

The final script for the Qasr Al Hosn inauguration. Undoubtedly it went through a few more changes in production, but the bones of the thing can be read here...

ACT 1, SCENE 1 (3 mins approx.)

Opening Sequence: The Boy and the Boat

We are looking towards the Musalla

In the foreground, a boy appears carrying a large model boat towards the water. He is wearing modern dress, and the boat is a modern vessel.

The boy is humming a familiar melody.

The boy pushes the boat out onto the water – leading us on a journey back in time.

NARRATION:

We live in a global metropolis – constantly growing, constantly changing. Sometimes we may lose sight of the past – but our heritage is always with us, if we know where to look...

ACT 1, SCENE 2 (3 mins. approx.)

Coastal Life

The model boat floats across the water towards the musalla. We see projections and hear soundscapes that bring the past to life.

Men appear at the water's edge, pulling fishing nets. They pick up on the boy's melody. We realise it's a traditional sea chant.

NARRATION:

Look backwards. Our culture is deep-rooted, where land meets ocean. For centuries, we harvested the sea – fishing, extracting salt, and diving for rare and precious pearls...

The boat disappears into the musalla – and streaks of bright light begin to play across its surfaces.

As the light intensifies, a single bright star begins to rise in the sky above the Musalla.

ACT 1, SCENE 3 (3 mins approx.)

Desert

The star rises, and the edge of the F&B area is filled with movement – bringing to life the desert culture of the past, through projection and sound. We see tents and camp fires, families gathering to drink Gahwa.

NARRATION:

Continue the journey: look further back in time. Follow the star Suhail as it rises and travels across the Southern sky. The star connects coast and desert. We see a people on the move, their tents and caravans guided by the seasons...

INTERLUDE (3 mins approx.)

Night stars

As our audience turns from one sector of the site to the next, the walls of the Cultural Foundation Building fill with a parallax projection of a starry night sky.

Meanwhile, high above, Suhail tracks slowly across the night sky – and the site, guiding the audience's attention towards the Oasis.

NARRATION:

We glimpse the past in everything, but to truly get to the heart of our heritage, we must return to our city's birthplace – the heart of Abu Dhabi: Qasr Al Hosn...

ACT 2, SCENE 1 (3 mins approx.)

The Journey

Suhail arrives above the Oasis – where it descends from the sky to scatter light traces across the ground and into the palms.

The star triggers movement. We see people emerging from among the palms.

A small group of Bani Yas set out from the Oasis, on a journey to the coast. Some are on horseback, some walking. All carry traditional weapons and supplies.

NARRATION:

The Bani Yas: a people constantly on the move, celebrated for their bravery and wisdom. Their winter homes lie in the villages and oases on the edge of the Empty Quarter, deep in the desert – but in summer they come to fish and dive for pearls at the coast...

ACT 2, SCENE 2 (4 mins approx.)

The Watchtower

As the Bani Yas approach the fort, (still not illuminated) we hear a poem recited:

*'To those who would know,
We are the Bani Yas.
This is our island,
Where we were born and raised.
We are a people of noble origins,
We inherited it from the ancestors.
Our forefathers guarded it with their lives,
Protecting it with sword and spear.
O valiant brothers, you are a proud and strong
people,
The nation loves those who serve it faithfully...'*

Mysterious projections – giving a sense of movement through the vast desert – appear on the fort walls as our group of Bani Yas pass by.

NARRATION:

The Bani Yas continue to follow the seasons, but Abu Dhabi Island is strategically important, with a wealth of resources...

We hear footsteps – a man running upstairs.

Suddenly the watchtower comes to life – standing alone in the desert. The walls of the current fort are hidden by projection mapping.

A lone guard appears, spotlit, at the top of the tower.

NARRATION:

At Qasr Al Hosn, a single tower, built with coral and sea stone, stands watch over the settlement, the oasis, and the Gulf shore...

A powerful searchlight shines out from his position – as if our guard is looking out over the Abu Dhabi of his time.

The searchlight rotates and the content projected onto the watchtower appears to rotate with it. We see more images of the Abu Dhabi coastline community of old, appearing as if on the walls of the watchtower. We understand that this is what our guard is seeing as he scans the coastline.

A cannon sounds – and the guard calls out:

"صبيان ياالله" (*Yalla Sobian!*) – 'come on boys!'

NB: this is the traditional 'Victory' call used to encourage people to defend their land. A more appropriate call, in the context of our ceremony, might be:

"بالسلامة وصلنا" – 'we have arrived safely!'

ACT 2, SCENE 3 (5 MINS APPROX.)

Mass Movement / The Settlement

The guard's call triggers mass movement from the Oasis. Hundreds of people appear among the palms and cross in small groups to the fort, where they 'set up camp'. Some might be seated around a fire, others will be engaged in traditional crafts such as telli and sadu weaving.

We hear a poem recited:

*'A tent, a boat on the sea
Fishing nets spread on the shores
A palm tree, I see its dates as if diamonds
It makes our spirit happy, shining like a pearl
A neighbourhood, a mosque, and a fortress that
is my light
And a household filled with glory
The whole of its society is my family
Like a bee hive. Each has his own role
You'd find divers deep in the sea
And honourable men in the desert
Men who have torn the cloaks of time
And friends who have been patient despite the
wolves of the age
Protecting the honour of Bani Yas
Proud tribes with virtue
Abu Dhabi is in my heart's blood,*

It letters are traced on my brow for eternity.'

As the people move towards the fort, we see the fort's second phase (the square fort) lit up around the watchtower, with the second burj (round tower) and murabba (square tower) clearly visible. The current fort remains hidden by projection mapping.

NARRATION:

In time, a community settles and grows around the watchtower. Sheikh Shakhbut bin Dhiyab takes advantage of Abu Dhabi's strategic location and builds a defensive fort – which becomes his home and seat of government...

The people begin to spread out along the walls of the fort.

The guards on the original fort's towers begin to call to each other:

"أهلنا وصلوا" – *'our people have arrived!'*

Or:

"أهلنا هم ها" – *'here are our people!'*

And as they call, each tower of the current fort is revealed.

As the rest of the current fort is revealed, we see that guards line the battlements from end to end.

As focus shifts towards the National Council Chamber, the 'settlers' discreetly depart.

ACT 2, SCENE 4 (2 mins approx.)

Al Shura

We see projections on the walls of the National Council Chamber – People's Majlis, the Consultative Council, rulers from Sheikh Zayed the Great to Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan.

NARRATION:

The journey continues. Over decades Qasr Al Hosn is transformed into a Royal Palace – home to a consultative, diplomatic style of government that encourages individuals to seek advice...

And lays the foundation for the Abu Dhabi of today - a nation that continues to take pride in

*consultation, innovation, diversity and
learning...*

ACT 2, SCENE 5 (5+ mins approx.)

Pride of the Nation

By now hundreds of people are positioned outside the fort, in an arc that connects the fort entrance to the grandstand where the Royal Family are seated.

The national anthem plays – and the UAE flag is raised.

The boy that launched the boat at the start of the ceremony reappears in the grandstand. He invites the Royal Family to walk towards the fort.

They walk forward to the sound of national chants, joining in with ayala among the people.

At the entrance to the fort, traditional policemen form a guard of honour.

Following the Royal Family's tour, all our remaining guests are invited inside to tour the fort.