

SINAI

By Eitan Gorlin

International co-production

Locations: US/CANADA – ISRAEL/EGYPT/SUDAN

GENRE: Period drama (9/11 to Occupy Wall Street)

Pitch: A Sudanese war refugee makes his way to America and seeks opportunity in New York but, instead, finds himself in Homeland Security detention after trusting an American music video director whose career is falling apart. Like *Babel* and *In America*, *Sinai* speaks to a globally connected world and the precariousness of the American dream.



Synopsis

Sinai depicts Ibrahim's (a war refugee from Sudan) journey to Egypt, New York and back in search of a better life, weaving global events into an action-packed, indie-style, New York tale. It is a wholly original story that speaks to the fall of Egyptian President Mubarak, the rise of South Sudan and the blossoming of Occupy Wall Street while highlighting Ibrahim's relationship with JOEY, an American music video director who almost "makes it" and must now contend with frustrated ambition and its consequences.

The story begins on 9/11 with Joey directing a crassly materialistic Hip Hop music video that is interrupted by a plane hitting the Twin Towers across the river. We cut to George Bush pledging to capture terrorists no matter where they are followed by a hapless IBRAHIM traveling the Sudanese countryside selling household items to stores in small villages. In the middle of the night, he is awoken by U.S. Special Forces who are looking for a suspect, the religious kiosk owner he just did business with. In exchange for a thousand crisp U.S. dollars, Ibrahim betrays the kiosk owner, YOUSEF. With this bounty, he rushes home only to discover that his wife and baby have been killed in a massacre as a result of the country's Civil War. Broken, Ibrahim hires smugglers to get him out of Sudan and take him to Egypt, where he is robbed and almost killed before being set free in the Egyptian desert. Meanwhile, in New York, Joey's video is nominated for a big award, and he attends the celebrity-studded ceremony where, filled with hubris, he speaks of his destiny as a director. Although he doesn't win, he does meet LESLIE, soulful and caring, who is working as a bartender at the event.

In Egypt, an unstoppable Ibrahim finds opportunity as a cab driver and pot seller on the dazzling Sinai coast, a destination for tourists from around the world. Joey, meanwhile, is offered a directing job in Eilat, Israel's southernmost town, and invites Leslie to come with him. After the job is finished, he and Leslie decide to visit a resort on the Sinai coast just across the border. There, he finds himself a customer in Ibrahim's taxi where he loses his phone. As the producers in Israel are trying to get in touch with him, this causes Joey a series of career setbacks that drastically changes his life. In fact, the phone was lost in Ibrahim's taxi but taken by another customer, SAYID, a seventeen year-old runaway working as a prostitute for tourists. Although Ibrahim never retrieves Joey's phone, he does figure out that Sayid is the son of someone important, a member of the Egyptian parliament. He proceeds to return the boy to his father hoping to receive, in exchange, his help in acquiring land in booming Sinai. Instead, the father offers Ibrahim a visa to America, under one condition, that he take Sayid, who has brought terrible shame to the family, with him.

Back in New York, Leslie attends nursing school while working two jobs. At the same time, Joey can't find work as a director but refuses to give up on his dream. Instead, he drinks too much, suffers from anxiety and mooches off Leslie. Meanwhile, Ibrahim arrives in America and chases the American dream with vigor, working as a gypsy cab driver, restaurant owner and pot seller and marrying CHEVION, a local African-American woman, in a quest for citizenship. So when Ibrahim, still in possession of Joey's business card, reaches out to Joey, hoping he will invest in his schemes, Ibrahim's star is rising while Joey's career, sense of self-worth and relationship with Leslie are falling apart.

After Leslie threatens to break up with Joey and kick him out of her apartment if he doesn't find work, any work, Ibrahim tries taking Joey under his wing and hires him to do odd jobs. Leslie still kicks Joey out, and he goes first to live with Ibrahim and then his grandmother in Queens where he encounters his opposite, a confident and rich cousin from Arizona, MIKE, who works in Manhattan as a Wall Street trader. Since Ibrahim is always looking for investors in his unfulfilled plan to acquire land in Sinai (that was his initial motive in even contacting Joey), Joey tries introducing Mike to Ibrahim. Instead, Mike meets Leslie, and Ibrahim, focused on immediate money problems, convinces Joey to do a job for him. The job entails driving to Pennsylvania, still reeling from the effects of the 2008 financial crash and the Iraq war, and bringing back marijuana grown by Sayid. There, Sayid lives with an older woman, RUTH, and her children, while pretending to be Mexican to shield himself from anti-Arab prejudice. Resentful of how much Ibrahim is paying him and on a downward emotional spiral, Joey conspires with a Russian criminal, IGOR, (who was once an extra on one of his music videos) to rob the contraband.

Still, Joey must rent a vehicle for the job, and since he has bad credit, he uses the card of his cousin, Mike, the cocky Wall Street trader. In exchange, Mike demands that he take his girlfriend REAGAN, a very attractive aspiring actress with no credentials, with him. Unbeknownst to Joey, the reason Mike wants Joey to take Reagan is so that he can go on a date back in New York with Joey's now ex-girlfriend, Leslie. As it turns out, Mike is able to give Leslie what she couldn't find with Joey. Meanwhile, Joey's attempt at smuggling drugs and double crossing Ibrahim goes terribly wrong, almost getting himself killed and landing Ibrahim in Homeland Security detention. From jail, Ibrahim convinces Sayid to make peace with his father and return to Egypt where he has better opportunities. How could Ibrahim know that the sweeping Arab Spring would shortly bring down President Mubarak putting Sayid and his family in jeopardy? Politics too would affect Joey and Ibrahim's predicaments, with Ibrahim being deported to a freshly independent South Sudan and Joey finding inspiration at a hippie commune and a second chance through the Occupy Wall Street movement.

A story about regular people whose lives are affected by big events, the movie begins on 9/11 and unfolds in an era punctuated by the War on Terror, the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. It speaks to a globally connected world and depicts an America mired in economic and psychological dysfunction, blowback from foreign wars and Wall Street greed, thus helping to explain how we arrived at our current political and emotional state.

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