



IN THE  
**WAKE OF  
YESTERDAY**

a film by  
Babatunde Apalowo

In a Sahelian civilisation where order is the only defence against extinction, a woman's refusal to falsify a record triggers an ancient procedure that exiles her into a desert governed by procedural laws.

# SYNOPSIS

Dandaji is a Sahel settlement that has survived drought by making everything legible. Water is administered by marshals. Births are witnessed and filed. The Hikma complex keeps the records that keep the village alive. Inside this order, two people have learned each other's bodies the way you learn a room you have lived in for years: Zainab, the Hikma's designated successor in training, and Bashir, a junior water marshal. The future is a place they have already agreed to travel to together.

Bashir is chosen for the seasonal pilgrimage, the boundary crossing the marshals undertake to secure the village's water stores. He does not come back with the others. Zainab crosses into the desert to find him. She returns. In Dandaji, this does not happen. When you enter the desert, you do not come back.

Then her pregnancy is discovered. One question moves through Dandaji: who is the father. A name would allow the village to turn the impossible into the manageable. Zainab says nothing. She will not enter a false record into a village built entirely on the integrity of its records. Her life becomes a case. A writ is sealed. Her brother invokes Nasab Seal - an ancient kin declaration that stops the crowd at the compound gate but not the writ. A sealed basket wound in the standard cord is placed in her hands. She is delivered into the desert.

The desert does not behave like a desert. She marks her path and returns to find the marks gone, the sand smooth, as if she was never there. Then she discovers that certain moments hold: the wind stops, the light shifts, and in those windows she can move and the ground keeps her. She learns to read this place the way she was taught to read an unfamiliar ledger, looking for the rule of the surface before she writes inside it.

She encounters others. A man maintaining a boundary marker who reaches for certain words as if he has not needed them in some time. A hyena that comes not for her body but for something she is carrying, circling with the patience of an auditor until she opens her hand and gives it up. And below a ridge, Bashir alive at the edge of a cyan pool, moving with the attention of someone performing a task his body has fully absorbed. She calls his name, but he couldn't hear her. Every attempt to reach him returns her to the ridge. He does not look up.

She follows a lamp glow through the haze to a hut. Inside a woman waits with copper wire in her hands and water measured in a bowl, who looks up the way someone looks up when they have been expecting a delivery. It is Muna, sent into the desert at fifteen, the same age Zainab was when she watched her go. A grown woman now, stationed, time rearranged around her.

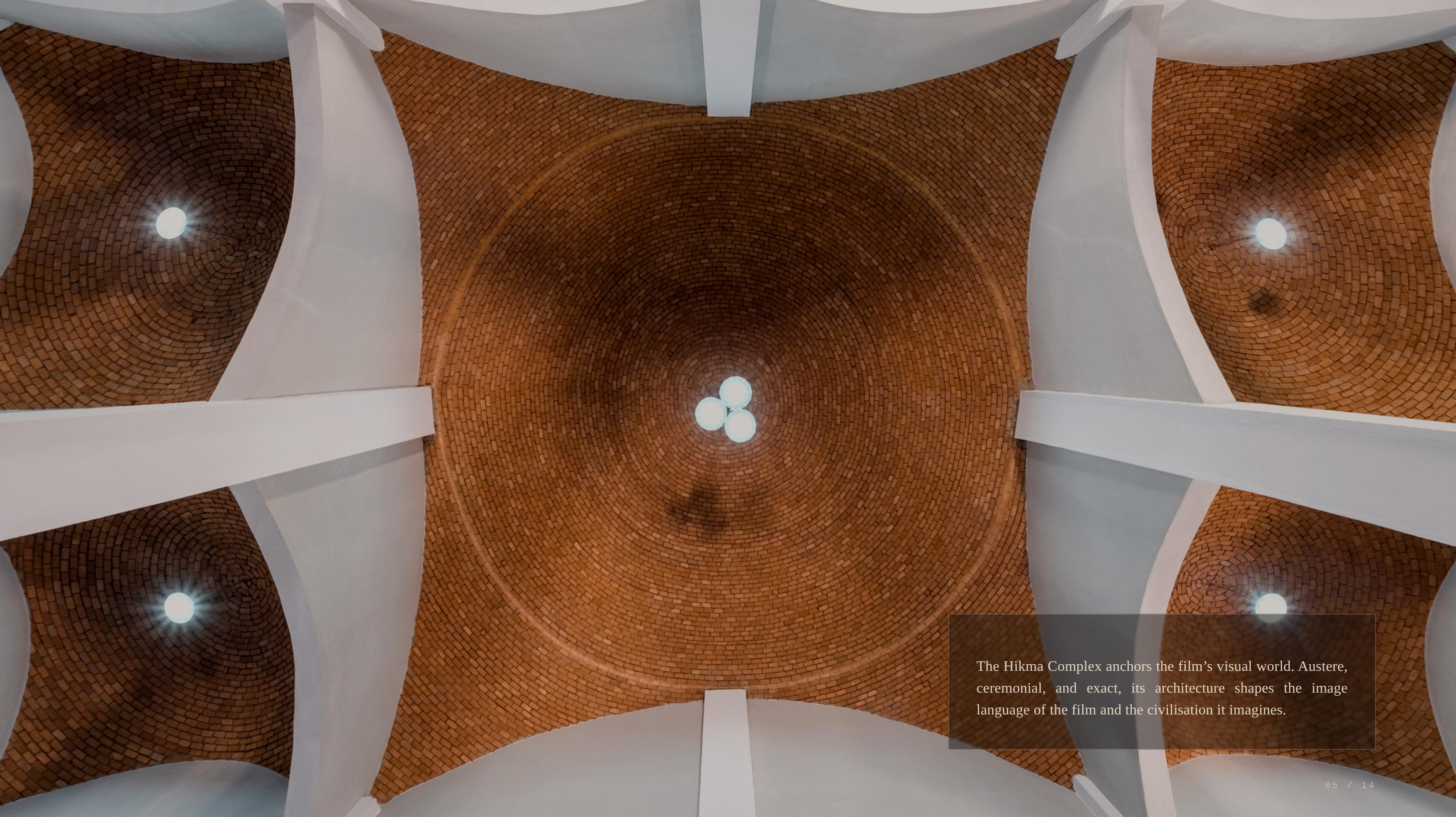
Labour begins, long and without ceremony. Afterwards Muna carries the child to the boundary marker, sets it down in the sand, and presses a clay seal fragment into the ground beside it.

Then the first drop falls. Then another. Then the sky opens over a landscape that has not felt rain in years, heavy rain on ochre walls and cracked courtyards and drought-split earth, rain the village will record as confirmation, as covenant, as proof that the system holds.



## DANDAJI

Dandaji, in the Republic of Niger, provides a key visual anchor for the film: ochre walls, measured courtyards, hard light, and long horizons, where civic structure meets the desert.



The Hikma Complex anchors the film's visual world. Austere, ceremonial, and exact, its architecture shapes the image language of the film and the civilisation it imagines.



In Dandaji, architecture directs the body through shadow, sequence, and restraint. That sense of order informs the world of In the Wake of Yesterday.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up learning that belonging has conditions. In Nigeria and in diaspora, the conditions are specific: the right paperwork, the right lineage, the right performance for the right room. Get it wrong and the system does not punish you openly. It reclassifies you. The administrative violence is procedural. It looks like order.

The desert has pulled at me for as long as I can remember. Not as a symbol or metaphor but as fact: a landscape that behaves like a machine, running on its own logic, asking you to read it before it will let you move. I have spent years collecting knowledge about camels. I have been drawn to African civilisation at its most formal and most invented, to the way civic order is designed under pressure. Dandaji came from both of these: a Sahel settlement built around record-keeping, where water is administered, where belonging is filed.

In Part I, the camera treats Dandaji as a record. Frames are architectural: doors, courtyards, queues, hands pressing clay. Sound is civic and patterned. The editing follows procedure. The civilisation is watching itself and the film watches with it. Everything looks like order because everything is order. That is what makes it liveable. That is also what makes it lethal.

In Part II, the same system continues with its skin removed. The desert becomes infrastructure. The camera widens and tightens at once. Repetition and duration become pressure. Editing follows permissions: resets, loops, windows that open and close. Sound sheds human reassurance. Haze thickens near the hut until night settles into a permanent operating condition. Part I carries order. Part II carries order without mercy.

The film is about a woman who refuses to give the world the lie it demands, and what a civilisation does to someone it cannot classify. More precisely: how a civilisation turns love, bodies, and truth into procedure, and calls the procedure a covenant.

Zainab is not a rebel. She is Hikma's designated successor, trained to read and maintain the records that hold Dandaji together. She understands the system better than almost anyone inside it, which is precisely why she will not allow a false entry to stand. Her refusal to name a father is not silence born of shame or stubbornness. It is the position of someone taught that an inaccurate record is worse than an incomplete one, applying that principle to her own case. The same training that made her dangerous to Dandaji is what lets her read the desert, because the desert, she discovers, is running on Hikma's own grammar. The film's horror lives in the collision between two coherent forces: a civilisation built on procedure, and a woman acting with integrity inside that procedure, in a situation where the only available resolution requires one of them to be broken.

I am not interested in condemning Dandaji. Dandaji works. Its people are not cruel. Its logic is coherent. That is the problem.

# ZAINAB

HIKMA TRAINEE / DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR

Everything she does inside Dandaji, the training, the betrothal, the future she has planned with Bashir, comes from the same place: a belief that a life of accurate witness is a life worth living. She does not want to escape the system. She wants to practise it well.

That is what makes her expulsion structurally tragic rather than merely unjust. The village does not cast out a rebel. It casts out the person who took its principles most seriously. She was taught that an inaccurate record is worse than an incomplete one. She applies that principle to her own case. The Hikma's logic and the Hikma's survival mechanism share the same instrument, and it turns against her the moment it is asked to protect her.

In the desert she does not become someone else. She uses what she was given. The facility carries the Hikma's grammar and she can read it because she spent her life being trained to read exactly this kind of record. Her competence is not rewarded. It is absorbed.

What the story does not cost her is her integrity. That is the central fact the film cannot soften.



## SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

### BASHIR

Bashir is the kind of man drought produces: steady, practical, trained to treat survival as routine. His love for Zainab is real, but his identity is built around function and duty. He measures himself by whether he performs his role correctly. That is both his flaw and his tenderness.

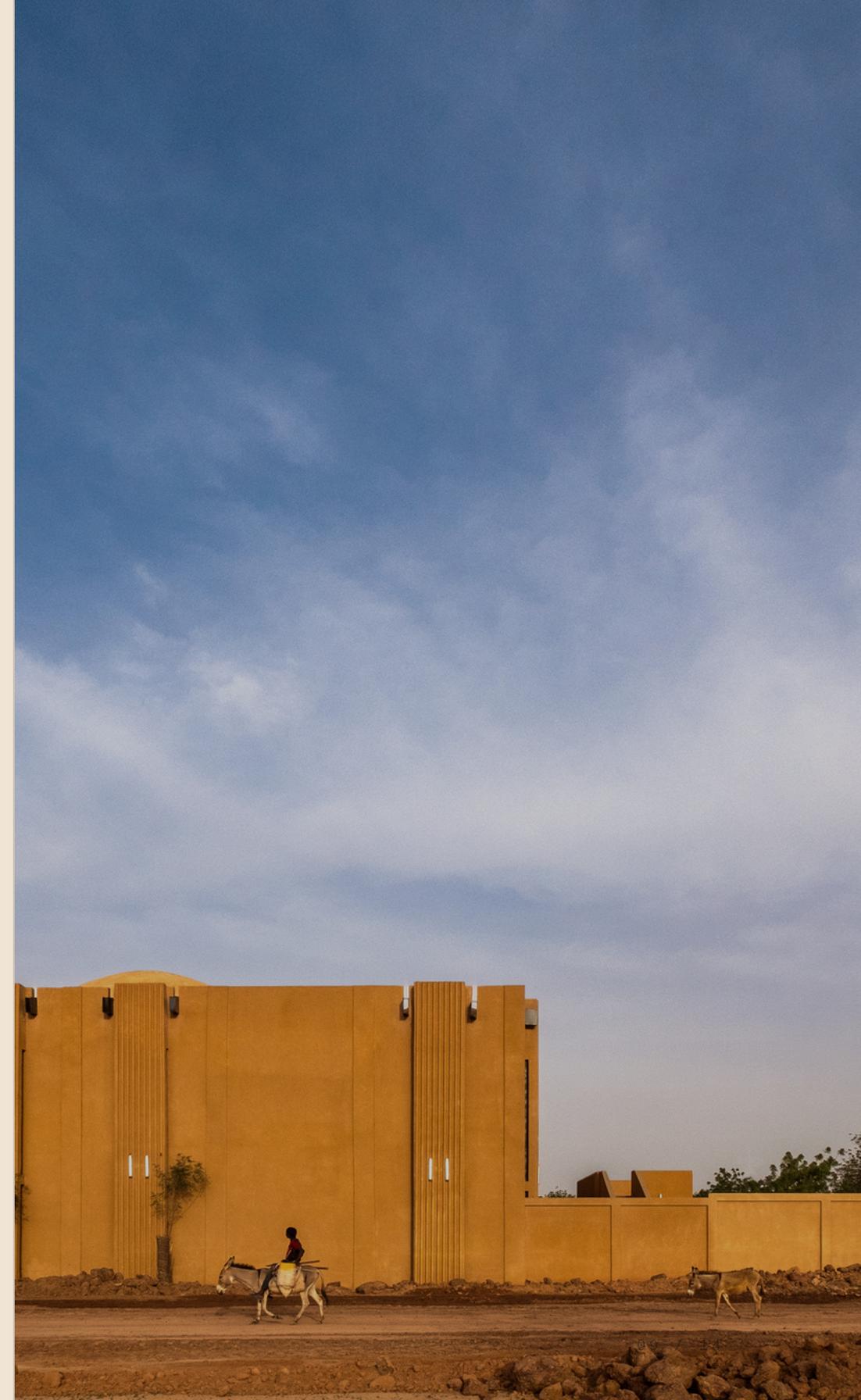
The film never turns him into a moral lesson. It places him where the system places him. The audience's anger has nowhere clean to go, because nothing he does is malicious. He is a product of a civilisation that trains people to become instruments.

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### IDRIS

He built his life on the belief that the record is the closest thing available to justice, and discovers too late that the record can also be a weapon. He does not sign the writ out of weakness. He signs it because he has lived too long inside a logic he cannot disown in the moment it turns on the person he loves most. He taught Zainab the principle she uses against herself. He cannot offer her a different one without collapsing the entire foundation of his life.

His suicide is not despair. It is the last precise act left to him. He contaminates the well, the village's oldest water source, older than the Hikma, older than the current authority structures. He makes the cost of what the system did visible in the one register Dandaji cannot ignore. It is the last record he makes.





## MUNA

She entered the desert prepared, which is different from resigned. Someone held her and told her the truth before she went. That steadiness is still present in the woman she becomes.

In the hut she works with competence stripped of softness. She does the task the way someone does a task they have done too many times. If she has any private feelings about it, it never becomes language. She offers completion. That makes her both victim and a function.

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## SANI / SAIDU / SALISU

Zainab's three brothers. Sani acts. Saidu negotiates. Salisu sings. At the compound gate they meet the crowd with their bodies, and that is where the family breaks. Sani keeps his left eye covered. Saidu leans in close when someone speaks, his head at an angle that does not change. Salisu opens his mouth to sing and nothing comes.

The morning she is taken, Sani stands with his back to her. Saidu is still speaking as if the right words might yet change the outcome. Salisu sits in the compound. He does not sing.

## *The World in Ten Laws*

I

Belonging is filed. A person exists inside the village to the extent that the Hikma holds their record. What cannot be recorded cannot be accommodated.

III

The desert is not the opposite of the village. The desert and the village share one grammar. When you enter the desert, you do not come back.

V

The desert assigns labour. It uses what you already know how to do. Your previous function becomes your station.

VII

The system does not punish; it processes. Any entity that cannot be classified is treated as an error until it is either resolved, reassigned, or purged.

IX

Each path through the desert is singular. What is learned cannot become a shared map.

II

Every transaction requires a witness. Every witness requires a seal. Every seal requires a record. The chain does not hold if any link is missing.

IV

The desert resets distance. A path can be walked and still lead back to its beginning. Progress occurs only in permitted windows, and the windows must be found.

VI

Every gift requires an offering. Every delivery requires a seal. The system accepts nothing without taking something in exchange.

VIII

The covenant is biological. The system's output is human. The village receives it as a gift. The ledger records it as delivery. Both are accurate.

X

Time inside the facility is measured in cycles, not years. Each cycle ends when the transaction completes. What feels like days may be decades.

# SOUND AS GOVERNANCE

- No score. The film does not editorialise.
- In Part I, authority is audible: clay seals pressed and drying, horns certifying dispatch, ledger pages turning, water measured and poured, crowd rhythm that knows its own order. Sound confirms procedure.
- In Part II, the civic layer falls away. Dialogue becomes sparse and functional. What remains is operational: wind, breath, footfall, distant work, the clatter of clay, hooves on packed earth. The sound design is densely layered and precisely orchestrated so it carries the emotional weight a score would carry in another film, without becoming one.
- Beneath that layer, Part II carries a continuous low frequency. Not music. Something closer to the interior register of a body. A womb tone. The facility is felt before it is understood.
- Permission windows are audible before they are visible. Wind drops. Insects stop. The hush is the cue.
- Dolby Atmos is not a technical flourish here. It is a narrative instrument. The movement of sound from village to desert, from controlled civic surround to vast directional space, is part of the film's argument. The audience should register the system in their body before they name it.
- The crystalline sound occurs once, late, without source or explanation. It is not repeated.



# SPEC

TITLE	In the Wake of Yesterday
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY	Babatunde Apalowo
FORMAT	Feature film
RUNTIME	~90 minutes
LANGUAGE	Primarily Hausa, with regional languages
SUBTITLES	English and French
ASPECT RATIO	1.66:1
SOUND	Designed for Dolby Atmos, with 5.1 and stereo deliverables
LOCATIONS	Shot on location in and around Dandaji, Niger (village, desert corridor, hut)

# PRODUCTION APPROACH

Shot on location in and around Dandaji, Niger. One village. One desert corridor. One hut. Minimal company moves. The geography is evidence.

Professional leads with a controlled ensemble of local non-professionals. Primarily Hausa, with regional languages.

The production will be designed around real light transitions, with precise, limited atmospheric effects to carry the desert's shift toward permanent night. The production is set to operate at the scale the story requires: contained, precise, and fully present in the place it is about.



ABOUT

# Babatunde Apalowo

WRITER / DIRECTOR

Babatunde Apalowo is a Nigerian writer-director whose work explores intimacy under systems of control and the ways communities administer belonging. His filmmaking is defined by formal restraint, architectural observation, and sound as structure rather than decoration. In the *Wake of Yesterday* extends those concerns into a Sahelian civilisation story, where governance becomes physical procedure and surrealism is treated as law.

SELECTED CREDIT

*All the Colours of the World Are Between Black and White* (2023)  
Teddy Award, Berlinale

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS

Hikma Complex, Dandaji  
Photography by James Wang

