Press Kit

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Rhode Island International Film Festival
Santa Cruz Film Festival
Salem Film Festival
Hearts and Minds Film Festival
Landlocked Film Festival
DocUTAH
Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival
Istanbul International Documentary Film Festival
Festival un Film Per La Pace
Ridgewood Film Festival
One Line Synopsis

HIDDEN BATTLES is an intimate and powerful look at what it means to kill another human being during war, as told by men and women who have pulled the trigger.

Short Synopsis

HIDDEN BATTLES a feature length documentary, is a dramatic and deeply intimate film about the psychological impact of killing on the lives of five soldiers, How does killing change the person who pulls the trigger? HIDDEN BATTLES weaves together moments of reflection and realization from people who struggle with what it means to kill in all of it’s complexity. The film offers unique insight into the internal conflicts that veterans around the world continue to face long after they have left the battlefield.

Long Synopsis

How does killing change the person who pulls the trigger? HIDDEN BATTLES, a feature-length documentary, is a dramatic and deeply personal film about the psychological impact of war on five soldiers. Representing a cross-section of nationalities, gender, class and race, these soldiers unveil intimate memories about the central act of combat— killing another human being. Consciously apolitical but deeply psychological, HIDDEN BATTLES examines the strength and
struggles of men and women who have killed and how they create a life for themselves afterwards.

HIDDEN BATTLES begins in the West Bank. Driving apprehensively through narrow streets, a voice narrates: “I hadn’t killed before... I kept thinking: what am I going to do? Will I be able to pull the trigger?” The voice belongs to Zachariah, leader of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, who at thirteen was shot four times and lost his family to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “We’re almost friends now, Death and I,” he admits calmly. The constant stress of being pursued as one of Israel’s “most wanted” is all-consuming, and causes him to reconsider his involvement in the conflict.

For soldiers there is no clean break between the past of war and the present. When Aaron, a former Marine, was deployed to Somalia in 1994 as a scout/sniper, “the really cool summer camp he was in, playing soldier, came to a crashing halt.” Aaron promised himself that he wouldn’t kill anyone. But in the midst of constant gunfire, he came face to face with that promise. For years, Aaron kept his experiences to himself, while he was haunted by his memories. He moves from Massachusetts to Scotland with his family in hopes of escaping his past, only to find that he can’t get away.

A beautiful housekeeper in New York, Esmeralda also has a history few people know about: thirty-one years ago she made the choice to pick up a gun and join the Sandinista Revolution. Esmeralda returns to Nicaragua, where she faces her past as she revisits her fellow soldiers, the dilapidated school where she trained, and places where she fought. As she does this, repressed memories emerge. As much as she cannot accept having “murdered,” she does realize: “in the moment, if I didn’t kill them, they would kill me.”

Saar, a successful choreographer, was a Special Forces Officer in the Israeli Army. He returns to his training camp in Israel with an experiment in mind: to apply what he has learned from dance to
training the elite unit. He talks at length about the cycle of brainwashing that makes it possible to see a human being as a mere target. Saar speaks of this brainwashing as if it is in the past, but when he picks up a gun and fires, he is overwhelmed by the warrior still inside of him. Ultimately, Saar comes to accept that having killed is a “fact” of his life.

Yet, how do soldiers process such a “fact?” For decades George minimized the emotional impact of having killed in Vietnam. Nevertheless, he recalls that when he first killed, he was gripped by the feeling that he “did something – literally against God.” George recognizes that killing has had a lasting impact, and resolves to do something about it. He works with young veterans, helping them express the psychological wounds of war through artistic outlets.

HIDDEN BATTLES weaves together moments of reflection and realization from people who struggle with what it means to kill in all of its complexity. The film offers unique insight into internal conflicts that veterans around the world continue to face long after they have left the battlefield.
Rhode Island Film Fest Announces Slate

By Micah Sachs (July 22, 2010)

The Rhode Island International Film Festival, New England’s largest and only Oscar-qualifying film fest, will open with a program of shorts and the world premiere of a documentary about the last remnants of Gilded Age Newport aristocracy, David Bettencourt’s and G. Wayne Miller’s “Behind the Hedgerow: Eileen Slocum and the Meaning of Newport Society.” The film is one of thirteen documentary world premieres at the festival, which runs Aug. 10-15. Based in Providence, Barrington and Newport, R.I., the festival will also feature the world premieres of six narrative features, including Joshua Lim’s gay seminary drama “The Seminarian” and Tom Provost’s throwback horror film “The Presence.”

The 14th edition of the festival will showcase more than 200 films from 53 countries, including the world premieres of documentaries “Kimshasa Symphony” by Claus Welchmann and Martin Baer (Germany/Congo), Jennifer Stoddart’s “One Thousand Pictures: RFK’s Last Journey” (U.S./United Kingdom) and Victoria Mills’ globe-hopping “Hidden Battles,” about the effects of killing on returning veterans. Other world premieres include Colin McIvor’s “Cup Caxte,” Alexander Holt’s “Forget Me Not,” Michael Morrissey’s “Boy Wonder” and Anthony Ambrosino’s “Sleather.”

Thomas Cobb, the author of the source novel for “Crazy Heart,” and Chris Sparling, screenwriter of the upcoming Ryan Reynolds-starring “Buried,” will speak at a screenplay workshop on Aug. 11. Shorts will feature prominently at the festival, with a program of Oscar-qualifying shorts on tap for closing night.

For more information and the complete lineup, see the festival’s website.

Video Librarian

★★★★ - “Recommended”
“Well made and revealing”

Vietnam Veterans of America

"Hidden Battles" is a timely and evocative documentary that looks beyond political rhetoric and polemics to focus on the very real human cost of war; any war. Poignant, engaging and disturbing, director Victoria Mills posits an important message about the real cost of killing another human being. Brilliant and highly recommended."

George T. Marshall,
Executive Director/CEO
Rhode Island International Film Festival

"Poignant, fascinating, and stripped clean of film cliches about combat experience, Hidden Battles gets to the heart of how five very different former soldiers carry the burden of killing."

Martha Davis
Forensic Psychologist and Director
“Doctors of the Dark Side”

Hidden Battles is an excellent film about war and the after effects of war. By telling the stories of the soldiers of war, of those who have killed, and how they cope with their killing after the shooting is over, Victoria Mills allows the filmgoer to enter the lives of these people and to realize “That could be me.” I think this film is very relevant for courses in sociology, criminology, political science, and psychology. But I also think it is important viewing for all Americans so we start to understand the toll war has on those who return.

Professor Stephen Gibbons
Western Oregon University

The complex and sometimes conflicting emotions they express about their combat experiences challenge facile assumptions about the psychological impact of war. Recommended viewing for any class that covers war.

Dr. Holly Arrow
Director, Psychology of War Lab
University of Oregon
“Every veteran in America should see this powerful documentary.”
Barry G. Campbell
CEO and Founder
Veterans Quality of Life Access Network

“The audience was deeply touched by the film and appreciated Ms. Mills’ sensitive portrayal of a difficult subject.”
Penny Rosen, MSW
Program Organizer
National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis

"Hidden Battles" is a powerful testimony to war and its effects on those who fight in them. No matter what the reason, the human spirit and soul becomes darkened and scared. The journey out of that darkness is a long and difficult. "Hidden Battles" goes to different parts of the world to reveal the journey of men and women in this fight to find meaning in their war experiences. The world needs to see this film.
Shad Meshad
Founder
National Veterans Foundation

“Hidden Battles” offers inspiring examples of how different veterans coped with and continue to cope with the demons of war. It is a film I have recommended and will continue to recommend to those who work with and care about veterans. Director Victoria Mills lets the veterans speak for themselves, without analytical voiceovers or editorial comments—offering fresh insights into the complex ways war and combat can affect those who survive it, and the impact combat trauma ultimately can have on military families.

Robert M. Wilson
Executive Director
Veterans Education Project
Amherst MA

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for keeping an under-enrolled, nonacademic elective that is displacing other classes during a period of severe district budget cuts. Hundreds of teachers have received layoff notices in San Diego, and the potential lack of courses needed to qualify for college is now of serious concern to students and their parents.

It’s expected that Mission Bay JROTC instructors, other supportive school staff, and the cadets will all be pressuring the student body to help boost fall enrollment in the program. Regardless, the lack of compliance with JROTC enrollment requirements for the last two years is an issue that will continue to be raised and, hopefully, lead to an administrative review of the enrollment status of all 13 JROTC programs in the district. If this leads to the removal of any of the units, it could become an organizing model for challenging JROTC in other places.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.projectano.org/

Hidden Battles
A film by Victoria Mills, VSM Productions, 2010

MOVIE REVIEW BY JUSTICE CASTANEDA

From the Hidden Battles study guide:

Hidden Battles is a documentary offering an intimate look at how five men and women have dealt with having killed in war... Viewers will meet Zacharias, a leader of the Palestinian Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Esmeralda, once a Sandinista soldier, Saar, a former Israeli Special Forces officer, Aaron, who was a Marine Corps sniper in Somalia, and George, who served as an infantryman in the Viet Nam War.

A few veterans who were working on the newer version of the documentary Winter Soldier once asked me whether I was against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I replied that I was not against those wars, but against the consumer culture in the U.S. that perpetuates our involvement in other country’s political and economic systems as a form of foreign policy, which makes war necessary. While there remains a question of the legality of the current conflicts, one would be hard-pressed to give an example of any war in the past 150 years that has been necessary, legal or just.

In our video game culture war has gone mainstream, yet the true cost of war is largely unnoticed. As with toxins and pollution, the actual cost of war is not evident in initial exposure, but in the prolonged effects of being enveloped in the pain associated with it. The complexities of war are so entrenched in the fabric of our culture that the simple removal of the human from the chaos of war does little for the long-term effects of human calamity. Hidden Battles presents a sobering reminder that the pain of war remains indefinitely with those who fight, and political victories or peace talks rarely give us respite from the reminders of our capability to hurt.

The individual circumstances of each narrative are unique, highlighting the dynamic stories of people who otherwise would be adversaries; however the parallels in their struggles are unmistakable. At the most basic level, regardless of which “side” we are on, killing betrays our love of self and the innocence of our humanity. And while to some these narratives may otherwise be looked at and viewed as success stories, what they really highlight is the long-term struggle of those who have been exposed to the horrors of war. The scourge of humanity, war represents the epitome of struggle and pain and a harrowing reminder that despite our other great accomplishments, humanity’s love affair with the violent reality of war continues to plague civilizations across the globe.

While we become preoccupied with which side we find ourselves on, or who is right and wrong, the sobering reality is that for the dead and those haunted by the ghosts of violence, the luxury of right and wrong is one rarely afforded to them. These narratives further expose the sense of betrayal felt by those who have been asked by their countrymen to do otherwise unthinkable things. And while the acts of revolution may become necessary in political defiance, what should never be missed is the immense gravity of the act of asking our comrades to kill. For those who have taken life, victory rarely offers anything solace from the nightmares of war.

For the men and women presented in Hidden Battles, as with all of our comrades who carry on the struggle in solitude, their wars will never end as they are and will always be present in our lives. The love we have, the lives we live and the spaces we occupy are forever altered by this experience. A question that remains is how we honor those who are lost and the struggles of those who remain. The residual effects of extreme pain leave scars and emotional wounds that will forever alter the way we interpret our interactions with the world; consequently, our identities become forever intertwined with the environments where we encountered our initial contact.

Hidden Battles should be required viewing for every young person who contemplates their potential involvement with our military-supported infrastructure, whether on the ground as a soldier or as one of the academic puppet masters working within the brain of our war culture. Only through the realistic account of the total cost of war on our young men and women, can we ever begin to appreciate what the catastrophic toll violence continues to take on humanity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: http://hiddenbattles.com/

Justice Castaneda is an educator and prison abolitionist who has worked in San Diego, CA, and Madison, WI. An eight-year Marine Corps veteran, Castaneda is currently a graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning, and holds a BA from UC, San Diego and MA in Education Policy from the Stanford University School of Education.
Westchester Learns What it Meant to Many to Kill on the Battlefield

The difficult question of how soldiers from diverse backgrounds deal with their pasts was examined in a screening and discussion of the film "Hidden Battles" at the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester in White Plains Wednesday.

By Michael Pellegrin | March 31, 2011


What do these people have in common? They are of different races, different ages, and different genders, but they are all struggling in their own ways with their experiences on different battlefields, with the fact that they killed other human beings. And they all agreed to speak with Dr. Victoria Mills last year, a psychoanalyst and filmmaker who released Hidden Battles, a film that explores what it means to kill in the sanctioned theater of war. Mills and her colleagues spoke to many soldiers and former soldiers in preparing the film, but these five ended up being the featured players.
The film—directed by Mills, produced by Hayley Downs and Kathy Leichter, edited by Bryan Gunnar Cole with Danae Elon as the director of photography—was screened Wednesday at the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester in White Plains. The documentary was followed by a question-and-answer session with Mills and two other trauma experts, Ari DeLevie and Kenneth Reinhard.

In visiting its subjects and at times accompanying them back to where they fought, the film was shot in diverse locations including the United States, Nicaragua, the Middle East, Scotland, and Spain, among other places.

In response to a question from a reporter about the lack of detailed discussion on actual killing—Mills said there was discussion among her colleagues on that issue, but ultimately it was decided that those details were not what the film was really about.

“I could have put in everyone’s killing stories,” she said, “but we made a choice to make it about the process.”

Indeed, the processes that the featured fighters went through to move on with their lives, in some cases to help veterans of more recent wars, and to come to terms with their pasts, framed the interviews and gave the film its fascinating and thought-provoking voice.

Quotes that appear in the film are often powerful, poignant, and informative all at once. There is George, the Vietnam veteran, who says he “wasn’t the same person” when he returned from Vietnam, and he was haunted by the feeling “that I did something literally against God.”

Zachariah, the Palestinian fighter, says of killing, “the first time it’s difficult; after that it’s normal.” Aaron, the former Marine, discusses the promise he made to himself before he left for Somalia to not kill anyone, a promise that “didn’t last long,” that he “didn’t even remember” once he got to Somalia. Saar, the Israeli soldier, says at one point that “it’s
white to feel connected to something that you didn’t believe in.” Esmeralda, the former Sandinista rebel, after dealing with the emotion of returning to Nicaragua and facing her fears, ends up telling us “they were no longer fears, just things that happened.”

The Division of Gender and Cultural Issues of the Westchester County Psychological Association, in association with the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester, sponsored the event.

Dr. Andrea Garry, president of the Division of Gender and Cultural Issues, introduced the event and moderated the question-and-answer session that followed the screening. Garry, a Scarsdale resident with a clinical psychology practice in Hartsdale, came across the film through her work with Give an Hour, a program that provides one free hour of counseling per week to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bart Worden, leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester, said after the event that he was happy with the turnout of about 50 people. He said the topic “bears a lot more consideration” in the future. “In general, [the Ethical Culture movement] tends to eschew violence in all its forms,” he said. “In this case, I guess we feel that there’s a need for more justice and compassion” for those that return from the battlefield.
Hidden Battles Review
By Mark Leepson
September 12, 2010

The well-made and revealing documentary Hidden Battles has just been released on DVD. The film by Victoria Mills looks deeply into the personal lives of five people who served in five different wars: a former Palestinian member of the Al Asqa Martyrs Brigade; a former U.S. Marine who served in Somalia in ’94 as a sniper; a former Israeli Army Special Forces officer; a woman who fought for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua; and Vietnam veteran George Williams.

Mills’ cameras zero in on the internal lives of the five veterans through talking-head interviews, shots of them going about their daily lives today and through flashbacks (using archival footage mostly). You get a very good picture of how they dealt with their post-war emotional problems. And you get a good idea about the universality of post-traumatic stress among those who take part in any kind of war and then come home to try to live life in peacetime society.

All of the veterans’ lives are well illuminated in the film. That includes Williams (above), who served for 18 years as a New York City firefighter a few years after coming home from Vietnam, then retired to the Boston area where he became an artist, writer and activist. That activism included volunteering with the Veterans Education Project in local schools and being very active with his local chapter of Veterans for Peace.

George Williams died September 2 after a heart attack. He was 63.

“His selflessness extended to social service causes,” Rob Wilson, executive director of the Veterans Education Project, told the Northampton Gazette, “His loss will be significant to all of us. He really was someone who respected the military and talked about some of the positive things that happened to him in the military. His stories of the war and coming home made an immeasurable impact on countless classrooms and students.”

Marc Leepson is a journalist, historian and the author of six books, most recently Desperate Engagement, the story of the Civil War Battle of Monocacy (St. Martin’s Press, 2007),
**Director’s Statement**

The film HIDDEN BATTLES was born out of my desire to understand what it is like to kill a person in war. As a psychoanalyst, I knew about trauma, but I understood little about this topic. At the time - in 2004 - it seemed important to find out more: our country was at war and we would have soldiers returning from combat who had killed, and who would be faced with integrating this reality into their lives.

Not wanting to make generalizations about how soldiers react to killing, I set out to interview former military men and women from around the world about this delicate topic. I was very curious about how soldiers processed their experiences and what they told themselves about what they had done. I interviewed military experts, war historians and psychologists, but I thought the real experts were the soldiers themselves.

I had so many questions, and wondered if there were similarities across different countries and conflicts. I traveled throughout the US and to several countries and met many soldiers, interviewing more than 40 people. For the film, I purposely chose individuals who were functioning in their day-to-day to show that it is possible to build a life after war. And I wanted to understand how they did it.

My work as an analyst both informed and conflicted with my work as a filmmaker. Most of these soldiers had never talked about how killing in war had affected them in any other than a superficial way. Because I am in the profession of helping people, I believe the soldiers found it easier to share things they rarely talk about. The trust they afforded me was tremendous. However, as an analyst, I am committed to maintaining a person's privacy and even though they wanted their stories told, as did I, I often felt conflicted.

I interviewed and filmed each soldier over an extended period of time, to see how their stories would unfold. As time went on, many of their recollections became more detailed and nuanced. Every soldier deals with killing in his or her own unique way, and HIDDEN BATTLES shows five ways in which this act is integrated into five different lives. All five testify to the resilience of the human spirit and the hopefulness of their future.
Victoria Mills  
**Director/Producer**

Victoria Mills is an award winning documentary filmmaker as well as a full-time practicing psychoanalyst. Her first film, "Mothers and Daughters: Mirrors that Bind," traveled the festival circuit in 2002. In conjunction with the films, she leads workshops with universities, national women's organizations, and grass-roots community groups. As an analyst with 25 years experience, Victoria has worked extensively with people of different cultures who have experienced trauma, including those who suffered from the disaster of 9/11. She is also is a training analyst and on the faculty of the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, and a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association, Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, and supervises graduate and PhD students at several universities.

**Filmography**

*Mothers and Daughters: Mirrors that Bind*

**Festivals and Screenings:** Columbus International Film Festival, Western Psychological Association Film Festival, MANA, New School for social Research, Columbia University, Jamaica YWCA, Staten Island College CUNY, Barnard College, LGBT Center NYC, Mt. Sinai Hospital, Clinical Social Work Association, NY Freudian Society, YM YWHA Queens, Society for Psychoanalytic Study and Research Scientific Meeting. **Awards:** Honorable Mention, Columbus International Film Festival  
**Distribution:** Aquarius Health Care Media
Hayley Downs  
**Producer**  
Hayley Downs is a documentary filmmaker, producer and non-profit consultant. In addition to "Hidden Battles," she associate produced "Naturally Obsessed: the Making of a Scientist," a documentary by Richard and Carole Rifkind. Currently she is in production on "Swamp Cabbage: a Dark and Sweaty Documentary," a personal film about her eccentric Florida Cracker childhood with Co-Director/Producer, Julie Kahn. Her past films explore multi-generational Florida folk culture, and have shown at underground film festivals including New York, Chicago and San Francisco, as well as The Museum of Contemporary Art Miami and Art Basel. Her angst-filled teen journal was included in “Mortified: Real Words, Real People, Real Pathetic,” published by Simon Spotlight Entertainment. She serves on the Junior Board of New York Cares and she lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband, Marlan and kitten Herman.

Kathy Leichter  
**Producer**  
Kathy Leichter is a documentary film producer and director, fundraising and outreach consultant and media activist. Leichter is directing and producing “Here One Day,” a documentary which follows Kathy’s quest to understand how living with her mother’s mental illness and losing her to suicide have impacted her as a woman, artist and ultimately as a mother. Previous films include, “Passing On,” the award-winning PBS documentary, “A Day’s Work, a Day’s Pay,” and has previously produced “Spit it Out,” and “Mothers and Daughters: Mirrors that Bind.” Leichter is the Project Director of The Workfare Media Initiative, a media activism project. For more information about Leichter’s work please go to: www.twosunsmedia.com.
**Lila Yomtoob**  
*Producer/Sound Editor*

Lila Yomtoob is a producer specializing in marketing and development, a filmmaker, and former sound editor. Most recently she co-produced “Foreclosure,” starring Michael Imperioli. Her feature length directorial debut “High Life” premiered at San Francisco Indie Fest in 2005, and she has made several shorts and viral videos that played in festivals and galleries across the country. As a sound editor, she worked on over 40 feature films, docs and tv shows, garnering an Emmy Award for sound editing HBO’s “Baghdad ER.” She has several projects in development: www.yomtoob.com.

**Bryan Gunnar Cole**  
*Editor*

As a director, producer, and picture editor Bryan Gunnar Cole’s work spans the full scope of media distribution and has been seen in theatres, festivals and television worldwide. His feature directorial debut, “Day Zero” starring Elijah Wood, Chris Klein and Jon Bernthal won international acclaim, and his feature documentary “Boomtown” premiered on the PBS showcase POV series. His television credits include programs for National Geographic (“Search for the First Dog,” “Street Dogs,” “Crows”), Discovery (“Return to Penguin City”), and Showtime (“Unfurled”). He is also a union picture editor with both feature and television credits including the acclaimed documentaries “Another Road Home,” “Arctic Son,” and “The Sunshine;” A&E’s “First 48,” PBS’s “Texas Ranch House,” and Lifetime Channel’s “Women Docs.” Bryan Gunnar Cole holds a BA in Film Studies from Yale University and a MFA in filmmaking from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts.
Danae Elon  
**Director of Photography**

Jerusalem-born Danae Elon graduated from NYU in 1995, recipient of the Kodak National Cinematography and Tisch Achievement in Cinematography Awards. Her first documentary “Never Again Forever” participated in over 20 international festivals, broadcast on Austrian TV and won awards at the San Francisco and Chicago festivals. Her second film, “Wild Mint,” screened internationally, and “Cut” was broadcast on Israeli TV, winning a cinematography award at the Jerusalem Film Festival. Danae's film, “Another Road Home” won numerous awards, was released theatrically in the United States in April 2005 and screened at many international festivals. Her latest feature documentary film “Partly Private,” premiered at Tribeca Film Festival and won Best New York Documentary.
Photo Caption Information

HiddenBattles_still1.JPG: Cinematographer Danae Elon photographs Saar at his former military base camp in Israel. Photo by Hayley Downs.

HiddenBattles_still2.JPG: Esmeralda at the 28th anniversary of the Sandanista Revolution. Photo by Phillip Touitou.

HiddenBattles_directorpic.JPG: Director, Victoria Mills, taking a photo in the market in Jenin, Palestine. Photo by Hayley Downs.


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Esmerelda Hoozky
Scott Palmer
George Williams
Yoav Yarom
Zachariah Zubeidi

Featured Soldiers’ Family Members
Heather Crowell
Rowyn Crowell
Lee Sher
Hamudi Zubeidi
Sousou Zubeidi

Participating Soldiers and their Families
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Dusan Borota
Barry Campbell
Huynh Phuong Dong
Harry Feinberg
Edie Feinberg
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Donald Garcia Osorio
Heather Grayson
Dalia and Yakov Harari
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