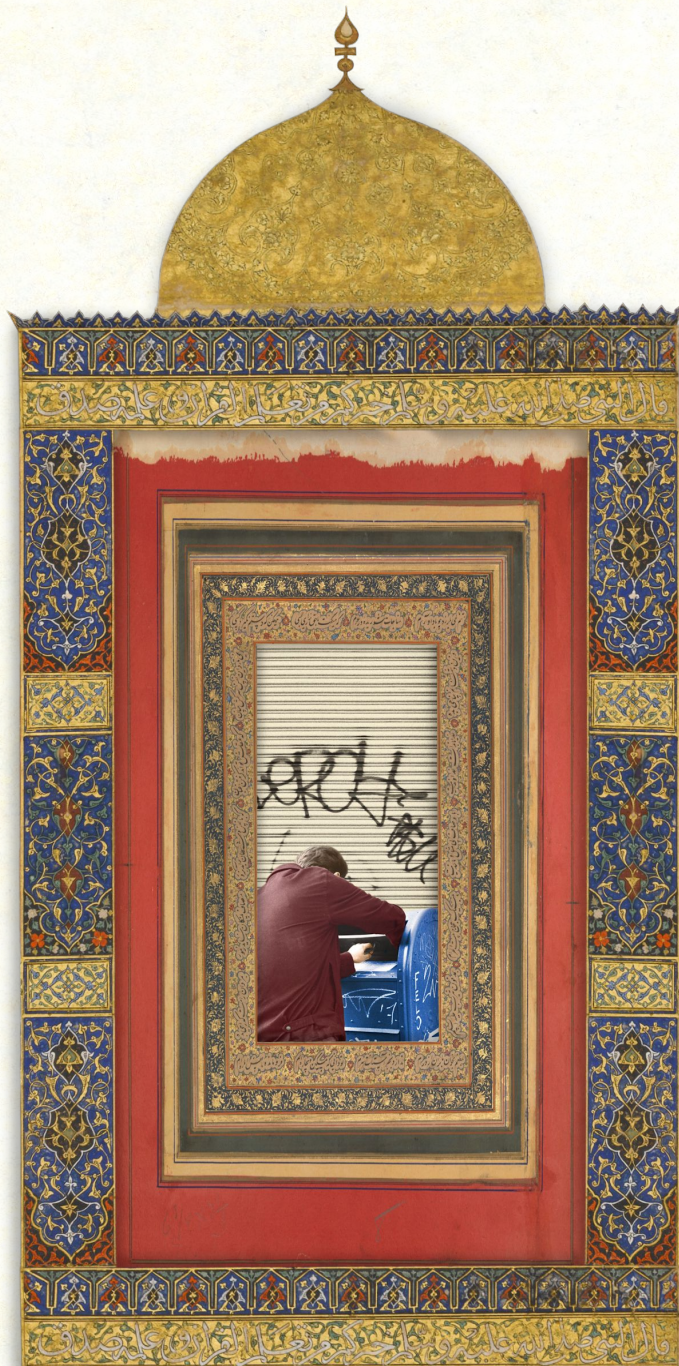


# MARVELOUS

*TALES of the*



*and NEWS of the*

# STRANGE

a short film by LILY EKIMIAN & A.T. RAGHEB

2021 / 9 minutes / Drama / USA / English / Dog Door Films

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## SYNOPSIS

Told through 35mm black and white photography, a sprawling narration, and contradictory subtitles, “Tales of the Marvelous and News of the Strange” explores the lives of a young couple as they grapple with their cultural and spiritual identities through superstition and art.

Ahmed (A.T. Ragheb), an Egyptian-American aspiring actor anxiously awaiting news of his latest film audition, gives in to his superstitions and sets off on a journey across Pittsburgh, trying to force the hands of fate. Lily (Grace Cooper), a photography student, meanwhile, criss-crosses the city unseen on a journey of her own, photographing and recalling scenes from her past. “Tales of the Marvelous and News of the Strange” is an adventure into the realms of both the physical and the spiritual: the urban landscapes of western Pennsylvania versus dreams of Egypt; the human psyche; the past; the present; the fantastic; and the anatomy of film itself.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**TITLE:** Tales of the Marvelous and News of the Strange

**COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION:** USA

**RUNNING TIME:** 08:23

**YEAR:** 2021

**SHOOTING FORMAT:** 35mm / Digital HD

**LANGUAGE / SUBTITLES:** English

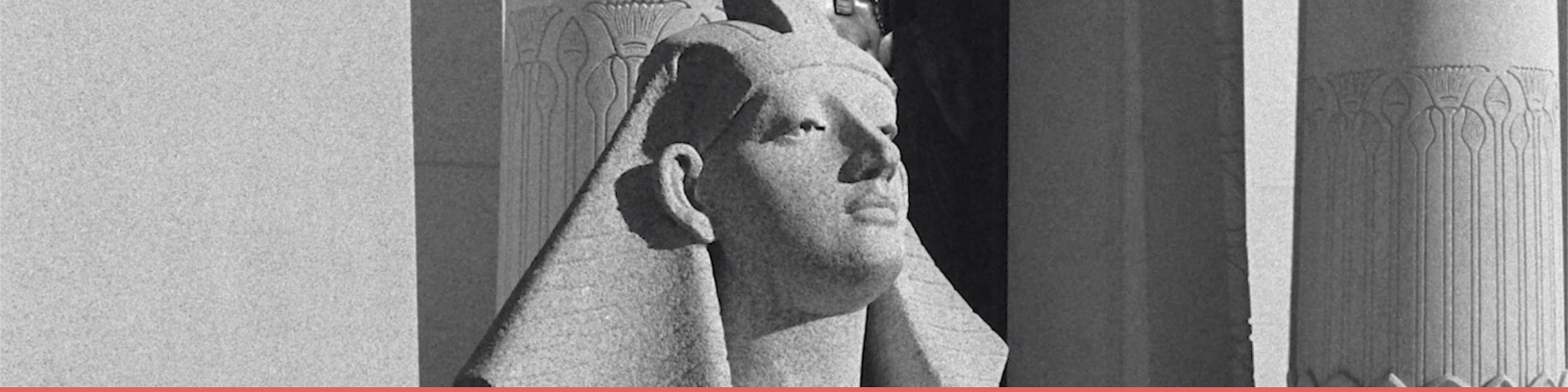
**ASPECT RATIO:** 1.85:1

**COPYRIGHT:** © Lily Ekimian &

**SOUND:** Stereo

A.T. Ragheb, 2021

**COLOR:** Black and White / Color



## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

We find the characters of “Lily” and “Ahmed” attempting desperately to define themselves and, in the process of doing so, both lean heavily on the idea of place – “Lily” through her connections to the actual, physical spaces of her childhood and young adulthood in Pittsburgh and “Ahmed” through his imagined connections to Cairo. It is from “Ahmed’s” confused sense of cultural identity that the film derives much of its structure. The storytelling techniques of embedded narratives – stories within stories – and multiple, parallel storylines are ubiquitous in Arab and Middle Eastern literature and are used heavily in the medieval Arabian story collection from which our film borrows its title. The sardonic nature of “Lily’s” narration, also common of the omniscient narrators of Arabian tales, is mirrored in “Ahmed’s” confused understanding of the culture with which he so hopelessly wishes to connect; evidenced most obviously by his interest in Ancient Egypt which, of course, contrasts sharply with the reality of modern day Egypt (shown in the stunning 35mm color photography of Osama Makawy), of which he knows very little and only reinforces his identity as an American – or at the very least *not* an Egyptian. →





## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT (cont.)

“Tales” is a fictionalized version of ourselves and our shared life. The character of “Lily” has never left Pittsburgh – her hometown – and the character of “Ahmed” has never been to Egypt – his ancestral homeland. But the real Lily is not from Pittsburgh, and she in fact met Ahmed in Cairo (because that is where he was born and raised). So if the information provided in the film is not accurate to our true selves, why do this? Why not just give the characters fresh names and disassociate them from ourselves? Because it is not about the literal truth of our realities, but a greater and more honest truth that lies below the surface of the film. To be a directing duo and romantic partners is in many ways easy; we hold the same values and interests, and in turn share the same emotional, intellectual, and spiritual conflicts. However, difficulties arise from our relationship when creating characters that can accurately reflect ourselves. How can two people who were raised in vastly different cultural contexts have the same level of authorship of one project that purports to be deeply personal and emotionally open? Will the project not inevitably be more personal to one writer than the other? Won't one of us necessarily be excluded? Whose film is it, *really*? The question of authorship is one that is often asked of us and “Tales” is, in many ways, an attempt to answer that very question. It is a reflection of our true dynamic: individuals that are messily and inseparably intertwined.

– LILY & AHMED





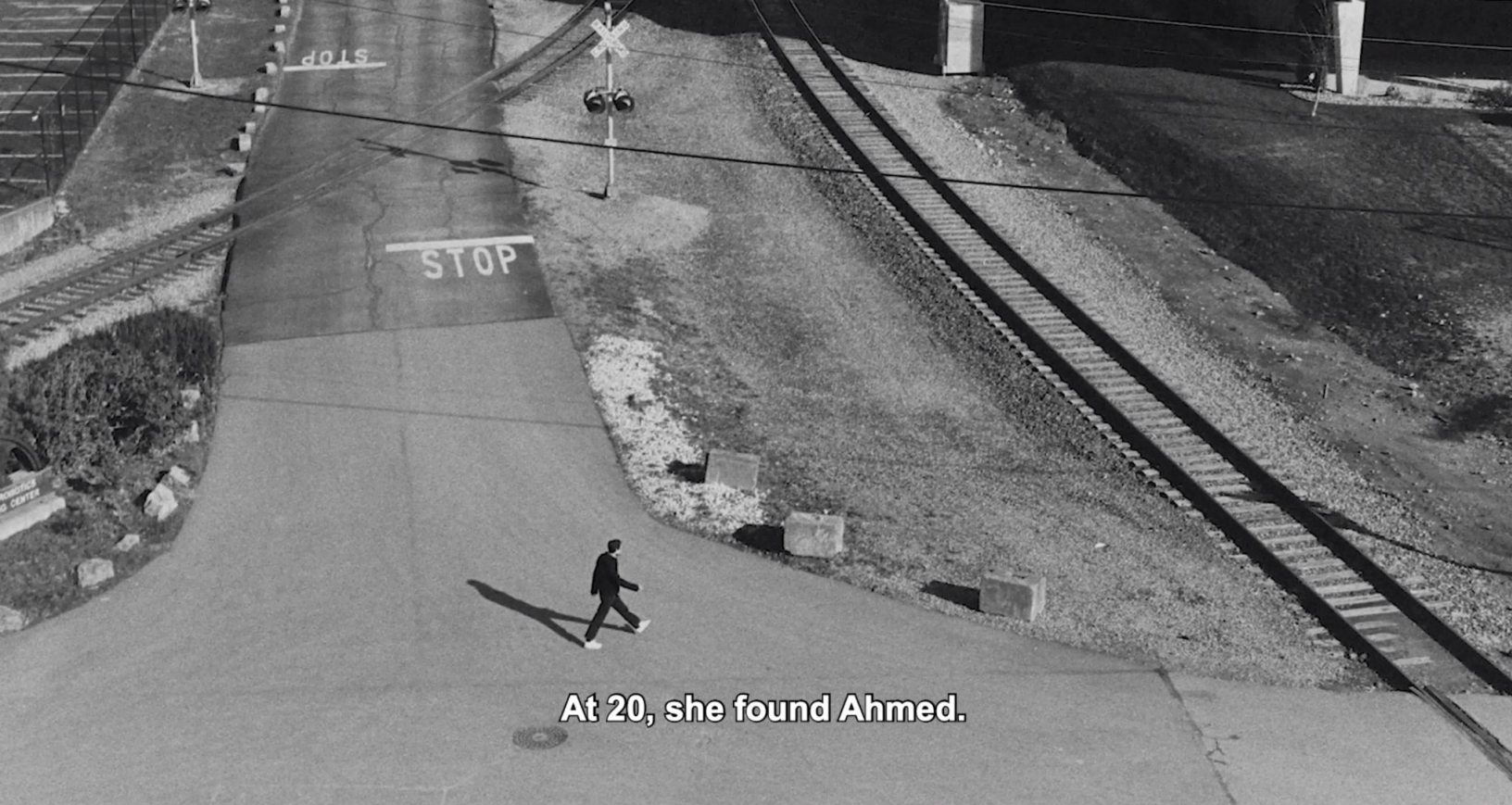
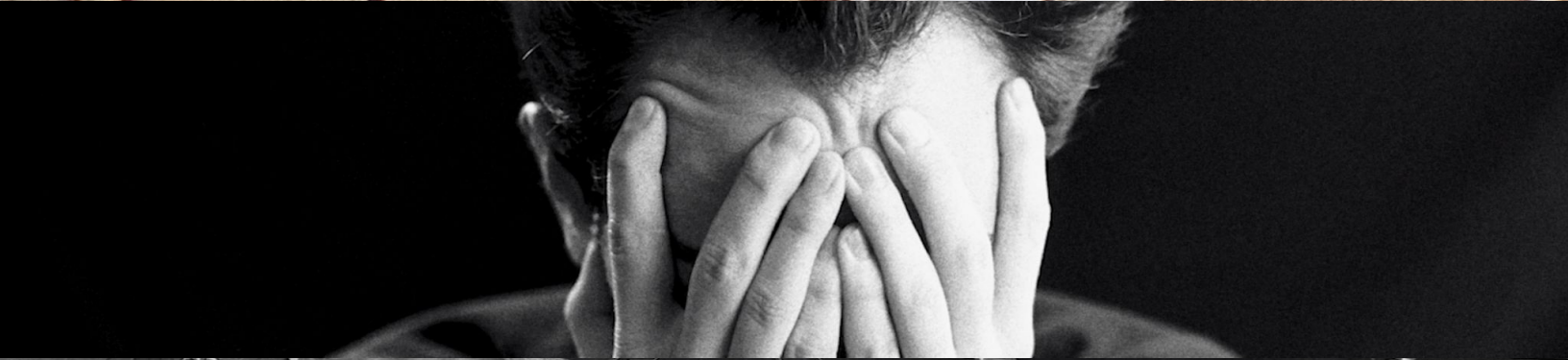
**She begged her to stay, to attend one of the local colleges instead.**







The maroon of a favorite jacket.

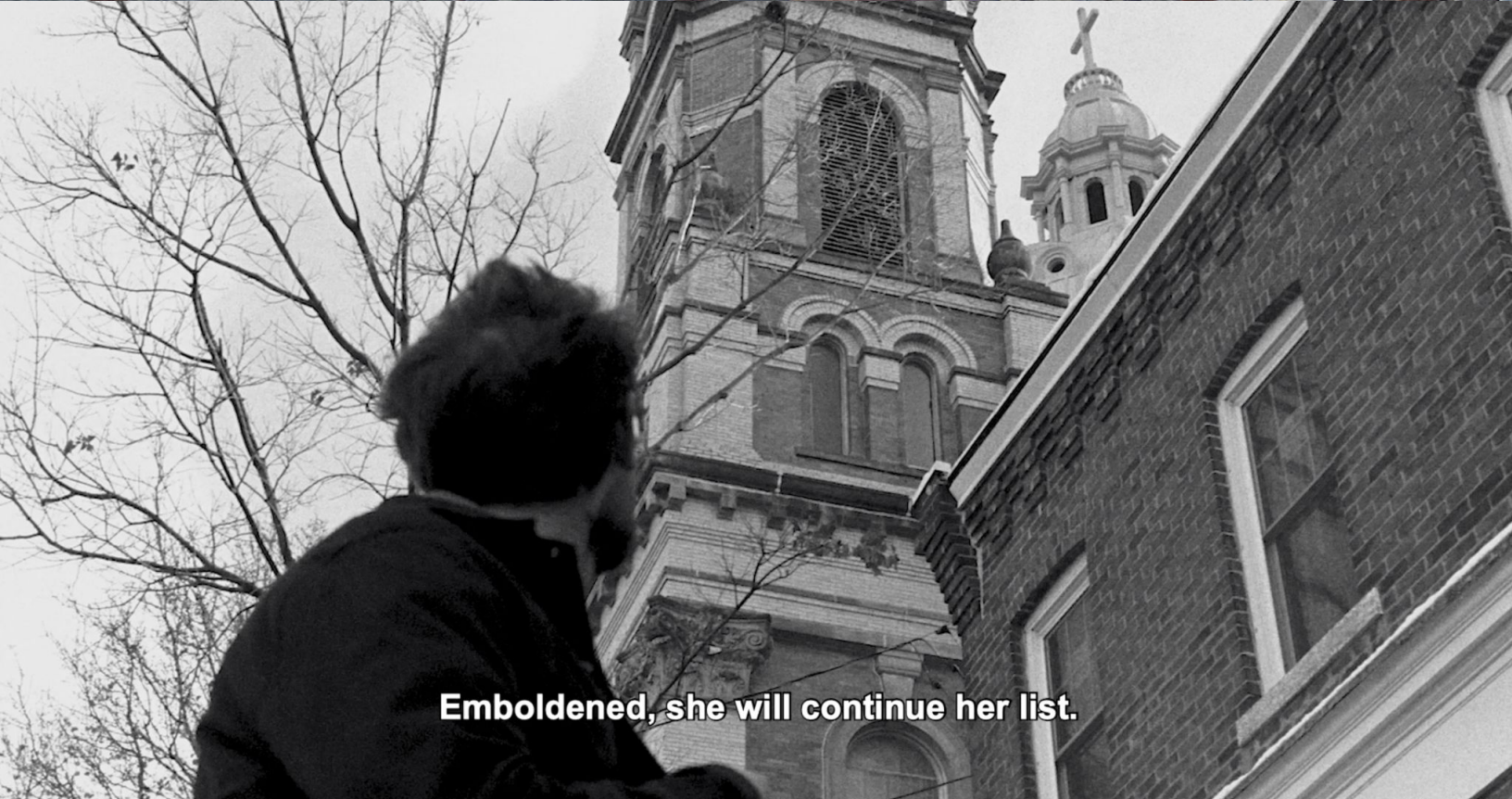


At 20, she found Ahmed.





**The bright red door of a childhood home.**



**Emboldened, she will continue her list.**





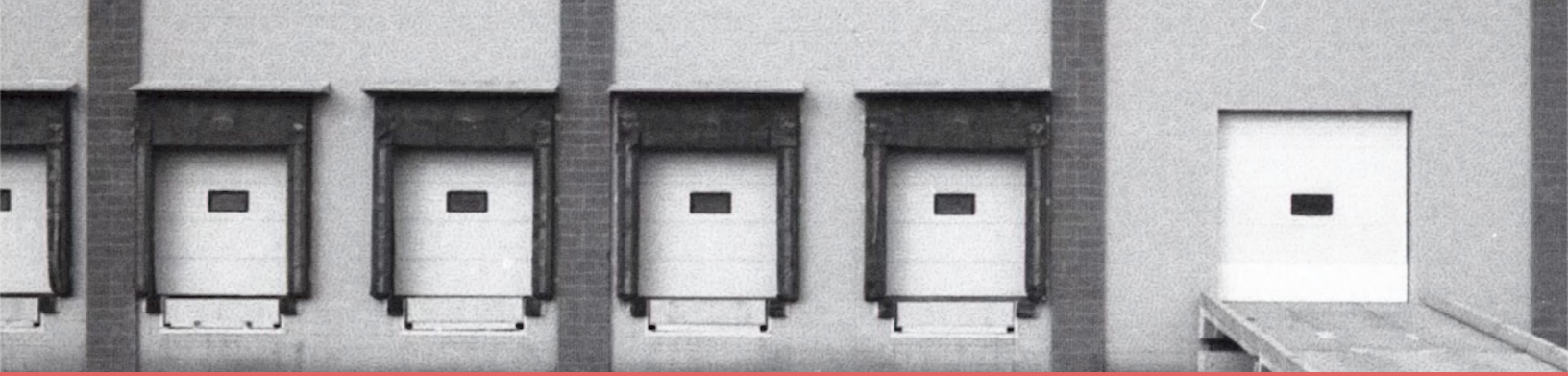
## CAST and CREW

**LILY EKIMIAN & A.T. RAGHEB** | Writers, Directors, Editors, Producers



Lily Ekimian & Ahmed T. Ragheb are independent filmmakers based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ekimian – part American, part Russian – is originally from Washington, D.C., and Ragheb – Egyptian, Dutch, and American – is originally from Cairo, Egypt; they met while both attending school in Cairo. Together they co-founded and run *The Pittsburgher*, an online arts and culture magazine, and a film production platform, Dog Door Films. Ekimian & Ragheb have recently completed their feature debut, *Portrait*, an experimental documentary. They have produced and directed music videos for Daniel Knox and The Handsome Family, as well as a series of short films. Their work deals heavily with the concepts of identity and place, with a special emphasis on feminism, cultural dislocation, and domestic relationships.





## CAST and CREW



### GRACE COOPER | “Lily”

Grace Cooper is a self taught artist and musician living in Oakland, CA, in cramped quarters with her musician spouse of over a decade. She is known for her intricate and sometimes disturbing drawings and records, mostly at home, under the name Grace Sings Sludge.



### A.T. RAGHEB | “Ahmed”

Ahmed T. Ragheb is a writer and filmmaker based in Pittsburgh, PA. Half Dutch and half Egyptian, Ragheb grew up in Cairo, where he met his future partner, Lily Ekimian. They together run an online arts and culture magazine, *The Pittsburger*, and an independent production platform, Dog Door Films.



## CAST and CREW

### **OSAMA MAKAWY | Color Photography**

Osama Makawy is an Egyptian photographer and medical student. He developed an interest in film photography in 2018. He has since documented his daily life through photography as a way of processing the world around him and asking questions. His art emphasizes empathy and vulnerability.



### **BABAK DANESHVAR | Music**

Babak Daneshvar is an Iranian-American musician, composer, and multi-instrumentalist. An expert in the field of traditional music, Daneshvar has released an album of traditional Persian folk instrumentals titled *Prelude* and has previously composed and recorded several pieces of music for The Iranian Television as well as having scored two documentaries (*Soltanieh Dome* and *The Laundry House*).









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# STRANGE

a short film by LILY EKIMIAN & A.T. RAGHEB  
narrated by GRACE COOPER music by BABAK DANESHVAR  
color photography by OSAMA MAKAWY  
a DOG DOOR FILMS production

P. 015. 88



# Credits

**DIRECTORS | WRITERS | EDITORS** Lily Ekimian & A.T. Ragheb

**PRODUCERS** Lily Ekimian & A.T. Ragheb

**STARRING** Grace Cooper (voice), A.T. Ragheb

**BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY** Lily Ekimian & A.T. Ragheb

**COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY** Osama Makawy

**MUSIC** Babak Daneshvar

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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Instagram and Facebook: [@dogdoorfilms](#)

