

MOVIES

The Great Wall First Look: See 5 magnificent images from the Matt Damon monster movie — exclusive

'I wanted it to feel like an aircraft carrier on land,' director Zhang Yimou tells EW of the film's souped-up Chinese landmark

BY JOE MCGOVERN (AUTHOR/JOE-MCGOVERN) · @JMCGVERN (HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/JMCGVERN)

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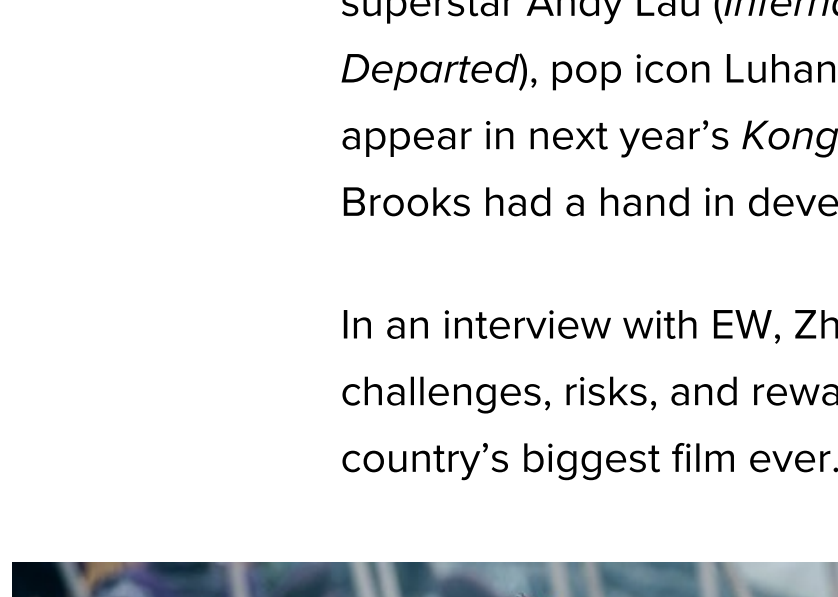
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Appropriately for a movie about one of the Wonders of the World, *The Great Wall* is huge. Directed by *House of Flying Daggers* and *Hero* filmmaker Zhang Yimou, it is the most expensive Chinese movie of all time. But if you're expecting a lofty historical epic about the 13,000-mile wall's construction, well, expect again.

In these exclusive images, you can see the vibrancy and imagination in Zhang's vision. Believe it or not, *The Great Wall* is actually a monster movie — and these shots show the fantasia-soaked pageantry that many remember from Zhang's most widely-seen spectacle, especially in the West, the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsDY1Ha83M8), which he directed himself.

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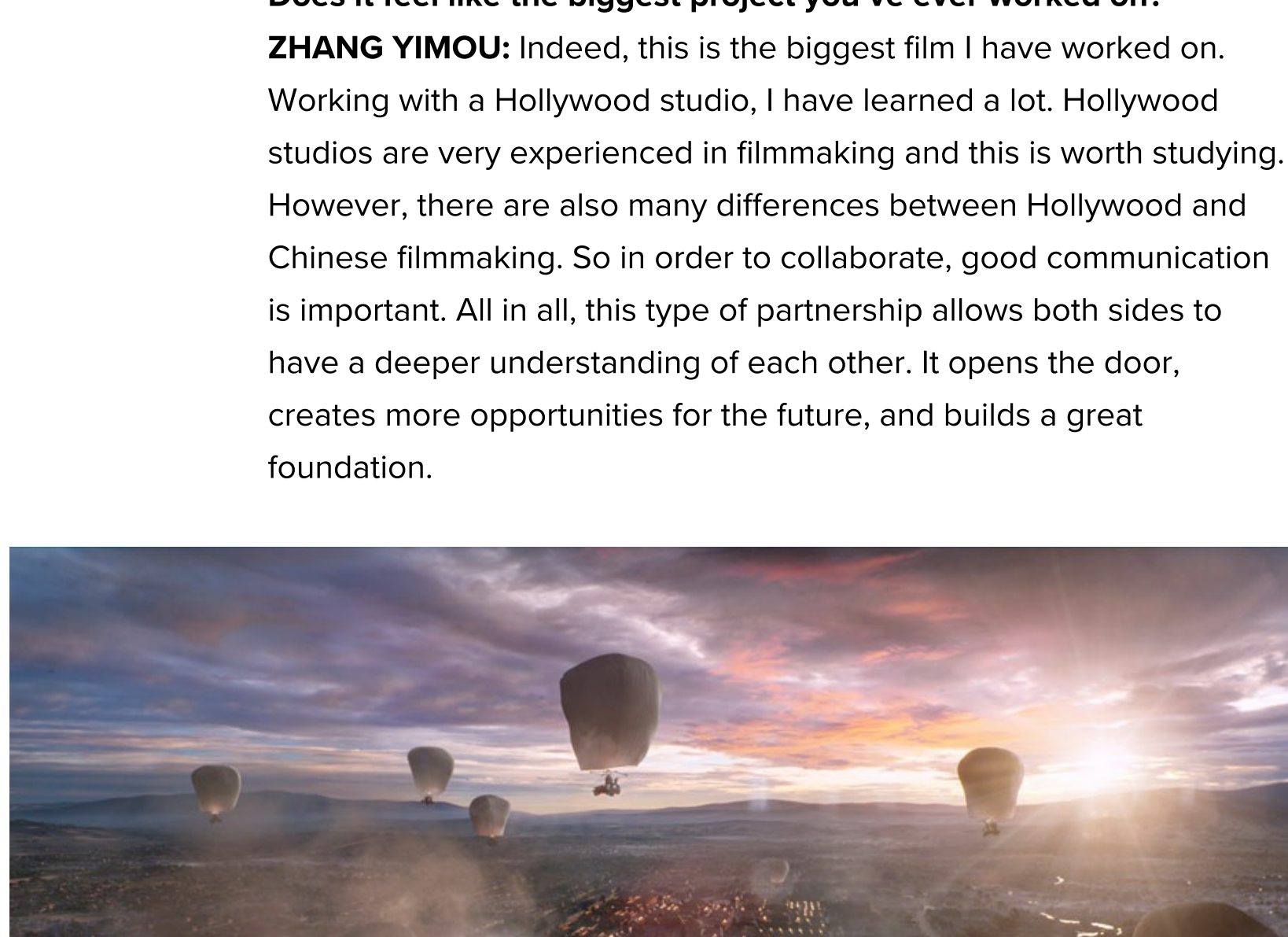
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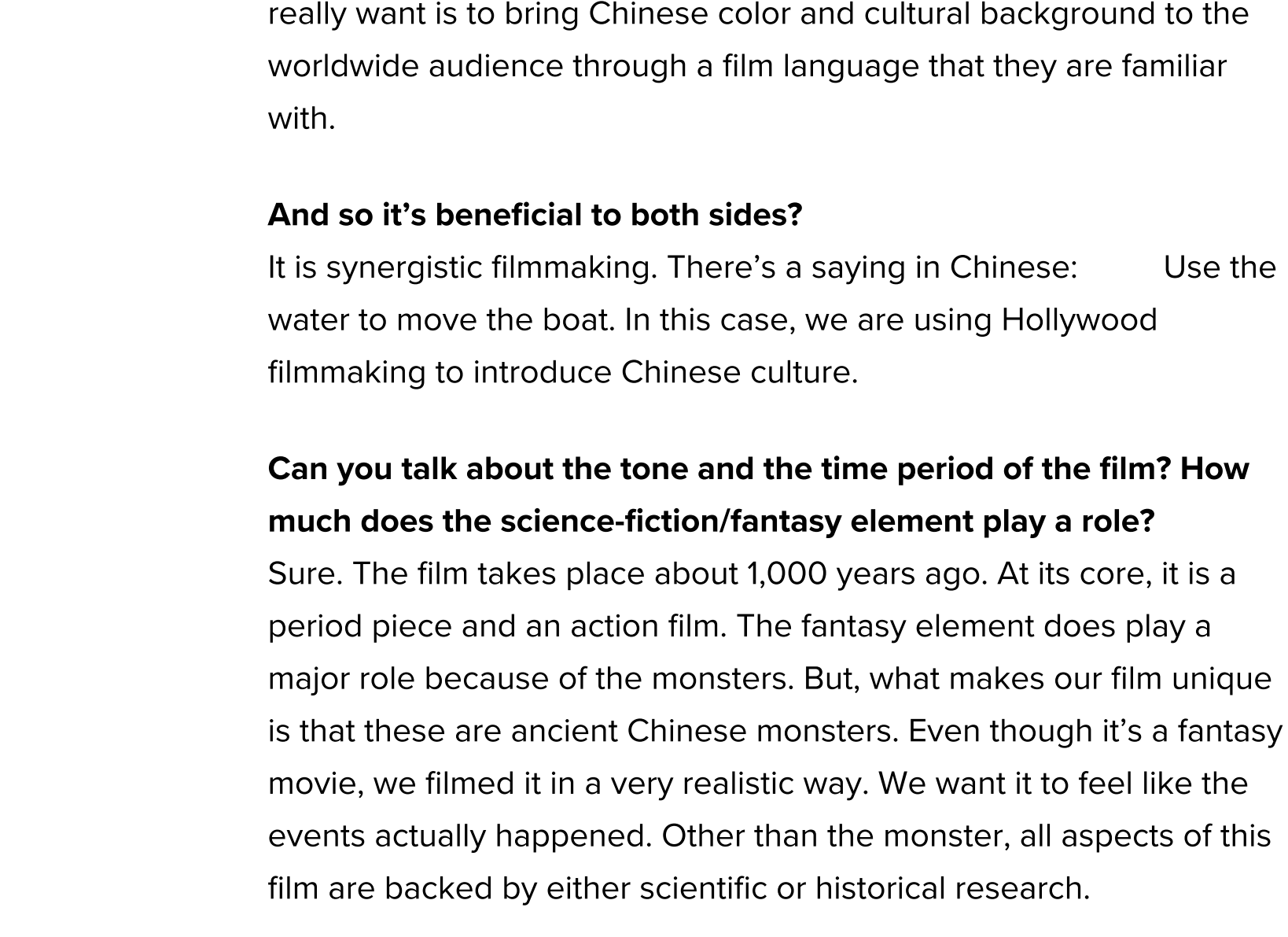
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The new film, which will be released in 3D on Feb. 17, 2017, stars Matt Damon, leading an international cast of actors that also includes Pedro Pascal (*Game of Thrones*), Willem Dafoe (*Platoon*), Chinese superstar Andy Lau (*Infernal Affairs*, which was remade as *The Departed*), pop icon Luhan, and actress Jing Tian (who will also appear in next year's *Kong: Skull Island*). *World War Z* author Max Brooks had a hand in developing the film's screenplay.

In an interview with EW, Zhang (via a translator) describes the array of challenges, risks, and rewards that come with making his and his country's biggest film ever.



ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: This is your first time working with a Hollywood studio, Universal. What has the experience been like? Does it feel like the biggest project you've ever worked on?
ZHANG YIMOU: Indeed, this is the biggest film I have worked on. Working with a Hollywood studio, I have learned a lot. Hollywood studios are very experienced in filmmaking and this is worth studying. However, there are also many differences between Hollywood and Chinese filmmaking. So in order to collaborate, good communication is important. All in all, this type of partnership allows both sides to have a deeper understanding of each other. It opens the door, creates more opportunities for the future, and builds a great foundation.



How do the film's Hollywood elements blend with its Chinese elements?
 First and foremost, this is an English-language film, and a Hollywood blockbuster. It was already very clear in the script phase. This is a Hollywood monster movie and needs to be made in that style. I don't want to change that approach, and there's no need to do that. What I really want is to bring Chinese color and cultural background to the worldwide audience through a film language that they are familiar with.

And so it's beneficial to both sides?
 It is synergistic filmmaking. There's a saying in Chinese: Use the water to move the boat. In this case, we are using Hollywood filmmaking to introduce Chinese culture.

Can you talk about the tone and the time period of the film? How much does the science-fiction/fantasy element play a role?
 Sure. The film takes place about 1,000 years ago. At its core, it is a period piece and an action film. The fantasy element does play a major role because of the monsters. But, what makes our film unique is that these are ancient Chinese monsters. Even though it's a fantasy movie, we filmed it in a very realistic way. We want it to feel like the events actually happened. Other than the monster, all aspects of this film are backed by either scientific or historical research.



Do the characters have superpowers?
 No, no one has superpowers in our film. I think there are too many superpowers in movies nowadays; people can level half a city with one finger, so any challenge feels too easy. For this movie, I really want to switch it up and do something as realistic as possible.

What was the most difficult sequence to shoot?
 The biggest difficulty is the limited amount of time. In China, when I make a film of this scale, I would have five to five-and-a-half months. This time, we only had four-and-a-half months. And of course, we also had to take the weekends off. In China we wouldn't do that. We also course, we do take breaks on Chinese films, but not this much. As for which specific sequence is the most difficult — I think filmmaking is the same throughout the world. If you want to do something great, nothing is easy.

The Great Wall is very different from your last film Coming Home. Did you feel a lot more pressure on this film than on your others?
 Fortunately, I directed the 2008 Olympic Ceremonies. Perhaps there's nothing grander than that. So the size of a production doesn't make a difference to me. I didn't feel any pressure. But there are major difference between Eastern and Western culture. And this is reflected in every little detail in our work.

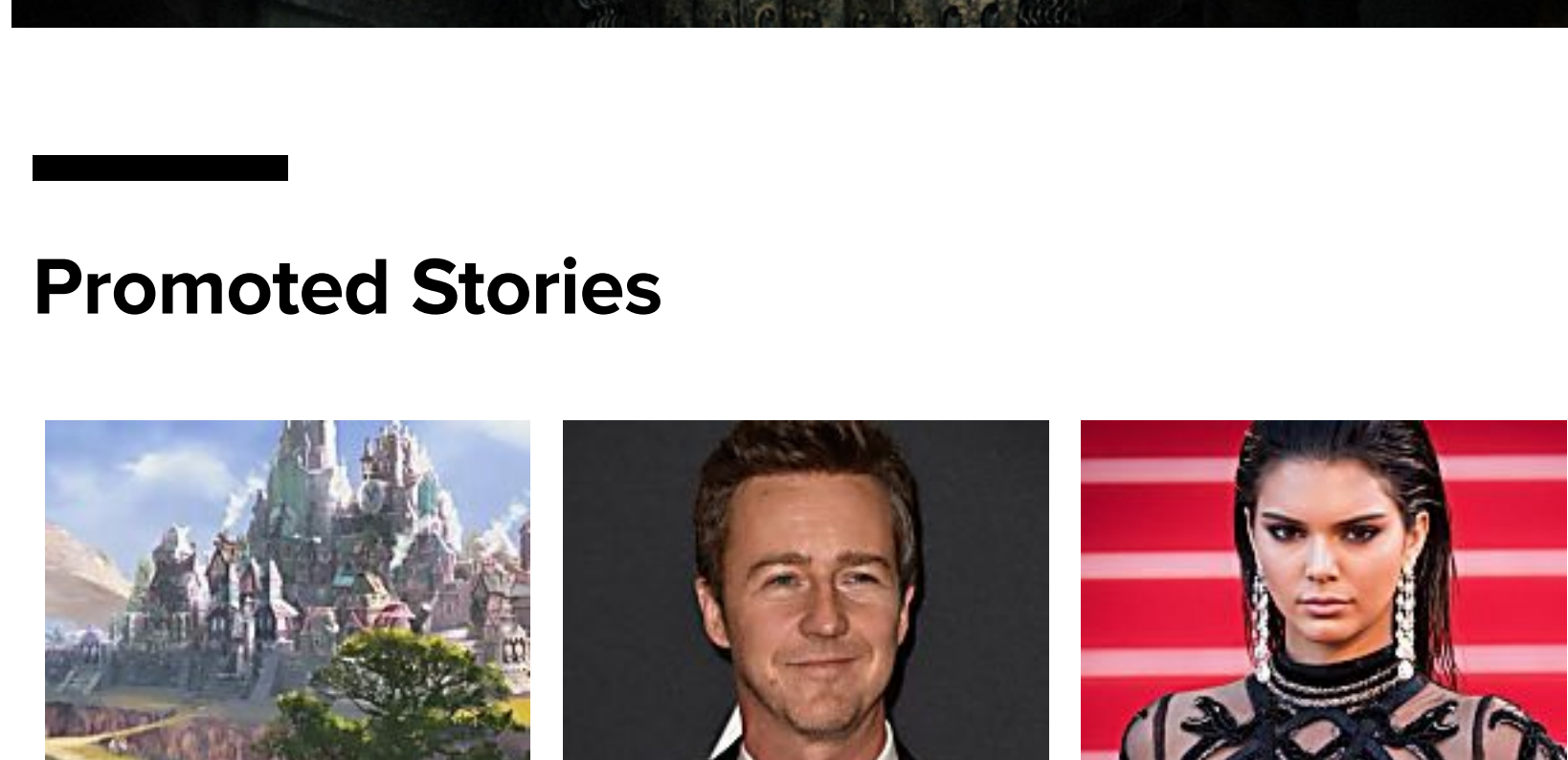
Was it a big challenge to communicate in English.
 I don't understand English, so a lot of time is spent on communication. It takes three times longer to get anything done. When I mentioned before that time was an issue on this film, I wasn't even counting the time it takes for translation.



How much did your own Chinese identity contribute to the development of the film?
 A lot. This script was written by American screenwriters. So the story is really told from an American's perspective. When I came on, I wanted to make sure everything Chinese in this film feels genuine.

What did you contribute?
 I brought in many unique Chinese elements, such as the use of color, the design of weapons, the battle formations and strategy, the battle drums, as well as the design of the palace. Of course we also did a lot of work on making the Great Wall unique. I wanted it to feel like an aircraft carrier on land. To defeat it and cross it will be nearly impossible. Also, I really like having strong female characters in my film, so I especially created a unique unit of brave female warriors.

What can you say about working with these three big Western actors?
 I am very fortunate to work with Matt Damon, Pedro Pascal, and Willem Dafoe on this project. They are wonderful actors and helped me tremendously. Especially Matt, who won an Oscar for screenwriting at such a young age — he is very creative and smart and contributed so much to the dialog. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all three actors.



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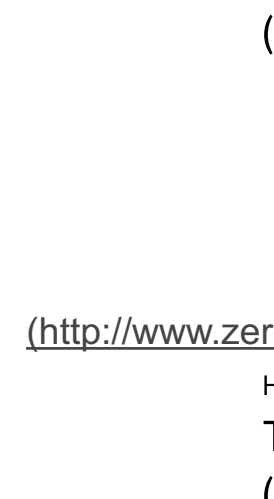
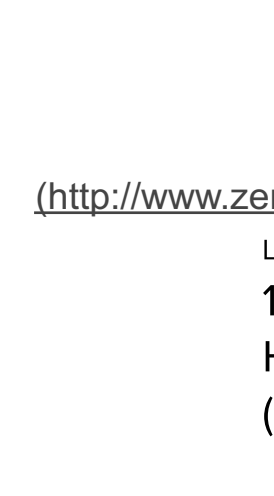
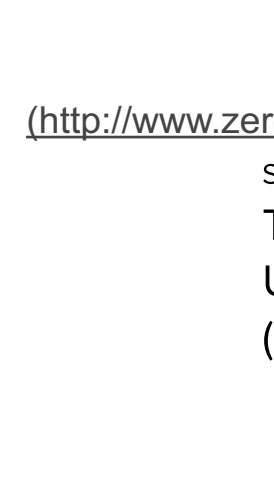
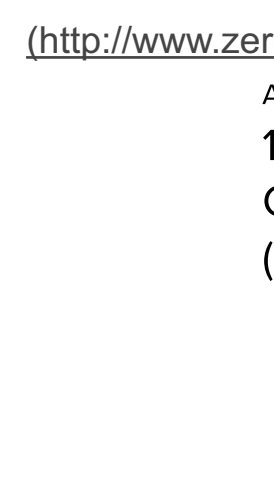
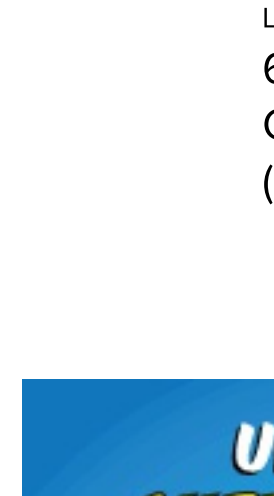

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