

# My Love Affair With Marriage

an animated feature film by  
**SIGNE BAUMANE**



**ANNEX**  
FESTIVAL



# Synopsis

From an early age, songs and fairytales convinced Zelma that Love would solve all her problems as long as she abided by societal expectations of how a girl should act. But as she grew older something didn't seem right with the concept of love: the more she tried to conform, the more her body resisted. A story about the acceptance of the inner female rebellion.



*Interview with director  
Signe Baumane*

by Marta Bałaga





***My Love Affair With Marriage* is inspired by your own past. Why is now the right time for you to tell this story?**

For thousands of years marriage has been considered a pivotal moment in a woman's life. Having a husband and children was the only pathway to personal fulfillment. Times may have changed, but attitudes of many have not. Girls and women still face pressure to be submissive to their husbands, partners, boyfriends and male counterparts.

I have been married twice with both marriages collapsing spectacularly. Looking back, I recognize that in the first marriage I failed to identify the abuse which was rooted in a rigid view of gender. Without equality, our intimacy eroded. In the second, although I was married to a gender-bending man, we were stuck in traditional gender roles too and didn't open our minds to other possibilities. I decided to show how social structures and hierarchies reflect on neural pathways, and the chemistry that occurs when people fall in and out of love. By wrapping my personal story around scientific findings, I was hoping to help women examine their own intimate relationships. We rarely think of the effects our cultural biases have on us, of the chemistry in our brains as we fall in and out of love. Yet these are critical components of our daily lives and it's important to recognize them.

My first animated feature, *Rocks in My Pockets*, was based on true events involving five women of my family, including myself, and our battles with depression and suicide. There are similarities between the two, but *My Love Affair with Marriage* is slightly more removed from the purely personal space. I would say that it took the possibilities presented by *Rocks...* and expanded them, making this new film, hopefully, more accessible and universal.

## When did you start to work on the film?

I started writing it in 2015 when we thought it would be possible to have a woman president soon. The elections that followed – and the #MeToo movement – indicated that there are strains between emerging new attitudes towards women, along with broader questions of gender, and the more conservative parts of our society which are trying to hold these old concepts together.

I was confronted with an unsettling question: Where did Zelma, this passionate young woman, get the idea that she has to love someone and marry them in order to feel happy and fulfilled? Although marriage is a social institution, it comes from a deep-seated human need for intimacy and control. Human neural pathways of oxytocin and other neurotransmitters help to establish intimate bonds, but there are almost endless variations of these bonds. Knowing neuroscience only on the level of popular psychology meant that after many months of research, I had numerous sessions with Pascal Wallisch, Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychology at New York University, who gave me valuable guidance and advice. Because of these challenging *Biology* segments, it took me a year to write 24 drafts of the script. Another challenge was to write 23 songs with composer Kristian Sensini for the *Mythology Sirens*.





**These *Sirens* are an equivalent of a Greek chorus, repeating stereotypical views of what a marriage should be.**

The singing trio lays down rules for Zelma of why she must marry and how to properly care for her husband, which are often in direct conflict with her own biology. As a child, Zelma thinks she is equal to boys. But to get the attention of a boy she likes, she has to change into a weaker, more submissive version of herself. Her mother insists that Zelma's most important asset is her virginity, that a woman's value is only measured by having a husband and children. Her college friend, Darya, gets pregnant and loses her life. Horrified, Zelma realizes that the only way to get ahead is to stick to a man. She marries Sergei, but he repeatedly abuses her. Their marriage is not between equals because they understood that society places men above women.

In my short *Teat Beat of Sex* I pointed out the absurdity of what is considered sexy and how it affects intimacy. In *Rocks in My Pockets*, I invited the audience to step into a bipolar mind and, without shame or judgment, showed them how depression works from the inside. Here, I explore the most hyped human emotion, love, in order to reveal what is at its core: biology.

**You combine multiple techniques in the film. What was your artistic approach?**

We spend a lot of time inside Zelma's head as she grows up from a feral 7-year-old to a 29-year-old, bruised by life. You hear her thoughts, see images of her wild imagination while biology, as a separate character, guides you through the processes of neural activity. The three "Mythology Sirens" seemingly exist in the real world. They represent the internalized voices of society seducing Zelma into conformity and demanding obedience. I collaborated with theater director Sturgis Warner on the script and this sparked the idea that the story needed elevated theatricality, a stylized approach to lift it up from the mundane. There are four general environments in the film, each represented by a different aesthetic.

Zelma's real life unfolds in an environment of hand-made sets and papier-mâché sculptures. The characters are hand-drawn with shadows sketched-in to compliment the look of the photographed backgrounds, pointing to the struggle between imperfect, human-made structures versus nature. Her imagination is depicted by 2-D drawings with flat, colorful backgrounds. She uses her imagination to process the world around her. Zelma's biology





is the world of the brain, neurons, neurotransmitters or electric impulses that determine her actions and emotions. Biology is a neuron-like, talking character that reveals all the activities taking place. This world is ancient, mysterious and moody, a thunderstorm in the middle of the night. I realized that although this segment needed a different style from my own, it had to be unique and personal. After an extensive search I came across an award-winning film by Yajun Shi called *Parasite*. Her style fits the film perfectly. Yajun was a joy to work with.

Finally, Zelma's political world is represented by very simple maps. They start out with just two colors and as Zelma learns more about the world, each country she travels to gains color separating them from others. The idea behind this approach is that life unfolds on several levels: personal, biological, political and imaginary. I believe that animation is the perfect medium to depict them. It can tell complex stories in an accessible way.

## What motivated you to make animated features independently?

The same forces that make a bird want to fly or make an artist want to find new challenges. Back in 2009, before I started working on *Rocks in My Pockets*, I had made around 15 shorts and just like a pirate, I wanted an adventure of exploring new lands and opportunities. But the reality of feature films is that it's an expensive medium and treated more like business than art.

The producers I met with didn't see the money-making potential in my proposals and, of course, they were quite right. I am an artist, not a businesswoman. For me, storytelling is a way to express and share my thoughts and visions. I decided to start on my own and make a deeply personal film: a journey into my bipolar mind. The strange thing is that once I started the project, the producers and the support came in as well.

I grew up in Latvia, which at that time was part of the Soviet Union, and I was really influenced by Eastern European poster art, illustration and animation. My greatest influence was Stasys Eidrigevičius, Lithuanian-Polish illustrator whose rich, imaginative work still fascinates me. Then, of course, there was the great Czech Jan Švankmajer, whose surrealistic approach to animation has had an everlasting influence on me. Russian animator-director Yuriy Norstein made *Hedgehog in the Fog*, which I have seen more than 78 times! When I came to New York, Bill Plympton's work gave me permission to be funny and silly, and I learned how to make films cheaply. My work is a combination of these two contradicting influences: serious, moody, artsy Eastern European and upbeat, funny American animation.





**Polish-born Dagmara Dominczyk, recently seen in *Succession* and *The Lost Daughter*, is narrating the film as Zelma. Why did you choose her?**

Sturgis discovered Dagmara. We knew we needed some star power, but not just that – we needed someone with experience in theater, someone who would be able to pull off this particular way of elevated storytelling. Her voice had to carry a lot. She told me she isn't like Zelma, she is more feminine, but they do share a similar spirit. When we worked on Zelma's husbands' backstories for example, Dagmara asked me about the tone. Zelma didn't witness these events, so she uses this *fairytale* voice. Dagmara understood all these details.

*Sturgis Warner:* We got in touch through a mutual friend. I keep a notebook in which I write down every good theater performance I see. Dagmara was featured there three times! She wrote a novel called *The Lullaby of Polish Girls* and we found a video of her reading it to a library audience in New Jersey. She played numerous different characters and was just so alive with her voice. Also, we didn't have to tell her anything about the Soviet Union. She knew all about it already.

**Now that the film is ready, what are you hoping the audience will take away from it?**

By making it part musical, part biological insight and part exploration of a woman's mind, my goal was to provoke and delight a thinking audience with a movie they have never seen before. Not only to tell a tale full of humor, surprising twists and unexpected worlds, but to leave them with the salient fact that biology is the root of our existence. What fascinates me about humans is how eagerly we want to dismiss science when it threatens to expose the fairy tales that we tell ourselves. We are all biological creatures, yet we hold on to ideas about ourselves that are not rooted in this reality. Especially in matters of love, we are willfully ignorant. Another fascinating thing for me is our human need for purpose and meaning, and how eager we are to define a woman's purpose as being a wife and mother. *My Love Affair with Marriage* challenges us to step outside that definition. Zelma's search for love is a search for a higher purpose and only when she breaks with societal expectations, can she truly start finding it. If I would have to put my intention behind this film in just a few words, I can't help but think of James Baldwin when he wrote: *Nothing can be changed until it is faced*. Although he wrote those words in a different time and context, they ring true to me now when describing the film. I want to contribute to the environment of meaningful conversations about topics that I feel are important to address. I want to face the truth of who we are and why we are here, hoping it will help us foster change for a better world.

I too am one of the many domestic abuse survivors. Looking back at that particular relationship, which started with lots of hope and passion, I am compelled to ask: How did we get from love to the dark place of control and abuse? I started the film to unravel that mystery for me and for others.



# Director

## SIGNE BAUMANE

WRITER, DIRECTOR, ANIMATOR,  
DESIGNER, CO-EDITOR

Signe Baumane is a Latvian-born, Brooklyn-based independent filmmaker, artist, writer, and animator. She has made 17 award-winning animated shorts but is best known for her first animated feature *Rocks in my Pockets*. The film covers a 100-year history of depression and suicide of women in her family, including herself. It premiered at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2014, went on to over 130 international festivals and opened theatrically in the U.S. through Zeitgeist Films.

Signe's new animated feature *My Love Affair With Marriage* fuses animation with music, theater, science, photography, three-dimensional sets and traditional hand-drawn animation to tell the story of a spirited young woman's quest for perfect Love and lasting Marriage. Signe is a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow in Film for New York Foundation for the Arts. She has a degree in Philosophy from Moscow State University.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2022 *My Love Affair with Marriage*, feature
- 2016 *The ABC of Travel*, short
- 2014 *Rocks in My Pockets*, feature
- 2014 *Tarzan*, short
- 2009 *Birth*, short
- 2008 *The Very First Desire Now and Forever*, short
- 2007 *Teat Beat of Sex: Episodes 8–11*, short
- 2007 *Veterinarian*, short
- 2007 *Teat Beat of Sex: Episodes 1–3*, short
- 2005 *Five Infomercials for Dentists*, short
- 2005 *Dentist*, short
- 2002 *Woman*, short
- 2002 *Five Fucking Fables*, short
- 2001 *Natasha*, short
- 1999 *The Threatened One*, short
- 1998 *Love Story*
- 1995 *The Gold of the Tigers*, short
- 1993 *Tiny Shoes*, short
- 1991 *The Witch and the Cow*, short



# Key Collaborators



## KRISTIAN SENSINI

COMPOSER OF SONGS AND FILM SCORE

Kristian Sensini has composed scores for nine feature films including *Rocks In My Pockets* for which he won the Colonne Sonore Award for Best Soundtrack, a Silver Medal at the Global Music Awards, a nomination for Best Original Score for an Animated Film at the Hollywood Music in Media Awards, and another nomination at the Jerry Goldsmith Awards for Best Music in a Feature Film. He composes for film and TV specializing in Animation, Drama, Fantasy and Documentaries. He is a member of ASCAP, SIAE, the American Society of Composers and Lyricists and is one of the founding members of ACMF, the Italian Association of Film Music Composers. Kristian is a piano and flute player with a classical and Jazz background.

## YAJUN SHI

BIOLOGY ANIMATION

Yajun Shi is a graduate from Pratt Institute with a master's degree in animation with a BA in animation from Hubei Institute of Fine Arts in China. Her short film *Parasite* went to many festivals, won a number of awards and inspired Signe Baumann to ask Yajun to animate the Biology sections of *My Love Affair With Marriage*. Yajun also works in digital painting, hand-drawing, and motion-graphics design. She recently moved back to her native China after spending eight years in New York.

## STURGIS WARNER

DRAMATURG, CASTING DIRECTOR, SET BUILDER,  
LIGHTING DESIGNER, CO-EDITOR

Sturgis Warner has been part of the New York theater scene for many years as an actor, director, and producer. His specialty is new plays and new play development. He started working with Signe Baumann in 2010 bringing theater principles and skills to her animation filmmaking. For her feature film *Rocks In My Pockets* he was Co-Producer, Script Advisor and he directed her 88-minute voiceover. He also built sets and was the lighting designer.

East



**DAGMARA DOMINCZYK**

THE VOICE OF *ZELMA*

Dagmara Dominczyk is a Polish-American actress and author. She has starred in the films *Rock Star* (2001), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (2002), *Kinsey* (2004), *Trust the Man* (2005), *Lonely Hearts* (2006), *Running with Scissors* (2006), *Higher Ground* (2011), *The Letter* (2012), *The Immigrant* (2013), *Big Stone Gap* (2014), *The Assistant* (2019) and *Lost Daughter* (2021). TV includes *We Own This City*, *Succession*, *Broadway Empire*, *The Bedford Diaries*, *24*, *Third Watch* and *Law and Order*. In addition, she has acted on Broadway and Off-Broadway. In 2013 she published her novel *The Lullaby of Polish Girls*. She is married to actor Patrick Wilson.

**MICHELE PAWK**

THE VOICE OF *BIOLOGY*

Michele Pawk is an actress and singer. On Broadway she has performed in *Beautiful*, *Hairspray*, *Losing Louie*, *Mamma Mia*, *Hollywood Arms* (Tony Award), *Chicago*, *Seussical*, *Cabaret* (Drama Desk & Outer Critics' Circle nominations), *Triumph of Love*, *Crazy for You* (Drama Desk nomination), *Mail*. Select Off – Broadway credits include: *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* (Lucille Lortel Award), *A Small Fire* (Drama Desk & Lucille Lortel nominations), *Picnic*, *17 Orchard Point*, *Giant*, *The Paris Letter* (Drama Desk nomination), *Hello Again*, *Merrily We Roll Along*. Michele is Board Chair of American Theater Group, and proud faculty member at Wagner College.

**MATTHEW MODINE**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER AND THE VOICE OF *BO*

Matthew Modine has been referred to as *one of the best, most adaptable film actors of his generation* by legendary New York Times critic Vincent Canby. He has worked with many of the film industry's most acclaimed directors, including Oliver Stone, Sir Alan Parker, Stanley Kubrick, Robert Altman, Alan J. Pakula, John Schlesinger, Tony Richardson, Robert Falls, Sir Peter Hall, Abel Ferrara, Spike Lee, Tom DiCillo, Mike Figgis, Jonathan Demme and John Sayles. He is well remembered for the title characters in *Birdy*, and for his iconic role as Private Joker in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*.

Cast



**CAMERON MONAGHAN**  
THE VOICE OF *SERGEI*

Cameron Monaghan began acting professionally at the age of five. He is best known for his role as Ian Gallagher on the Showtime comedy-drama *Shameless* (eleven seasons) and as the Joker on the DC Comics based TV series *Gotham* (four seasons).

**STEPHEN LANG**  
THE VOICE OF *JONAS*

Stephen Lang is a film and stage actor, and a playwright. His film roles include *Manhunter* (1986), *Gettysburg* (1993), *Tombstone* (1993), *Gods and Generals* (2003), *Public Enemies* (2009) and *Don't Breath* (2016). In 2009 he played Colonel Miles Quaritch in James Cameron's *Avatar* and will reprise the role in four upcoming *Avatar* sequels. He has had an extensive career on Broadway and received a Tony Award nomination for his role in *The Speed of Darkness*.

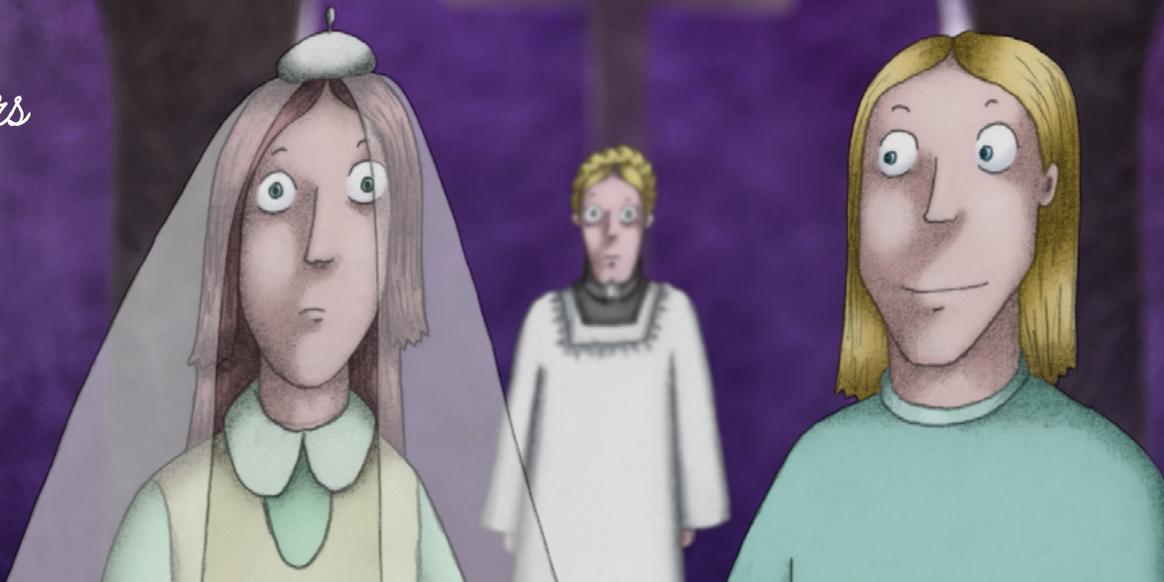
**STORM LARGE**  
SINGS *LION / MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH MARRIAGE* (end-credits song)

Storm Large is a singer, songwriter, actress and author. She attracted much attention as a contestant on *America's Got Talent* singing *I Got You Under My Skin*. A resident of Portland, Oregon, Storm tours nationally with her own band, and internationally with the musical group *Pink Martini*.

NOTE FROM CASTING DIRECTOR  
**STURGIS WARNER ABOUT  
THE 21 ADDITIONAL ACTORS**

21 additional actors voiced characters in *My Love Affair With Marriage*. 18 of them are New York theater actors who collectively have hundreds of Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional theater credits. Whether a role had a single line, a single scene or was for a main character, we only considered casting actors with excellent language and theatrical skills. The three other non-New York actors had excellent theater skills as well: from Los Angeles – Emma Kenney and Ruby Modine, and from London – Tanya Franks.

# Producers



## **STUDIO LOCOMOTIVE** (STUDIJA LOKOMOTIVE), RIGA LATVIA

Studio Locomotive produces creative documentaries, narrative and animated films. Founded in 1999 by Roberts Vinovskis, it has become one of the fastest growing and most productive film studios in the Baltic Countries. Studio Locomotive also facilitates a comprehensive post production company, BBPost House, that specializes in post-production services and the digitization of archival film. Roberts and Studio Locomotive were Co-Producers of *Rocks In My Pockets* and produced

a Latvian version of the film. For *My Love Affair With Marriage* the Studio Locomotive team colored and composited the animation, produced and recorded the musical elements of the film, and handled all technical aspects of the production. They also produced a Latvian language version of *My Love Affair With Marriage* using the top Latvian actors.

## **THE MARRIAGE PROJECT LLC** BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, USA

The Marriage Project LLC under the partnership of Signe Baumann and Sturgis Warner was founded in 2016 to produce the USA elements of *My Love Affair With Marriage*: the script, the design, the casting and recording of actors, the building, lighting and photography of background sets, the animation, editing and the general supervision of all aspects of the production.

## **ANTEVITA FILMS** GOEBLANGE, LUXEMBOURG

Antevita Films was founded in 2006 by Raoul Nadalet with the sole objective to produce, co-produce and distribute movies based on real facts: true stories written by life itself, stories that have influenced or changed the lives of a person, of a family, or even of a whole ethnic group. Antevita Films was responsible for all post-production sound for *My Love Affair With Marriage* including Foley, ADR, Sound Design, and the Final Mix. This is Raoul Nadalet's first collaboration with Locomotive and The Marriage Project.

## Festivals

World premiere: Tribeca 2022,  
International Narrative Competition  
European premiere: Annecy International Animation Festival 2022,  
Feature Films in Competition  
Latin american premiere: Guadalajara International Film Festival 2022,  
International Animated Feature Films,  
Official Competition film information  
Original title: My Love Affair with Marriage  
English title: My Love Affair with Marriage  
Genre: Animation  
Country: Latvia, USA, Luxembourg  
Languages: English  
Year: 2022  
Duration: 108 min.  
Picture: Color  
Aspect ratio: 1.85:1  
Sound: 71  
Available format: DCP

## Crew

Director: Signe Baumann  
Screenplay: Signe Baumann  
Music and songs: Kristian Sensini  
Lyrics: Signe Baumann  
Animation: Signe Baumann  
Biology animation: Yajun Shi  
Director of photography: Signe Baumann  
Lighting design: Sturgis Warner  
Production design: Signe Baumann  
Set design: Sturgis Warner, Signe Baumann  
Principal set artists: Yasemin Orhan, Sofiya Lypka  
Maps: Yüpu Ding, Sturgis Warner  
Animation shading: John Koerner, Signe Baumann  
Coloring supervisor: Anete Matvejeva  
Compositing supervisor: Georgs Harijs Āva  
Mastering: Raimonds Lužinskis  
Technical support: Pēteris Sudakovs  
Editing: Signe Baumann, Sturgis Warner  
Editing advisor: Sabine Hoffman, Ace  
Casting director: Sturgis Warner  
Chief recording engineer  
& dialogue editor: Arjun G. Sheth  
Musical directors: Arnis Račinskis, Steve Sundholm  
Instrument recording director: Kārlis Auzāns  
Sound design: Pierre Vedovato  
Re-recording mixer: Loïc Collignon  
Foley artist: Christophe Burdett  
Foley recording & mixer: Kenn Nnganyadi  
Principal science advisors: Pascal Wallisch, Phd, Elizabeth Cox

Production companies: Studio Locomotive,  
The Marriage Project Llc, Antevita Films  
Producers: Roberts Vinovskis, Sturgis Warner,  
Signe Baumann, Raoul Nadalet  
Executive producers: Matthew Modine, Adam Rackoff, John Jencks  
Associate producer: Reginald C. Foster

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Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia,  
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New York State Governor's Office of Motion Picture & Television  
Development Office's Post Production's Credit Program,  
New York State Council on The Arts,  
John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, H.O. Peef Foundation,  
The Ravenal Foundation of New York Women In Film & Television,  
Kickstarter and 1,685 Individual Backers

## Credits

Zelma: Dagmara Dominczyk  
Zelma's voiceover: Dagmara Dominczyk  
Biology: Michele Pawk  
Mythology Sirens: Trio Limonāde – Ieva Katkovska,  
Kristine Pastare, Iluta Alsberga  
Cameron Monaghan  
Matthew Modine  
Sergei, Zelma's first husband: Stephen Lang  
Bo, Zelma's second husband: Erica Schroeder  
Jonas, the artist: Emma Kenney  
Zelma's love interest at age 17: Florencia Lozano  
Elita, the perfect girl: Clyde Baldo  
Sarma, Zelma's sister: Carolyn Baeumler  
Zelma's mother: Christina Pumariega  
Eduards, school bully: Tracy Thorne  
Darya, Zelma's college friend: Laila Robins  
Darya's mother: Dale Soules  
Master of ceremonies – funeral: Anna O'donoghue  
Master of ceremonies – wedding: Tanya Franks  
Velta, art gallery owner: Najla Said  
Latvian Official, marriage permits: Dan Domingues  
Teacher 1: Keith Randolph Smith  
Teacher 2: Ruby Modine  
New Girl, at school: Brian Dykstra  
Lauris: kissing high school senior: Andrew Garman  
Man on a train: Michael Laurence  
Nina, Sergei's mother: Sturgis Warner  
Estonian 1, hostel voyeur: Jennifer Dorr White  
Estonian 2, hostel voyeur: Storm Large  
Big man, Street guardian of morals:  
Big man's friend,  
Street guardian of morals:  
Swedish pastor:  
End-credits singer:

## Producer's Contact

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## World Sales

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