.

Greg's knowledge of building large sites will be crucial when we construct the Korem refugee camp on location in Erfoud.



Image: *Dune Part II* (2024)

VISUAL EFFECTS

Where possible we will use practical effects to keep the budget down, but visual effects will be a vital tool in expanding the scale of the Korem refugee camp. We are in talks to bring on VFX Supervisor **VICTOR TOMI** (*Die My Love, The Crown, Bridgerton*).

Use practical effects where possible.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Director of Photography:
SCARLETT GARDNER
(*Contact Hours, Yamas!, Baby*)

Featured in [British Cinematographer](#) &
on Panavision's [Instagram page](#)
to 250K followers.

Wide aerial shots of the desert will allow our audience to take in the vast East African landscapes and grasp the magnitude of the Ethiopian Famine. **We will lean into an earthy colour palette, harnessing the region's natural beauty and golden light.**

Intimate close-ups will reveal sweat, tan and sunburn, etched into our characters' skin by the desert heat.



MUSIC & SOUND

Composer:
JACK SALZANI
(*Echoes of Yesterday*)

The film's score will be emotive, epic and stirring.

[LISTEN HERE](#) to the *Painting Rocks Suite* composed by Jack.

This will be complemented by immersive sound design that puts our audience right with our characters on their journey through the desert.

The sound of roaring engines and shredding tyres drive the adrenaline, giving way in quieter moments to the whisper of the wind.

Familiar needle drops will place us right in the 1980s. Our music supervisors [LALA Music](#) (*Barbie*, *The Batman*) plan to help us secure the rights to the Band Aid track *Do They Know It's Christmas?*.



PARTNERSHIPS

We intend to explore partnerships with reputable refugee and hunger charities, such as Choose Love and the UN World Food Programme. This will help to ensure that our film makes a more direct impact to people currently living in crisis.



World Food Programme



FINANCE PLAN

Following the example of *The Brutalist* that delivered an epic period film for \$10 million, our budget will be **£7-10M**.

We aim to raise this finance through public soft money (e.g. BFI, BBC FILM, Film4), private equity and debt finance (a loan against Morocco's Cash Rebate).



MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION



With a sales agent's support, we plan to premiere the film at a top international film festival, to attract global distribution partners that will help us release the film both **in cinemas and on a streaming platform.**

*Image: Into
The Wild (2007)*

CONTACT

Image: IO Capitano (2023)

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SCREENPLAY & BUDGET
AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST