

dream





dream

Great civilizations of the past paid particular attention to dreams. In Babylon, just as in Egypt under the pharaohs and across imperial China, men built veritable “dream temples” that drew people seeking someone who could interpret their dreams. They were searching, among other things, for diagnosis and doctoring for certain illnesses.

Dreams were perceived as a manifestation, whether benevolent or hostile, of superior spirits, divinities and demons. During those distant eras people weren’t concerned so much about the intrinsic nature of dreams, but rather with interpreting them for celestial presages, signs or warnings. Dreams were considered so important that their interpretation was often the prerogative of a special, distinct class of society whose members were painstakingly taught and highly respected.

Over the course of centuries mankind has never stopped dreaming, letting itself be transported by a vital experience that accompanies us from infancy all the way into old age. But the role dreams play has changed progressively, taking on new and different values and meanings.

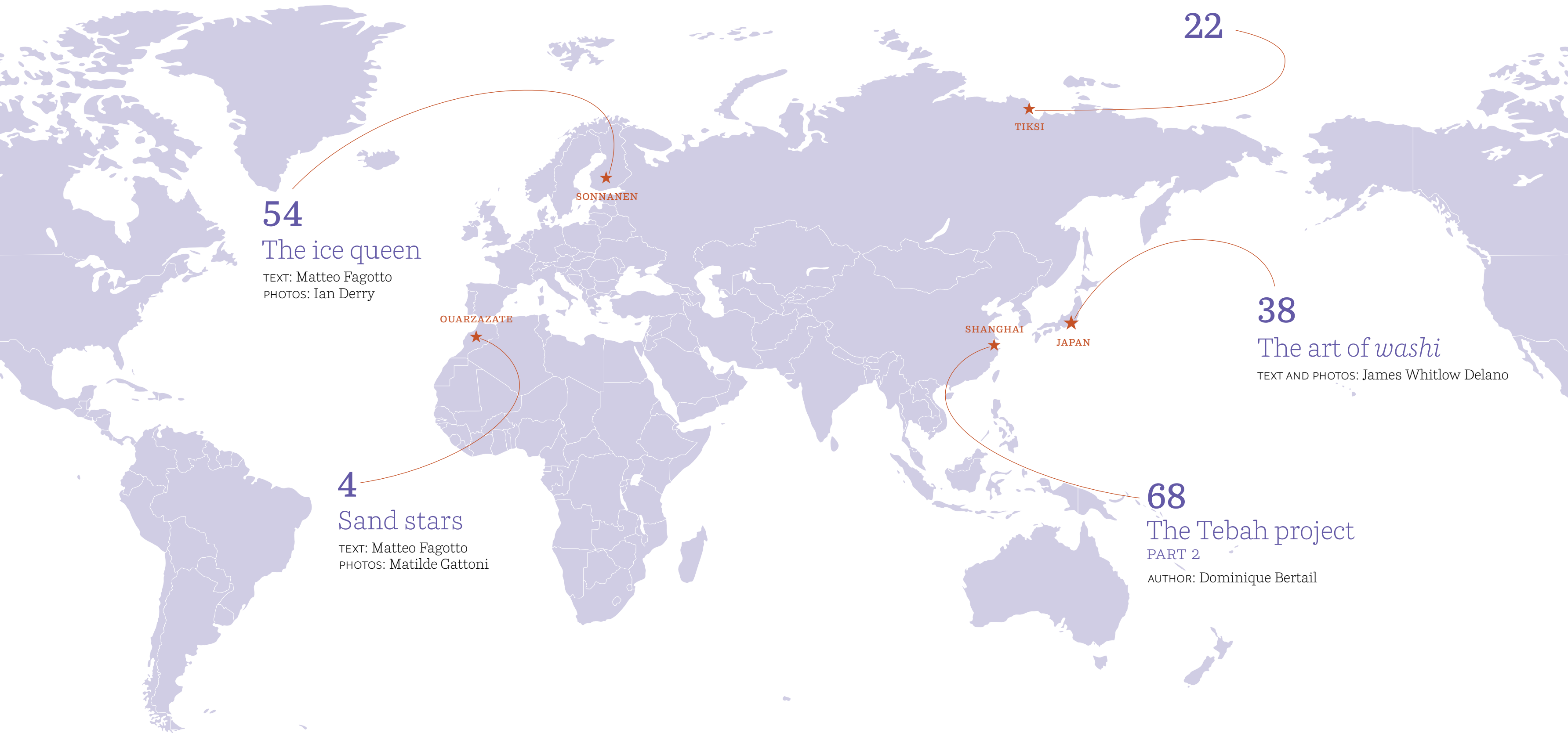
Today dreams help us question tangible reality, and ourselves along with it. They are the flame that tempers our ambitions, allowing us to tackle the challenges of life, transmitting a sense of freedom and the right measure of lightheartedness necessary to achieve the unthinkable.

Through the adventures detailed in these pages, we want to pay homage to that tiny voice that vibrates in each of us, and never stops repeating: “I, too, have a dream.”

Matilde Gattoni

ART DIRECTOR

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In an enchanted oasis, thousands of unsung actors chase the Hollywood dream.

TEXT: Matteo Fagotto PHOTOS: Matilde Gattoni

sand stars

OUARZAZATE (MOROCCO) – It’s mid-morning when Osama Bin Laden finally leaves his dingy one-room house. Dressed in his customary long robe, military jacket and white cap, he crosses the courtyard, leaving a handful of seed for the birds before exiting the crumbling, mud-and-straw compound. “My dream would be to live and fly just like them”, he ponders, a broad smile lighting up his calm, wrinkled face. “At my age, there’s not much else I can ask of this world.”

Once outside, his unmistakable salt-and-pepper beard attracts so much attention from friends, acquaintances and curious tourists that it takes the old man several minutes to reach the nearby cigarette shop he has been running for years. Here, some of his dearest memories hang along the walls in the minuscule space. “This is me playing in *The Ten Commandments*, with Omar Sharif. Here I was reciting in *Prince of Persia*, this is *Prison Break*...” He lists the projects he’s worked in with ill-concealed pride, going through dozens of pictures of himself posing in different outfits and costumes.

Nicknamed “Osama Bin Laden” for his striking resemblance to the defunct leader of al-Qaeda, 59-year-old Abdelaziz Bouyadnaine is a walk-on actor who has appeared in more than a hundred movies, TV series and documentaries. “I love this job because it has given me the opportunity to meet top international actors”, he continues. Over the course of his more than thirty-year career, Bouyadnaine has appeared alongside Orlando Bloom, Brad Pitt and Jean-



PREVIOUS SPREAD: The mountains surrounding the Fint Oasis seen from K Studios. Located few kilometers outside Ouarzazate, Fint hosted the shooting of famous movies such as *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Jesus of Nazareth*, *Alibaba*, *Moses* and *Cleopatra*.

An Ancient Egypt temple located within Atlas Corporation Studio. It was the setting for *Asterix & Obelix: Mission Cleopatra*, starring Gérard Depardieu and Monica Bellucci.



Remains of a decor reproducing the Great Mosque and used in *Journey to Mecca*, a 2009 feature about renowned Muslim scholar and traveler Ibn Battuta.

Claude Van Damme, among others. “Cinema has a unique atmosphere, and that’s what I like the most.”

Bouyadnaine lives in Ouarzazate, a remote Moroccan desert town that has developed a special relationship with the world’s cinema industry. Thanks to its picturesque Kasbah, silent desert and snow-capped mountains, this enchanting oasis of 70,000 inhabitants boasts a variety of natural settings that have served as film locations for blockbusters like *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Gladiator*, *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Game of Thrones*. Once a small military outpost, today Ouarzazate boasts

two film studios and several five-star hotels that cater to movie stars.

Decades of film productions have also nurtured a multitude of local walk-on actors and extras who are recruited on a regular basis to feature in mass scenes, and occasionally for slightly bigger roles. Among the most versatile artists in the world, these talented professionals can play biblical refugees, slaves of Ancient Egypt or ISIS fighters. They are unsung heroes of celluloid entertainment, appearing in countless movies without ever standing out. Inactive for months between productions, they’re

required to work for up to 16 hours a day during filming, often earning 15 to 25 euros a day. Most end their careers without a pension or enough to pay for life in retirement. Yet their passion for the job remains sincere and touching testimony to the greatness of cinema.

Many live within the narrow, crumbling alleys of the Kasbah Taourirt, Ouarzazate’s charming historic center. While some have enjoyed long careers, for others the journey is just beginning. Thanks to her expressive features and hazelnut eyes, 11-year-old Fatima Zahra al Hassani has already appeared in



“I like the atmosphere of cinema. When I have to wake up at 4 in the morning to prepare a scene I do it willingly, because I feel I am doing something important.” A background actor, stuntman and assistant director, 32-year-old Mohamed Habib started his career when he was 6. Among the movies he featured in are Ridley Scott’s *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Charlie Wilson’s War*, a drama starring Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts.

several movies. “I was one and a half years old when I did the first one”, she recounts under the satisfied gaze of her mother and several siblings, crammed together in the family’s living room. Al Hassani’s biggest role so far was in *Rock the Kasbah*, a Barry Levinson movie starring Bill Murray, for which she played an Afghan girl stealing some flour from a shop in order to feed her poor mother. “I liked the movie, but I preferred the documentary about Cleopatra, when I was dressed like a little princess”, she adds with an innocent smile. Al Hassani may dream of becoming a famous actress, but her mother only lets her skip school for cameos. “They can earn up

to 50 euros per day. That money helps our family a lot”, she confesses.

Located on the outskirts of town, Atlas and CLA studios host the bulk of the shootings. Walking through their gates is a surreal trip into the heart of cinema, halfway between reality and fiction. Visitors to this sweltering stretch of desert suddenly see Mecca and Jerusalem arise alongside Egyptian temples, Afghan villages, Greek villas and Crusaders’ castles, all perfectly reproduced yet oddly ephemeral, their sculpted Styrofoam forms set in wooden scaffolds. Some have collapsed under the wind, but could spring back to life in seconds if restored for a new movie.

The fake fighter jet used in *The Jewel of the Nile*, a 1985 adventure film with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner.



Atlas was built in 1983 for *The Jewel of the Nile*, starring Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner. The fake fighter-bomber used in the film and an autographed picture of the two actors still adorn the studio entrance. Three years later, Ouarzazate received a visit from a true Hollywood maestro. “I was head of the Moroccan Cinematographic Center at that time and Martin Scorsese was having trouble finding a location for *The Last Temptation of Christ*, because of its controversial plot”, remembers 74-year-old Souheil Ben Barka, one of the most important local film directors. “When he asked to shoot in Ouarzazate we gave him everything he wanted!

Upon his return to the US he gave us great publicity within the industry.”

In 2015 Morocco hosted a total of 46 foreign movies, films made for television and TV series, 65 percent of which were shot in Ouarzazate. According to the Ouarzazate Film Commission, production costs here are 30 to 50 percent lower than in Europe and the US thanks to a combination of fiscal incentives, cash refunds and inexpensive but skilled technicians. “Some of them are among the best in the world”, continues Ben Barka. “The first American productions used to bring 150 foreign technicians and give work to 20 locals. Nowadays those

An Ancient Egypt decor at Atlas Corporation Studios.



proportions have been reversed.” Morocco’s political stability and tolerance have also contributed to the fortunes of cinema. “Here there is great freedom of expression”, explains 55-year-old Khadija Alami, a local producer who worked on *Captain Phillips* and *Homeland* 6. “When it comes to movies, the only prohibitions are pornography

or scripts that denigrate our king or Islam.”

Inhabitants of the Kasbah still smile when talking about the set of *Rules of Engagement* (2000), a movie starring Tommy Lee-Jones and Samuel Lee Jackson. The film chronicles a fictitious attack by an angry mob on the US embassy in Yemen, and

a subsequent retaliation by the American army. “Hundreds of extras were signed up. The production had to hire the whole Kasbah and pay people not to leave their houses for a whole day”, remembers Naceur Oujri, a 68-year-old walk-on actor. “There were military helicopters flying over and fake explosions everywhere. It was a lot of fun.”

It took some effort to convince Ouarzazate to embrace cinema. As recently as the 1980s local society remained quite traditional, and appearing in movies wasn’t viewed in a positive light, especially when the walk-ons were women. Productions often had to bring in extras from big cities like Casablanca and Marrakech. “I went to the

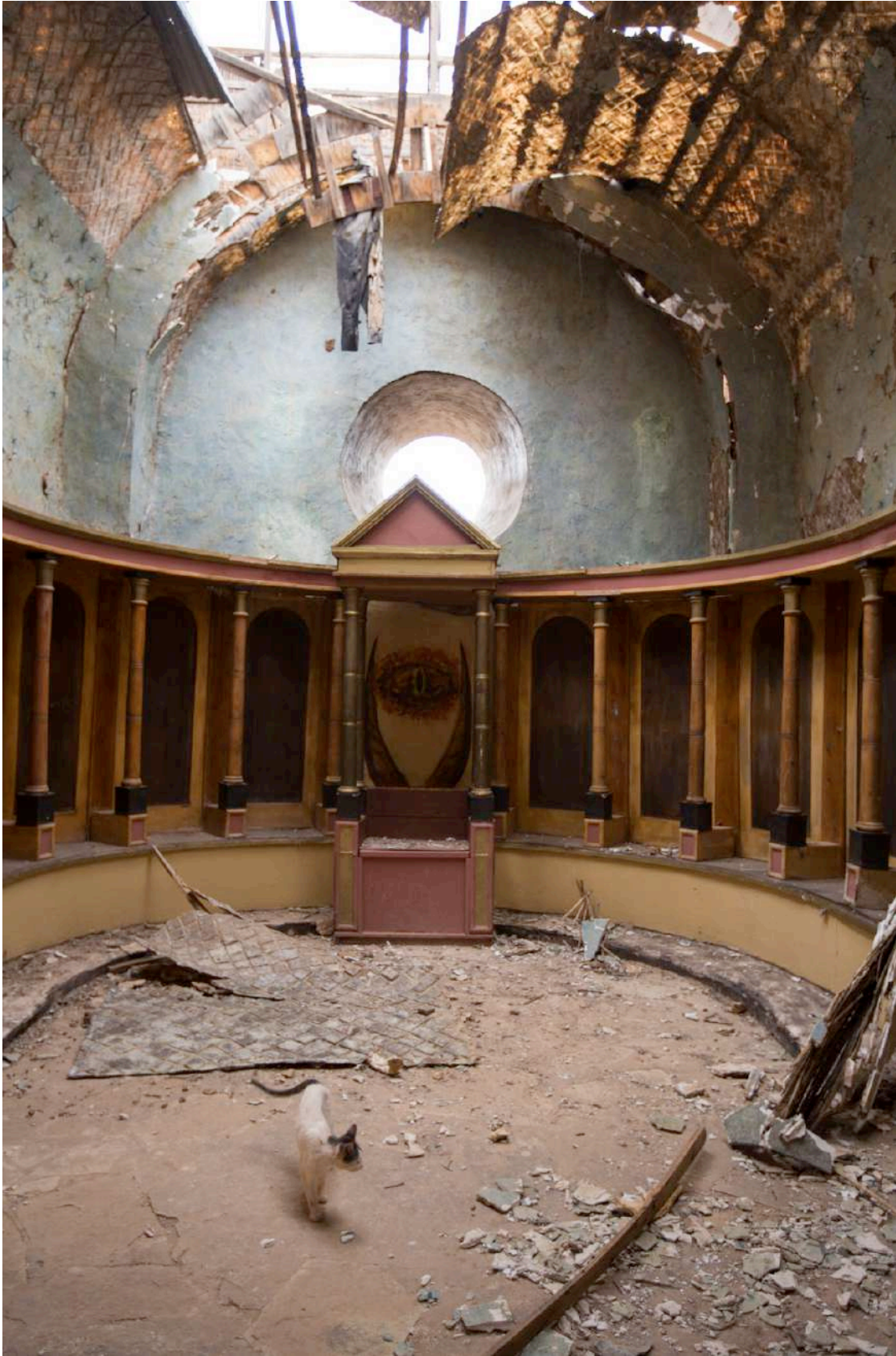


Abdelaziz Bouyadnaine, 59, portrayed in his house within the Kasbah Taourirt. Bouyadnaine appeared in more than one hundred films and documentaries, mainly posing as Osama Bin Laden.

A picture of Mohamed Habib’s father on a movie set. The man was among the first extras from Ouarzazate to work in the film industry.



Rquia Farres, 67, has been working as extra for 36 years. Nowadays an old, frail woman, she is about to leave her home for a retirement house.



An Ancient Roman tribunal. Built in 1996 by an Italian production, it has served as filming location for a dozen religious movies.

casting for *The Jewel of the Nile* out of curiosity. I was an orphan and there was no one forbidding me”, recounts Saadiya Gardienne, one of the first local actresses. This solemn looking, middle-aged-woman is able to cry on command and has featured in over fifty movies, but her debut is still the performance she remembers most fondly. “Kathleen Turner was so beautiful and kind. She was really patient with all of us, even when

we made mistakes”, she says. “Once I brought my daughter to the set and she gave her a lot of clothes as a gift.”

Just like its studios, this otherwise sleepy community springs back to life whenever a production comes to town. Hundreds of extras line up for casting, while local artisans decorate the sets and manufacture the necessary accouterments. Fifty-year-old Mbarek Arouaie has been working as cinema artisan for the



Thanks to her expressive eyes and beautiful features, 11-year-old Fatima Zahra al Hassani is among the most sought-after young actresses in Ouarzazate.



past two decades and can craft any kind of object, from Roman swords and helmets to beautiful Pharaonic jewels. His best memories are linked to *Kundun*, the 1997 Scorsese film detailing the life of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. “It was by far the biggest production we ever had”, remembers Arouaie fondly. “Hundreds of extras were brought from Asia to impersonate Buddhist monks. The crew stayed for almost a year, creating work for the whole town.” The temple built for *Kundun* is still intact and remains one of the main attractions at Atlas, but the recent proliferation of digital effects in modern cinema has put local craftsmanship at risk. “Productions used to order 3,000 copper swords for a scene”, explains the artisan, “but now they just ask for three and make the rest out of wood.”

This poses new challenges for a city whose economy is heavily dependent on cinema. A production recently hired twenty extras for a scene in an Ancient Egyptian temple, adding hundreds more in post-production. “The world is changing. Why build

A movies set nicknamed “Jerusalem”, on the outskirts of Ouarzazate. *Killing Jesus*, a 2015 National Geographic Channel's film, was shot here.

a set if you can reproduce it digitally at a lower cost?”, reasons Ben Barka. “Thanks to digital effects, the recent *Ben Hur* series is much better than the original movie with Charlton Heston.”

After three years of recession, Ouarzazate has nonetheless seen a rebound, hosting productions for *Queen of the Desert*, *A Hologram for the King* and the popular television series *Prison Break*. Speaking from

her leafy house in Casablanca, Alami is so confident about the city’s future that she is currently building her own studio in the oasis of Fint, a few kilometers outside Ouarzazate. Once completed, K Studios will be a smaller replica of George Lucas’s Skywalker movie ranch in California. “The difference is that he moves around his property by helicopter, while I can tour mine on foot,” she jokes. Among her future projects is construction of a movie theater

in Ouarzazate: Morocco’s “capital of cinema” hasn’t had one in decades.

Most walk-ons never get to see the movies they play in. The glittering cinema industry looks quite different when viewed from inside their impoverished homes. When productions are not in town most of the population survives by doing small jobs, like Gardienne, who manages a communal oven where women bake flat breads. “This is what

I earn in a day”, she explains while rattling few coins, the equivalent of three euros, in her hand. For her and other actors of the Kasbah, dreams of a dazzling film career have yielded almost nothing: a few yellowing photos and faded memories are all that’s left. “I had a very hard life, but I am not the only one here”, continues Gardienne, wiping real tears from her cheeks. “Next time I would like to play a role in which I change the fate of my people.”+

Thanks to its perfectly preserved Kasbah, the village of Aït Benhaddou, located 30 kilometers from Ouarzazate, has been the setting for a number of well-known movies, including *The Jewel of the Nile*, *Babel*, *Queen of the Desert* and *Prince of Persia*.



Hassan Kashir, 26, works as a tour guide and walk-on actor in Aït Benhaddou, where the fighting arena featured in *Gladiator* was set. “The arena took four months to build. The film crew spent two weeks here and hired 900 local extras”, explains Kashir, who played a young arena spectator in the movie.



A prop boat featured in a recent documentary about queen Cleopatra.





Tiksi

A Siberian fairytale.

TEXTS AND PHOTOS: Evgenia Arbugaeva





*Once upon a time in Siberia, in a small town on the shores
of the Arctic Ocean, a little girl was sleeping in a warm bed.*

*It was morning, but it was still dark out, for the little town was so far north that
the sun would not rise for many months.
They called this the Polar Night.*



*The little girl woke up,
rubbed the sleep from
her eyes and started to
get dressed.*

*She put on her pink
jacket, red stocking cap
and stepped outside.
Her breath froze as
she walked toward the
school.*

*All around her were
endless fields of tundra,
while up above the
Aurora Borealis lit up
the sky.*

*The snow was painted
green. Some mornings—
if she was lucky—she
could see bits of blue,
yellow and pink.*

*Walking through those
colors brought her
imagination to life.*

*She liked to think of the
fields as blank canvases
for Mother Nature to
paint upon.*

*Was she part of the
painting too?*



She smiled and began dreaming of days when the Polar Night would come to an end: the first sun would light up the snowy mountains, making them look like blueberry ice cream.

Then summer would come, snow would melt and the tundra would transform into planet Mars, its red and golden colors stretching out in every direction.



She stored all these colors in her heart, walking beneath the Aurora Borealis in this little town way up north.





I was born in 1985 in Tiksi, where I grew up.

In the days of the Soviet Union, the city was an important scientific and military base. People used to come from all over the country, some for work, others driven by a romantic dream of the far north and its vast expanses of tundra.

After the fall of the USSR the government stopped financing its northern projects. Many little towns were left to survive on their own. In 1991 my family, like many others, boarded up the windows of our house and moved to a bigger city.

I was eight when we left, and I've never been able to forget Tiksi. I have been dreaming of going back, revisiting the scenery and soft colors where my childhood dreams were enshrined.

In 2010, for the first time in 19 years, I returned. The landscapes were still there, but the town was nearly abandoned.

I met Tanya, a young girl who shared my fascination with the sea and tundra. We both possessed the same urge to explore our surrounding environment. She told me how much she admired French explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau. The red hat she used to wear was a tribute to her hero.

Tanya quickly became my local guide. Thanks to her I was able to go back through my childhood, immortalizing Tiksi as a series of nostalgic postcards born of a young girl's imagination. +



THE ART OF

W A S H I

TEXT AND PHOTOS: James Whitlow Delano

A look
at Japan's
millenary
papermaking
craft.



A train makes its way through the forest in Chichibu Valley.

PREVIOUS SPREAD:
A *washi* paper fan decorated by a calligrapher. Mito, Ibaraki.

The Tokyo megalopolis is an expanse of concrete almost 50 km wide. Nearly 38 million people share the confined spaces on this crowded plain. Train lines radiate out from it like spokes, speeding through former villages that the city swallowed up long ago.

Yet suddenly, passing through the first set of hills at the edge of the plain, it is as if Tokyo had never existed: here, high mountains with steep, forested slopes hem in to the north and west, while clear rivers drain narrow gorges, racing toward the capital. The place could not be more removed from the frenetic version of contemporary Japan and its hyper-urbanized society.

Here, along the fringes of these highlands, artisans labor in small workshops making *washi*, the traditional, handmade Japanese paper obtained from fibers from the inner bark of local trees. Literally “Japanese” (和) “paper” (紙), *washi* was registered as an intangible cultural asset by UNESCO in 2014 and is famous worldwide for its brilliant white color, strength and durability: the highest quality *washi* can last over 1,000 years.

Its manufacture was first introduced to Japan by Buddhist monks from the Korean Peninsula in the 7th century to record holy books and other texts, and its precious sheets of paper have been sought out by

government officials for accounting books and landholding archives for centuries.

Thanks to its unique characteristics, *washi* finds multiple applications in disparate fields including arts, interior design, clothing and religious festivals. It can be used in ceremonial texts, lantern making, traditional umbrellas, origami, gift-wrapping, sliding paper doors and even kite battles. Above all, *washi*'s place in Japan's spiritual and material world has long been solidified by its purity, strength, utility and connection to the land, and occupies an honored place in the national psyche.

Along with the neighboring city of Chichibu, Ogawamachi, 70 km northeast of Tokyo, is known across Japan for its artisans and their traditional papermaking, a craft dating back more than 1,300 years. Ogawamachi is home to the Kubo Shotaro Papermaking Studio, a family business for five generations that was founded at the beginning



Elder *washi* papermakers wash and remove impurities from the *kozo* bark in the cold shallows of Itadori River. Mino, Gifu Prefecture.



Tale of Genji (colour woodblock print), by Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige and Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III), 1853. © Graphica Artis / Bridgeman Images



Workers stripping the bark from *kozo* branches after they have been steamed. The pulp on the bark's inner membrane is the main material used for *washi* papermaking. Higashi-Chichibu, Saitama.

of the 20th century. In over a hundred years, the Kubo family's papermaking process has hardly changed at all.

"No one taught me how to make *washi*", explains 35-year-old papermaker, Takamasa Kubo. "My father told me the techniques can't be taught through theory. They have to be seen, experienced and imitated." The act of making *washi*, continues Takamasa, shouldn't be forced. "Rely on nature, but use your ability." *Washi* paper does not immediately communicate the subtle complexity of the many stages necessary for its production, but it takes months of effort before even a single sheet of paper can be made.

The paper is mostly obtained from the *kozo* tree, or paper mulberry. Its branches are first steamed in a large kettle to soften the black bark and softer pulp underlying it, known as the cambium. These are then stripped from the wood and left hanging to dry. The cambium is subsequently scraped from the black bark, immersed in water and then inspected for impurities, which are removed by hand, one by one. After having been dried, moistened and boiled for a second time, the cambium is then pounded and softened with an oak stick while still moist to make it ready for papermaking.

In the past *washi* production was a wintertime activity for farmers in the lull between autumn harvest and spring planting. Nowadays it has become a year-round activity, so timing is important. Papermakers don't want to make more pulp than they can use in a short period of time because it can grow moldy if left too long, particularly during Japan's hot summers.



Shower Over Ohashi Bridge (woodblock print), by Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige, 1857. © Graphica Artis / Bridgeman Images



Daiki Ichimura harvesting
kozo branches. Yasudo,
Saitama.



Takamasa Kubo stirring
kozo bark at Kubo
Shotaro Papermaking
Studio. The bark is
boiled into a cauldron
for roughly two hours
and stirred every thirty
minutes to further soften
it in a process called
shajuku. Ogawamachi,
Saitama.

Takamasa remembers his grandfather Shotaro once saying, “you cannot fight the sun and win.” More than for other jobs, a *washi* papermaker must approach the work with patience, humility and in harmony with nature, or suffer the consequences. In this part of the world the concept of *satoyama*, symbiotic human interaction between inhabited arable lands and mountains, still resonates. This philosophy pulses through the food cycle, rural community interactions and artisanal crafts, acknowledging man’s place in nature and his dependence on, not separation from, the land.

No place embodies this concept more than the Kubos’ studio, a single-story wooden workshop attached to a typical Japanese family house that dates back to the 19th century. On the sunny December afternoon when I visited, *kozo* bark had been hung next to the sliding front door to dry in the sunshine. To the left of the entrance, Takamasa’s mother sat on a cushion placed on an elevated floor fitted with straw mats, doing the bookkeeping. Her lap was draped with a quilt-like blanket. She didn’t look up from her work. Quiet reigned everywhere.

The sound of water sloshing around caught my attention. Akiko Okonogi, a 40-year-old employee and Takamasa’s 69-year-old father, Haruo, were making sheets of paper using the *kamisuki* method: each person stood in front of a large basin, dipping a big ladle into a syrupy solution and adding it to the mixture of water and *kozo* pulp (the syrup acts as a binding agent for the fibrous pulp).



Workshop owner Haruo Kubo and his employee Akiko Okonogi manufacturing *washi* sheets at Kubo Shotaro Papermaking Studio. Ogawamachi, Saitama.

Over and over, Akiko and Haruo sloshed the pulp solution skillfully across bamboo screens, lifting them out of their frames and effortlessly flipping them over so that the pulp faced down. Next they placed one side of the screen onto the slimy stack of paper closest to them, removing the screen in a sweeping motion and safely depositing a new sheet of paper on top. Behind them stood a rectangular pile of freshly made sheets, all wet and shiny. Early the following morning, each stack would be pressed between sheets of plywood for about two hours to squeeze out excess water, after which the sheets would be ready for drying.

Akiko, the only employee who is not a member of the Kubo family, can produce 350 sheets a day, but making that many with a consistent thickness is anything but easy. “Back in the day, papermakers would make 500 sheets”, she adds, “but we don’t work that quickly.” An energetic woman whose tall slender frame belies her strength, Akiko was still attending university when she decided she wanted “to do something creative with my hands.” When she explored different craftsmanship traditions, *washi* papermaking felt like the right fit. Nine years later she loves the work as much as she did her first day.

When Japan’s economic might surged in the postwar era and artisanal crafts fell into steep decline, many of the Kubo family’s neighbors abandoned papermaking, trading their smocks and rubber boots for well-heeled, higher paying salary work in nearby Tokyo. However, the Kubos’ passion for *washi* has carried them through thick and thin, and after years of hard work the family is finally enjoying the rewards for their dedication.

Wrinkled *washi* paper, used for wrapping, hung out to dry on a veranda at Kubo Shotaro Papermaking Studio. Ogawamachi, Saitama.





Kanasugi Bridge and Shibaura, by Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige, 1857.
© Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN, USA / Bequest of Louis W. Hill, Jr. / Bridgeman Images



Men prepare magnificent floats, festooning them with candle-lit *washi* paper lanterns for the Chichibu Night Festival. *Washi* lanterns bring out the bright colors in the hand-carved wood and gilded floats. Chichibu, Saitama.



A master calligrapher writes the character for “bird” on a sheet of *washi* paper. Mito, Ibaraki.

“About six years ago I was introduced to a wholesale dealer who exports *washi* to Europe and America”, explains Takamasa. “Since then, exports make up a large portion of our sales... I am proud that *washi* is loved and respected in other countries. But there are many kinds of *washi* paper that are never exported. It is a pity they are not known outside Japan.”

Despite the success of *washi*, the survival of such a unique craft can’t be taken for granted. During the Edo Period (1603 – 1868) there were over 750 papermakers living and working in the area, and as late as the 1950s roughly half of Ogawamachi’s residents engaged in papermaking. Today barely twenty remain active.

“I believe that *washi* will endure in Japan, but in order for it to be passed on to future generations, people must want to keep using it”, says Kubo after a long pause. “*Washi* forms part of the Japanese identity, but to me there is nothing unique or magical about producing it. It’s what you do with it that makes it special.” +



Opening celebration of Benzaiten Shrine at Enoshima in Soshu, by Ando Hiroshige, 1848 – 1854. © VCG Wilson/Corbis viaGetty Images



A free diver confronts the frigid abyss to explore her inner depths.

TEXT: Matteo Fagotto PHOTOS: Ian Derry

the ice queen

SONNANEN (FINLAND) – Evening is falling and the cold winter light is bleeding out of a steel-colored, cloud-covered sky. Soon the short Scandinavian afternoon will give way to night. Not a single gust of wind moves the pine branches; not a single leaf ripples the water’s surface on the lake. Nothing disturbs this infinite expanse of trees, ice and snow. While I’m admiring this natural landscape, I realize that for the first time in my life I’m experiencing absolute silence.

I’ve been given the privilege of spending three days in a simple hunter’s lodge set on the banks of Lake Sonnanen, 170 km northeast of Helsinki, the capital of Finland, in the company of free diver Johanna Nordblad and her sister and personal photographer, Elina. With urban rhythms left far behind, our days are spent shoveling snow, gathering firewood and spending long hours after dinner chatting by the light from the candles set around the winter garden.

On the banks of this desolate, mysterious lake, I instantly perceive the spirit of something Johanna has been telling me for hours. “Elina and I always come up here whenever we can. I love this natural setting, these lakes... Lots of people don’t like to practice free diving in Finland because the water is black in the depths, but that’s exactly why I like it so much. Down below there are no colors, no sounds. There’s nothing... You are completely alone with yourself.”

Johanna is one of the most fascinating and versatile people I have met through my work. A woman of a thousand skills and a world-famous athlete who managed to transform a serious accident into an opportunity to make her mark in a new discipline, one in which she still holds the current world record. “Diving was never a problem”, she says as she carefully positions a few pieces of wood in the fireplace. “In the town where I grew up we had a big open pool, four



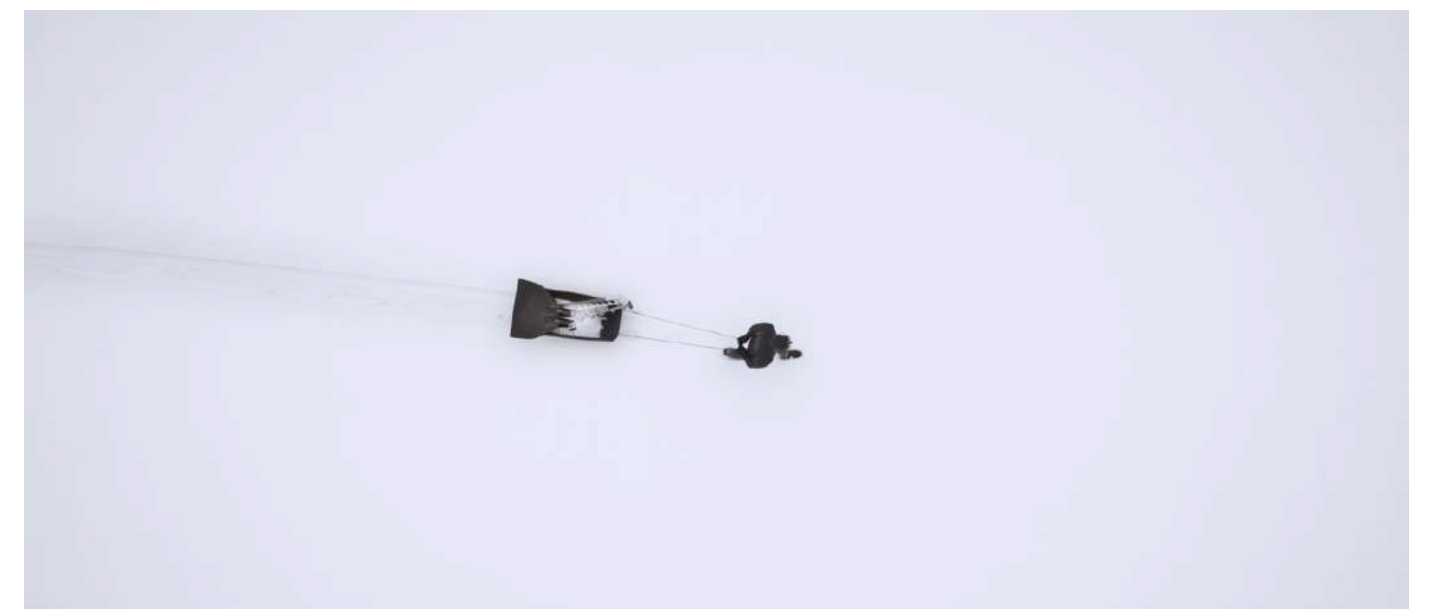
meters deep. I remember I would dive down to the bottom, then turn to look up at all the people swimming on the surface. From that distance they seemed more like fish than human beings.” When Johanna was six she received her first set of swimming fins as a present. She was so happy that she slept with them for months.

In 1999, after years of scuba diving, Johanna took her first free dive. The feeling of immediate lightness proved liberating. Being able to swim without the weight of equipment won her over instantly, and ever since then Johanna has been racking up one success after another. In 2004 she set the women’s world record for dynamic free diving with fins, and she has remained consistently ranked among the best free divers in the world.

Then, in 2010, a serious accident changed her life. “I was riding a downhill bike, traveling a slippery, muddle path down a hill when suddenly I began to slip”, she recalls. “The fall wasn’t particularly dangerous, but

I was unlucky and I hit a rock. The pedals didn’t open and my left leg was smashed into a thousand pieces, like a twisted branch.” Rushed to the hospital, Johanna underwent delicate surgery designed to keep necrosis from developing in her leg. The swelling and compound fractures were so serious that the doctors weren’t able to sew the leg back up and close the wounds until another ten days had passed.

Rehabilitation was painful and complex, and lasted more than a year and a half, consuming all of her energies. A graphic designer by trade, Johanna decided to sell her agency and say goodbye to the thirteen people who were working for her. After 12 months passed she was finally able to walk without a cane, but the nerves in her leg were so badly damaged that the pain, profound and persistent, remained her constant companion. “I couldn’t sleep for the pain. That’s when my doctor recommended I try cold water therapy”, says



Johanna. “The first time I put my leg in 4-degree water I only managed to keep it in for a minute, but the relief was immediate. Finally it didn’t hurt anymore.”

As the months passed, Johanna became so accustomed to the cold that she found she could no longer do without it. She began immersing the other leg as well, then her entire body, ultimately even her head. “I liked the way it felt. That’s when I first got the idea of diving beneath the ice. What better place to try it than Finland?”

While her sister is preparing dinner, Johanna sits on the little wooden dock that runs out from the bank

into the lake, busy breaking up the thin layer of ice that’s formed on the water’s surface over the past couple of days. After she’s pushed a few sections underwater, she lights a series of candles that illuminate the wooden stairs leading down into the water. In a few hours she’ll be able to take the first dive of the season. She’s been waiting for this moment for weeks, and it stirs emotions she finds hard to conceal. “I love diving, feeling the water run between your fingers... When you’re down below there’s no margin for error. You have only yourself to trust. You have to be both relaxed and in control at the same time”, she explains. “Free diving requires physical



effort, but mental discipline is even more important. Going as deep as you possibly can isn't enough; you have to do the dive without panicking or losing your head."

Johanna's personal record for static apnea is 6 minutes and 35 seconds, an eternity for mere mortals. "The most difficult thing is watching the seconds go by. After two or three minutes your mind starts listing all the infinite reasons why you should go back up to the surface instead of staying down there underwater.

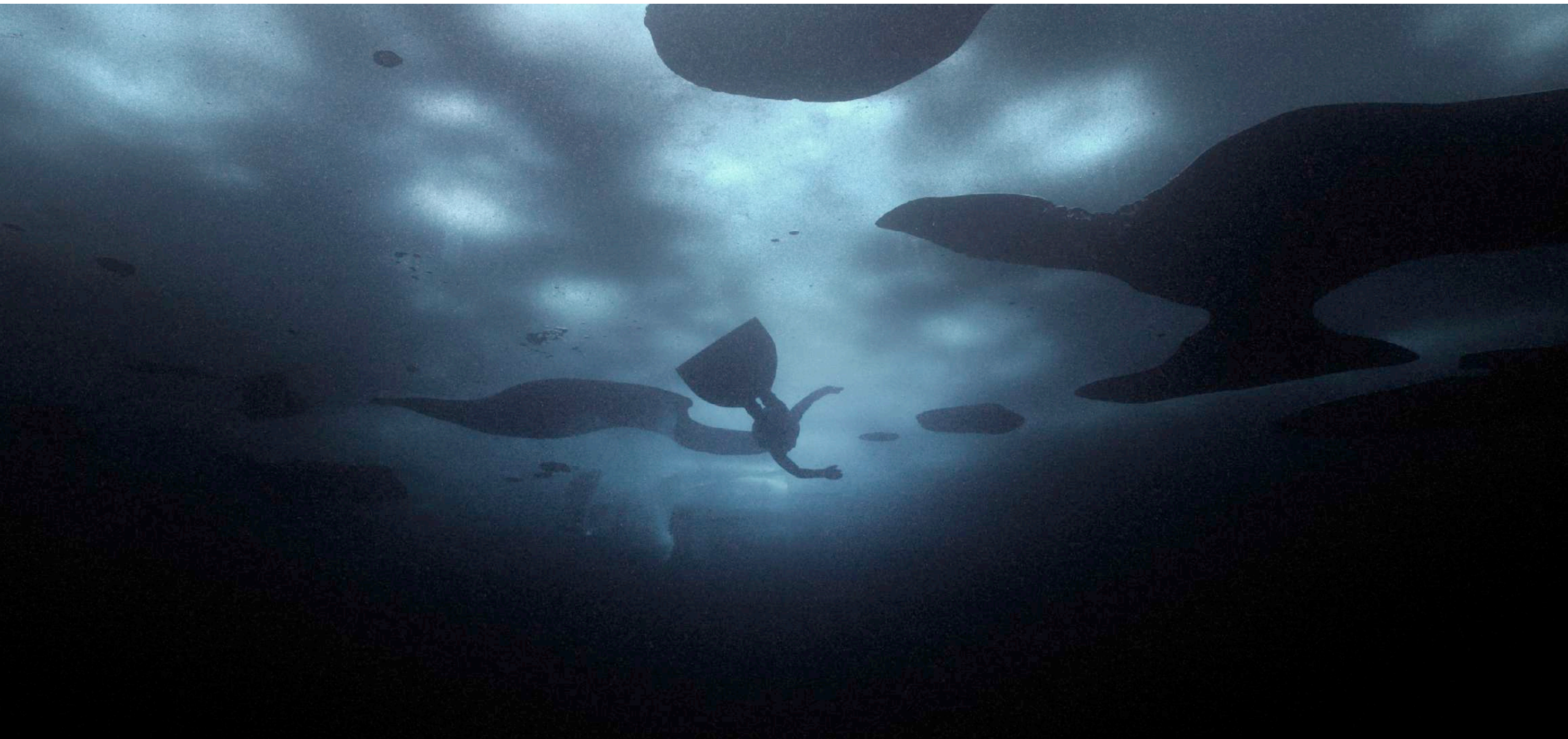
The more time goes by, the harder it gets. You need a lot of self control." In apnea conducted beneath the ice, where the diver has to move horizontally, covering a preset distance between two holes cut into the ice, the feelings are considerably different. Following an initial acclimatization phase brought on by the low temperatures, a feeling of great peace takes over. In 2015 Johanna set the world record in this particular discipline, swimming for 50 meters wearing nothing

more than a simple swimsuit and goggles. The water temperature was barely 2 degrees centigrade. "Up until the end I was afraid that my head, the part of the body that suffers the most during low-temperature dives, couldn't take it", confesses Johanna, "but in reality things were easier than I'd anticipated."

Diving beneath ice has other pitfalls. Visibility is one, since the thick layer of ice and snow on the water's surface often reduces vision to a minimum. It's easy

to become disoriented, so much so that officials extend safety ropes between the holes. "Sometimes I can't even make out my own hands. That's how dark the water can be. In the event of a real emergency, my safety plan is to swim down six meters below the surface. That's the only way I can see light coming in from the holes and figure out where I can get out."

Although it's hard to believe, Johanna is afraid of the depths. Every time she goes free diving and swims



down 50 meters to the Finnish lakebed, her mind turns to sea monsters and unknown creatures that populate the abyss. “The deepest point I reach corresponds to the extreme limits of my ability to dominate my fears. Otherwise I could go deeper”, she says with a smile.

Sunny, energetic and curious, Johanna is an unusual mix of successful athlete and a woman whose dreams and fantasies come to life the moment she comes back into contact with nature. As soon as she can, Johanna likes to leave daily rhythms, work and family commitments behind (she’s the mother of a 16-year-old boy) and spend a little precious time with Elina, her best friend and trusted helper. Although they have very different personalities, the two sisters share a deep and very special relationship, so much so that one is tempted to think that one couldn’t exist without the other. Spending time in their company is like being admitted into a small, secret and magical world of their making.

Elina spent many years living in Australia and New Zealand. According to both sisters, the distance and separation was hard for them to bear. Today they work together creating photo shoots and books, and traveling around Europe for diving competitions. Although she still holds the record for diving beneath the



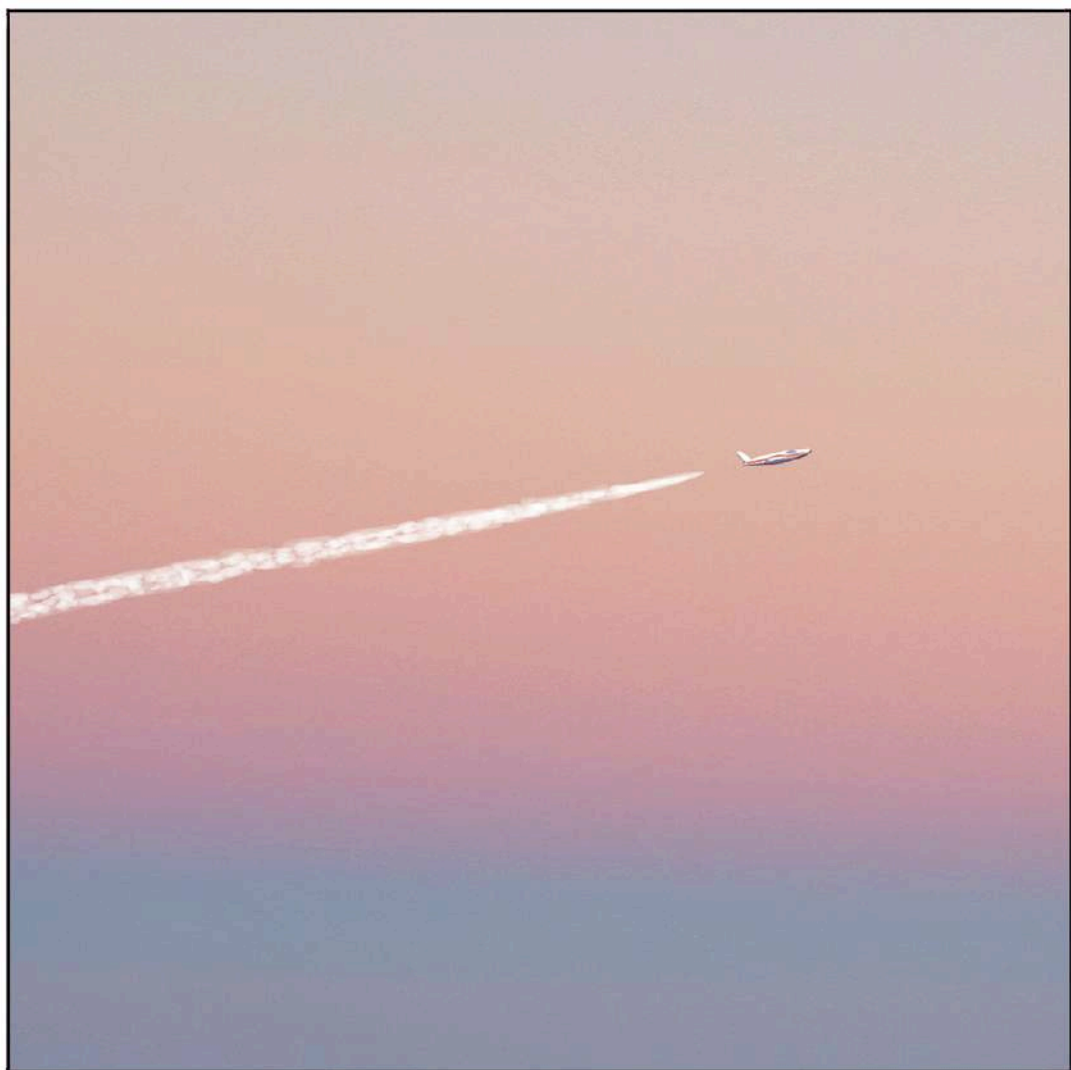


ice, for Johanna free diving has long since evolved into something more than a desire to “beat” her opponents. “If you compete with that mentality, you’re not enjoying the moment. I don’t deny that I thought that way when I was younger, but now I don’t like it anymore.”

Today Johanna is a 42-year-old woman who can allow herself to experience diving and apnea as something more than a duty. “When you win, the expectations of those around you increase automatically”, she says. “So many different windows of opportunity open up around you that you have to be good at figuring out what you want from life and what you truly desire from this sport.”

In 2006 Johanna earned one of just three government stipends reserved for non-Olympic Finnish athletes. Not by chance, that was the year she found herself training the least. “Going to the pool just wasn’t fun anymore. I was losing motivation. I love apnea because I find it more stimulating than spending hours looking at a computer screen, but I realized that I was turning it into a job just like any other”, she explains. “One of the most beautiful periods of my life was the time just after my rehabilitation. I spent two years out in the open: I would take my kayak and go out and explore the islands around Helsinki. There are hundreds of them, and all you need is to paddle for five minutes before you’re completely lost in nature.”

This year another diver may attempt to break Johanna’s record. Deep in her heart Elina hopes she does, because this would give her sister the excuse she needs to try again, along with the determination and seriousness that have always been a part of her personality, only this time devoid of any obsession with success. Her sister would take the challenge in stride, almost as if it were a game. Sometimes that’s how remarkable achievements are accomplished. +

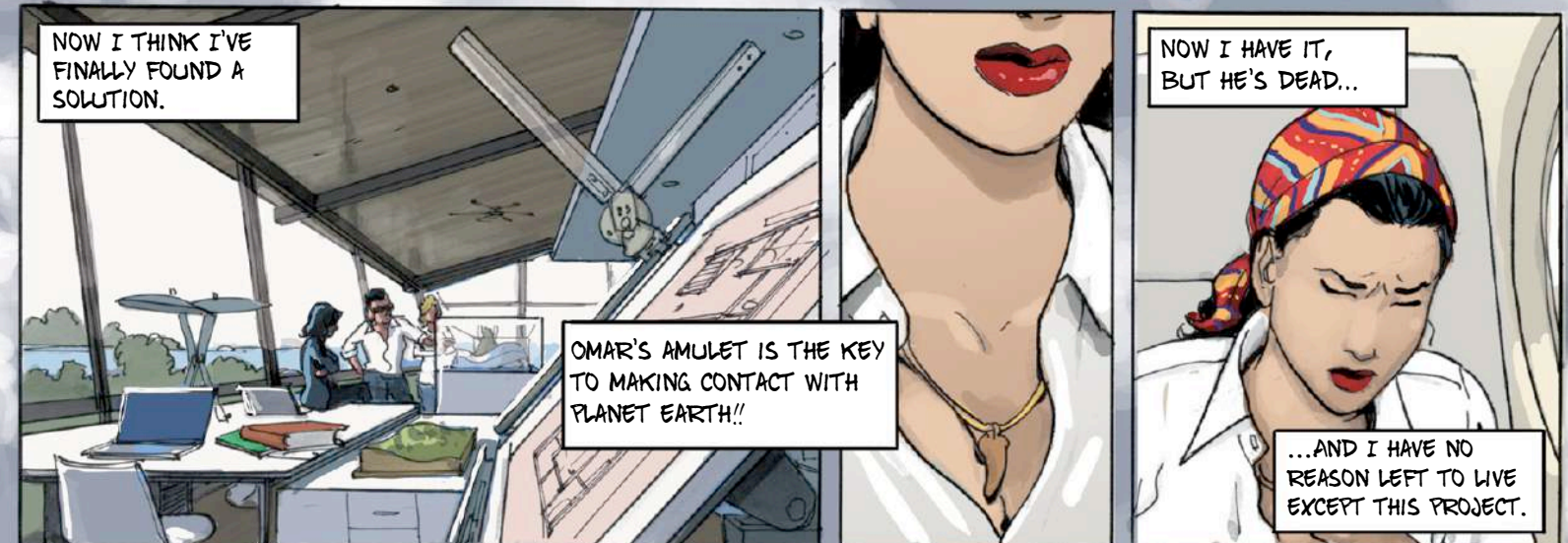
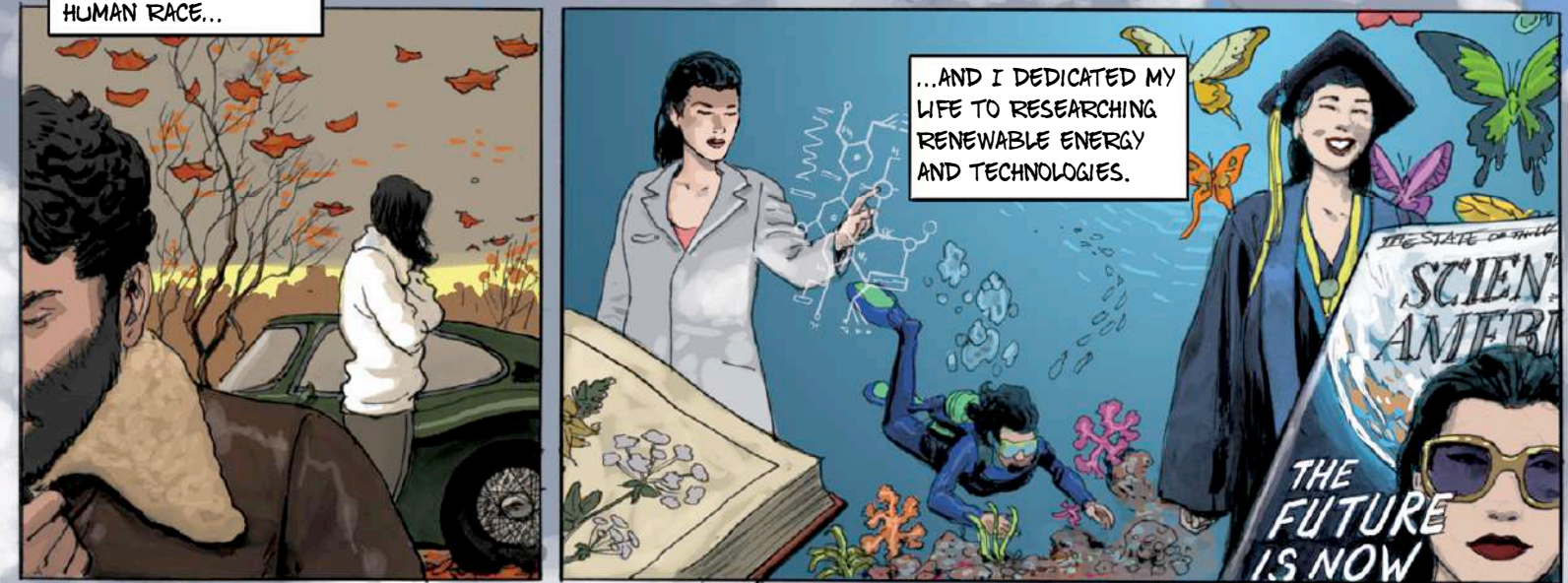
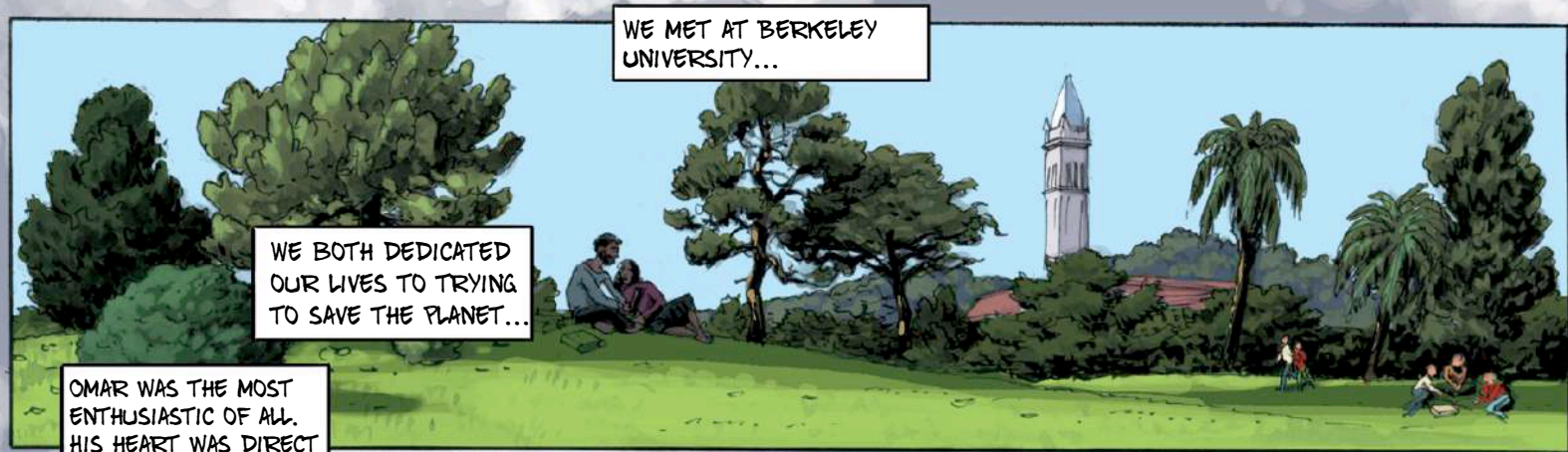


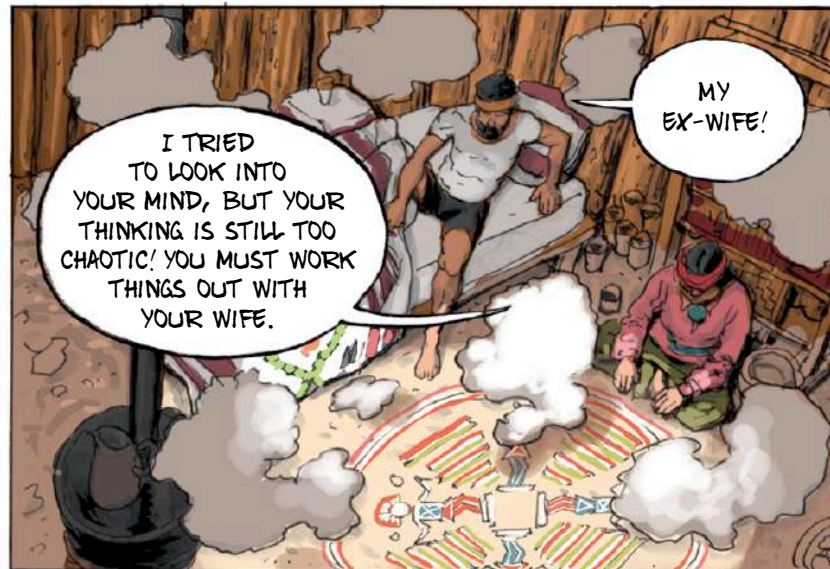
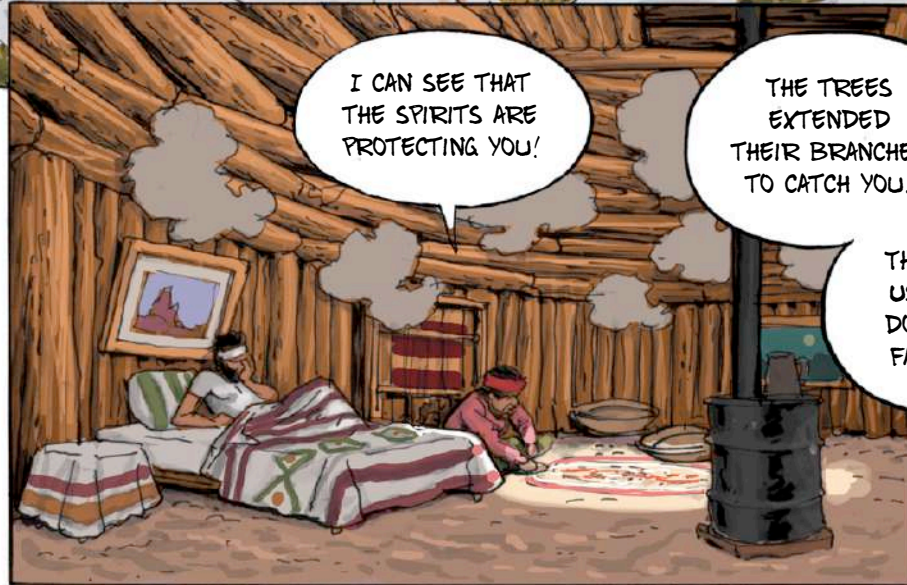
Searching for the lost amulet
along the streets of Shanghai.

AUTHOR: Dominique Bertail

the Tebah project

PART 2





LAS VEGAS AIRPORT.

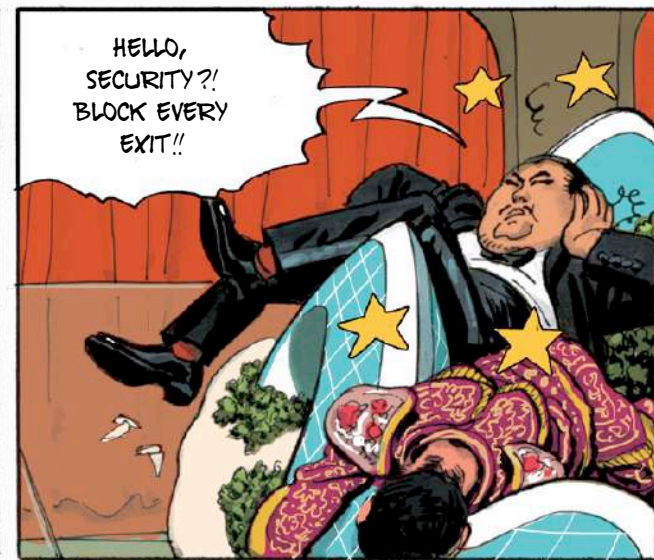
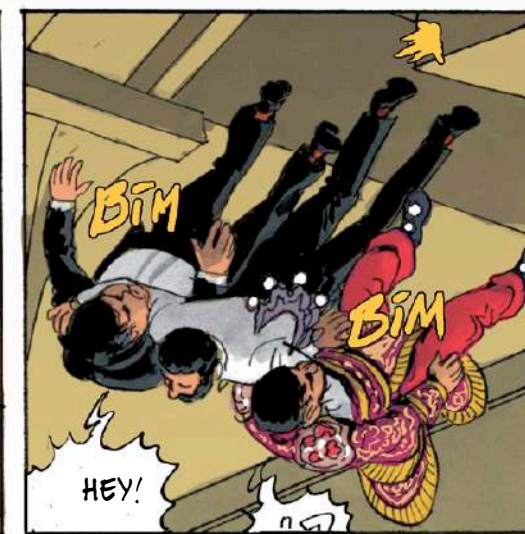
SHE STOLE MY MOST VALUABLE POSSESSION! SHE TRIED TO KILL ME!

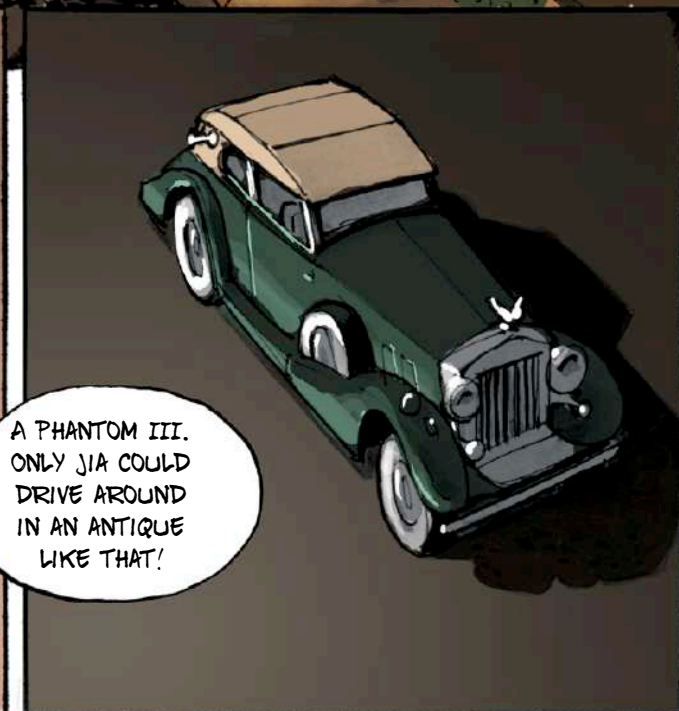
HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN IN LOVE WITH HER?!

AND I HATE THESE PLANES! I'M NEVER COMFORTABLE UP HERE IN THE AIR. IT'S NOT MY ELEMENT!

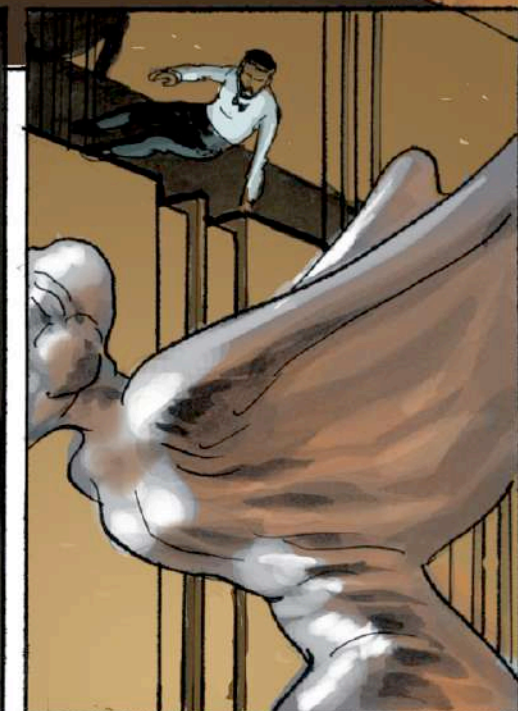








A PHANTOM III. ONLY JIA COULD DRIVE AROUND IN AN ANTIQUE LIKE THAT!



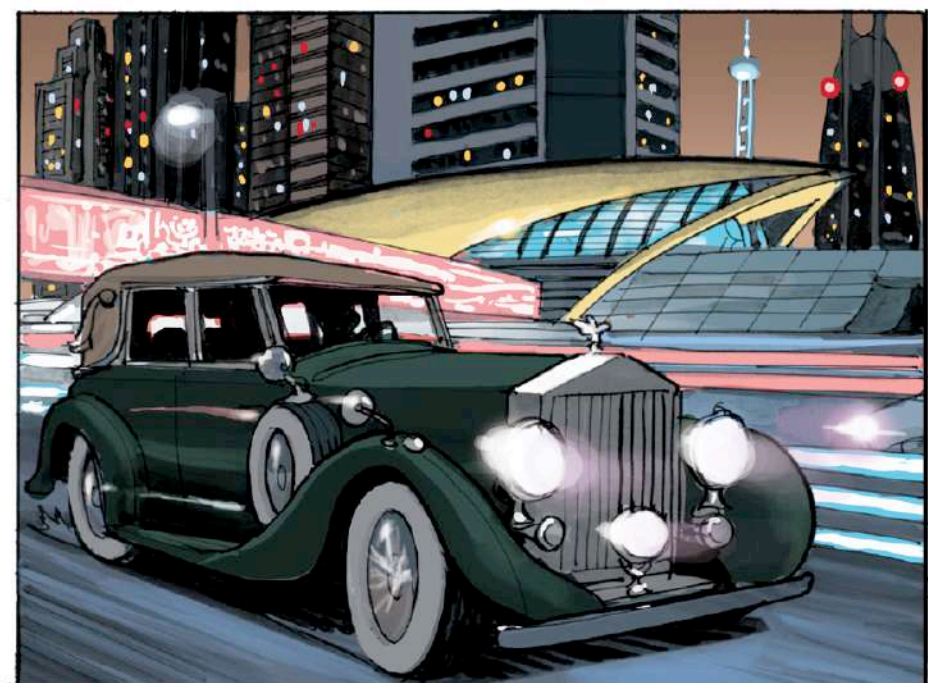
HOW COULD YOU LET HIM GET AWAY?! QUICK, TO THE ARK! WE HAVE TO PROTECT THE AMULET!



HE'LL DO ANYTHING TO GET IT BACK, AND BELIEVE ME, HE'S CAPABLE!



CHENG, HEAD FOR THE PORT! TELL LI TO MEET US THERE.



I'VE HAD A DIFFICULT NIGHT, CHENG... THE MAN I LOVE IS ALIVE... BUT HE HATES ME, AND HE HUMILIATED ME IN FRONT OF EVERYBODY.



?!!



HEY, CHENG, SLOW DOWN!



HERE WE CAN TALK WITHOUT ANY INTERRUPTIONS.

??



FOR THE
LAST TIME,
WHERE'S MY
AMULET?!



YOU HAD
NO RIGHT!
YOU STOLE MY
LIFE!



IF ONLY YOU'D BEEN SMART
AND FOLLOWED ME RATHER
THAN KNOCKING OUT MY
DRIVER, I WOULD HAVE LED
YOU STRAIGHT TO IT...



WILL YOU SHUT UP
ALREADY?!
YOU'RE DRIVING ME
CRAZY!



?!!



LISTEN OMAR,
I NEED YOU!
I CAN'T DECIPHER
THE IMAGES FROM
YOUR AMULET. WHERE
ARE YOU WITH YOUR
RESEARCH?



COME WORK WITH US...
I WON'T DENY THAT SOME
THINGS WILL SEEM STRANGE
AND DISTURBING TO YOU,
BUT THEY ARE ALL FOR THE
GOOD OF THE PLANET!
I'M BEGGING YOU
TO TRUST ME...



TRUST YOU?!
YOU MUST BE OUT
OF YOUR MIND...

MMMM...



WAKE UP,
OMAR. WE'VE
ARRIVED.



BEHOLD OUR
LIFE'S WORK.
A PROTOTYPE FOR A
BETTER WORLD.



ANYTHING
IS POSSIBLE HERE...
AND YOU'RE GOING
TO BE PART OF THE
ADVENTURE...

contributors



Evgenia Arbugaeva is a Russian freelance photographer. In her personal work she often explores her homeland—the Arctic—discovering and documenting its remote landscapes and the people who inhabit them. She is a recipient of the ICP Infinity Award, Leica Oskar Barnack Award and the Magnum Foundation Emergency Fund Grant. Her work has been exhibited internationally and has appeared in numerous publications including *National Geographic*, *Le Monde* and *The New Yorker*.



Dominique Bertail was born in 1972 in Tours, France. After completing his studies at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Rennes, Angoulême and Aberdeen, he spent several years drawing storyboards for advertising and creating animated movies, before switching to graphic novels. His work as a graphic novelist includes epic Napoleonic War stories, science-fiction/thriller serials and grotesque old west adventures. Bertail currently lives in Bordeaux, France.



James Whitlow Delano is a Japan-based documentary storyteller. His work has been published and exhibited globally, leading to four photo books including: *Empire: Impressions from China* and *Black Tsunami: Japan 2011*. His projects have earned the Alfred Eisenstadt Award, Picture of the Year International and PDN, among others. In 2015, he founded EverydayClimateChange, an Instagram feed on which photographers post climate change photos from seven continents.



Ian Derry has photographed some of the most famous people on the planet, including Gary Oldman, Brad Pitt, Meryl Streep and Usain Bolt. Today he brings the same aesthetic approach and photographic eye to his work as a filmmaker. His debut short *Johanna* became an Internet sensation, attracting over 25 million views. Derry has also created ad campaigns for brands including Versace and Hugo Boss.



Matteo Fagotto is an Italian journalist and writer based in Milan, Italy, who frequently travels around the world to cover human rights, cultural and social issues. His work has appeared in over one hundred magazines and newspapers worldwide, including *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Policy* and *The Guardian*.



Matilde Gattoni is an award-winning French-Italian photographer. Since her debut in 2000, Gattoni has covered droughts, illegal mining, mass migrations, land grabs and climate change for publications including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Der Spiegel*. She is the author of *Uzbekistan, 10 years after independence*, a book depicting the social situation in the Central Asian country following its independence from the USSR.

dream

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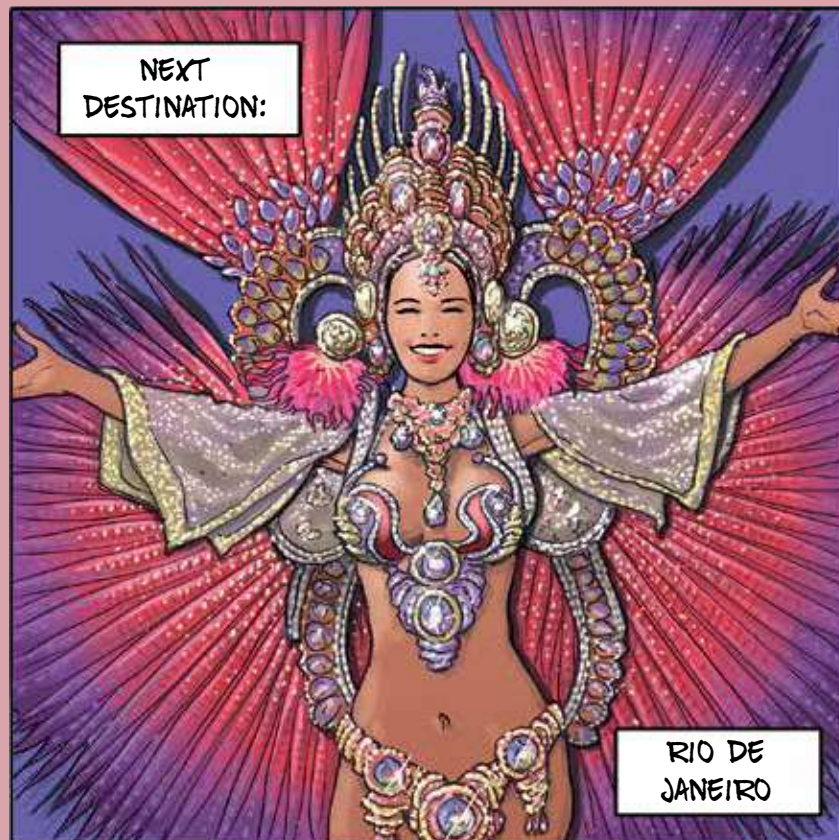
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