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JAILBIRDS

written & directed by **Thomas VILLEPOUX**

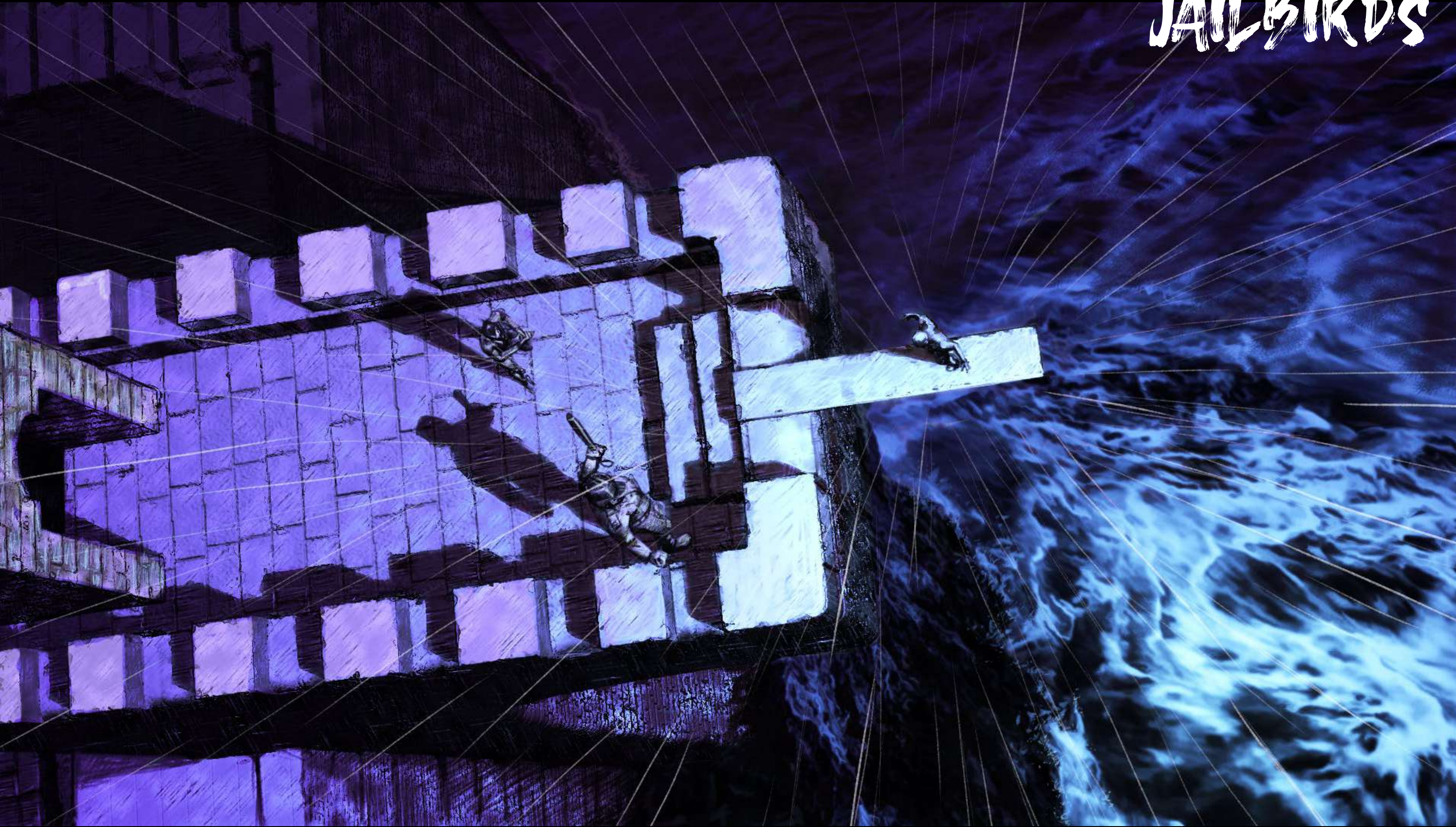
- Chapter 1 : Bwa Kayiman
- Chapter 2 : The Vulture's Claws
- Chapter 3 : An Artist Eye

32 minutes Virtual Reality fiction

PRESS RELEASE

Freely adapted from *Paulot S'évade*
by Philippe Foerster, edited by
FLUIDE GLACIAL

JAIL BIRDS



PITCH

Despite his hellish prison cell and the constant suffering, Felix the good giant always seeks the bright side of life. His bullet-proof serenity infuriates the vicious Chief-Warden who has sworn to uncover the inmate's secret and eradicate his happiness once and for all. A fantastic tale on the price of freedom.

[International Trailer](#)

JAILBIRDS



Chief Warden



Felix

A Belgium-France
coproduction



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International Distribution



PRODUCTION COFINANCED BY
Wallimage Creative and Creative Wallonia

President **Virginie Nouvelle**
Project & Artistic coordination **Domenico La Porta**
Coproductio assistant **Camille Samain**



In coproduction with Shelter Prod
Sibylle Seys-Smets, Ives Swennen, Damien Riga

with the support of the tax shelter
from the Federal Government of Belgium



WITH THE SUPPORT FROM



CONCEPT

JAILBIRDS is a trilogy of 6DoF VR narrative experiences, inspired by a comic book by Philippe FOERSTER, *Paulot Escape*. It is a fantastic tale about freedom and the human condition. The experience, intended for a public novice in VR, uses to the maximum the media in volume in its process of narration (Effects of claustrophobia, proximity, effects of scale, vertigo...).



JAILBIRDS : chap. 1 presented at New Images Festival in Paris, June 2021

SYNOPSIS

The Bwa-Kayiman prison is a modern hell, a dehumanizing institution where inmates endure the sadism of a petty **CHIEF WARDEN**. Yet, despite all the bullying and psychological torture, one inmate, **FELIX**, is always happy.

Sentenced to life for the crimes of his gang, this repenting good giant seems to have reached serenity. His 9m2 cell is covered with his drawings: a colorful universe of beautiful sceneries. Calm, meditation, drawing... that's enough for Felix.

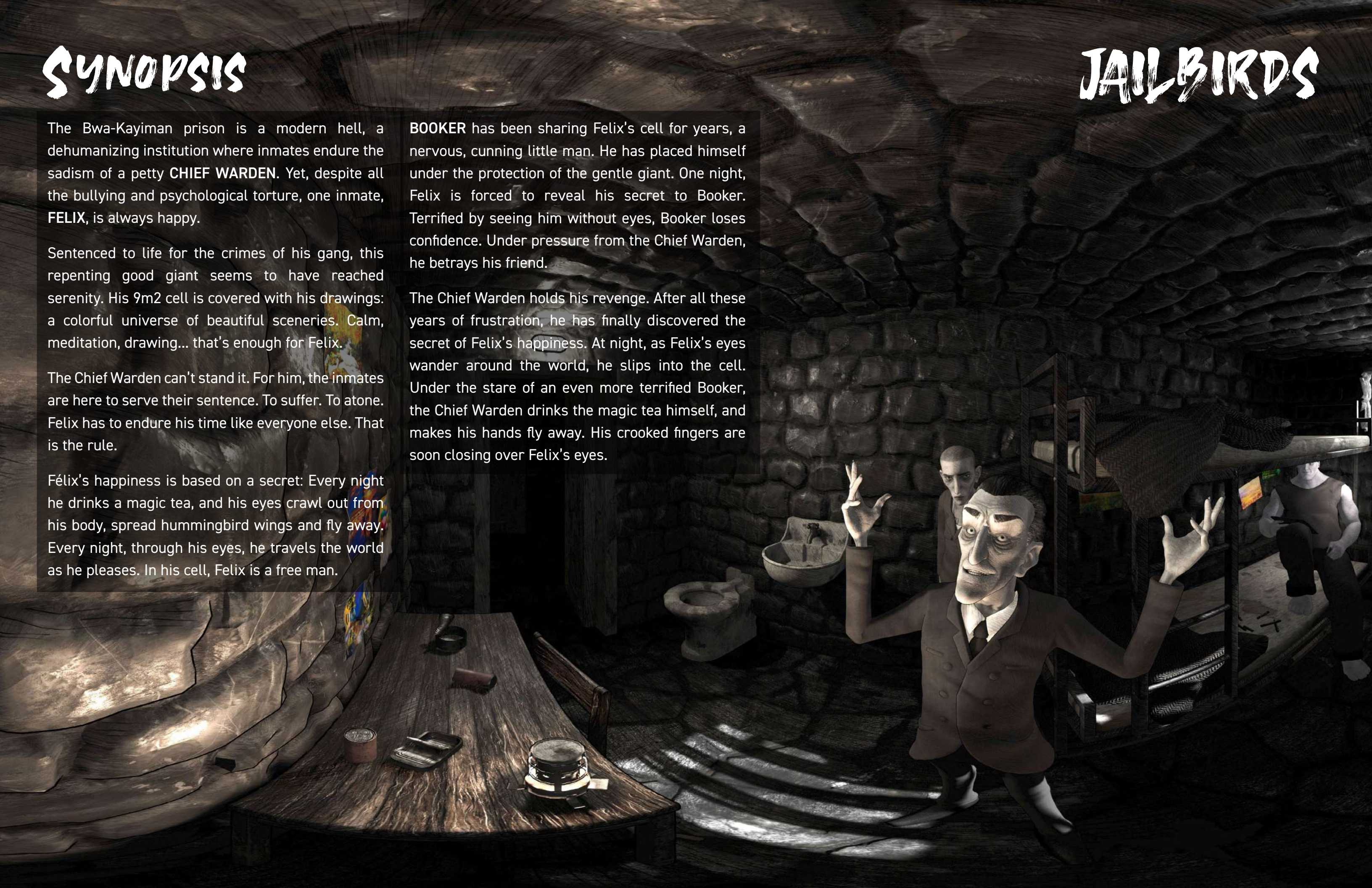
The Chief Warden can't stand it. For him, the inmates are here to serve their sentence. To suffer. To atone. Felix has to endure his time like everyone else. That is the rule.

Félix's happiness is based on a secret: Every night he drinks a magic tea, and his eyes crawl out from his body, spread hummingbird wings and fly away. Every night, through his eyes, he travels the world as he pleases. In his cell, Felix is a free man.

BOOKER has been sharing Felix's cell for years, a nervous, cunning little man. He has placed himself under the protection of the gentle giant. One night, Felix is forced to reveal his secret to Booker. Terrified by seeing him without eyes, Booker loses confidence. Under pressure from the Chief Warden, he betrays his friend.

The Chief Warden holds his revenge. After all these years of frustration, he has finally discovered the secret of Felix's happiness. At night, as Felix's eyes wander around the world, he slips into the cell. Under the stare of an even more terrified Booker, the Chief Warden drinks the magic tea himself, and makes his hands fly away. His crooked fingers are soon closing over Felix's eyes.

JAILBIRDS



HIGHLIGHTS

JAILBIRDS



Le Gardien Chef



Félix



Booker

JAILBIRDS is a fantastic tale full of black poetry. The story plunges us into a bittersweet fable about human freedom.

Set sometimes in a nightmarish prison, sometimes in beautiful landscapes, the experience makes **full use of the assets of the immersive sound medium as narrative tools.** The story resonates strangely with the promise of virtual reality : a prisoner escapes each night as his eyes magically detach from his body and set off to discover the world that is physically inaccessible to him.

JAILBIRDS is an innovative drama that **relies on audience imaginary engagement** by alternating objective and subjective points of view, creating a subtle blend of perspectives in the story.

JAILBIRDS is a wonderful story which has a very simple concept, an original form and a universal purpose. A free spirit, a system restricting it, a frustrated authority who wants to control everything. **JAILBIRDS speaks to all of those who were once forced to silence.**

JAILBIRDS also transpose a naive poetry, the impression of being frozen in a universal time, the tragedy combined with the comedy, the irony of the drama and the black humor, and beyond all that, the satire of the system, specifically here the prison world.

PRODUCERS INTENTIONS

François Klein, Digital Rise

JAILBIRDS is a Belgium-French immersive fiction written and directed by Thomas Villepoux and adapted from Philippe Foerster's comic strip, «Paulot S'évade», published by Fluide Glacial.

I wanted to produce this experience, convinced by Thomas Villepoux's idea to treat the themes of freedom and confinement through a fantastic tale. While in our modern society individual freedom is increasingly constrained and controlled, it was important for me to explore this subject through the VR medium. The story of Jailbirds is touching and full of poetry. It is tinged with a dark and scathing humor. It bears the scars of our world but also a touch of unalterable hope. All of this is presented with strong and effective directing choices for immersive media.

JAILBIRDS has already conquered the public with the first chapter of the story released in Virtual Reality on Meta's Oculus and soon on SteamVR. The story has been awarded in 2021 with an audience award in France and with the best immersive fiction award at Film Gate Miami. In 2023, the three chapter story is Premiering in Austin' SXSW Festival.

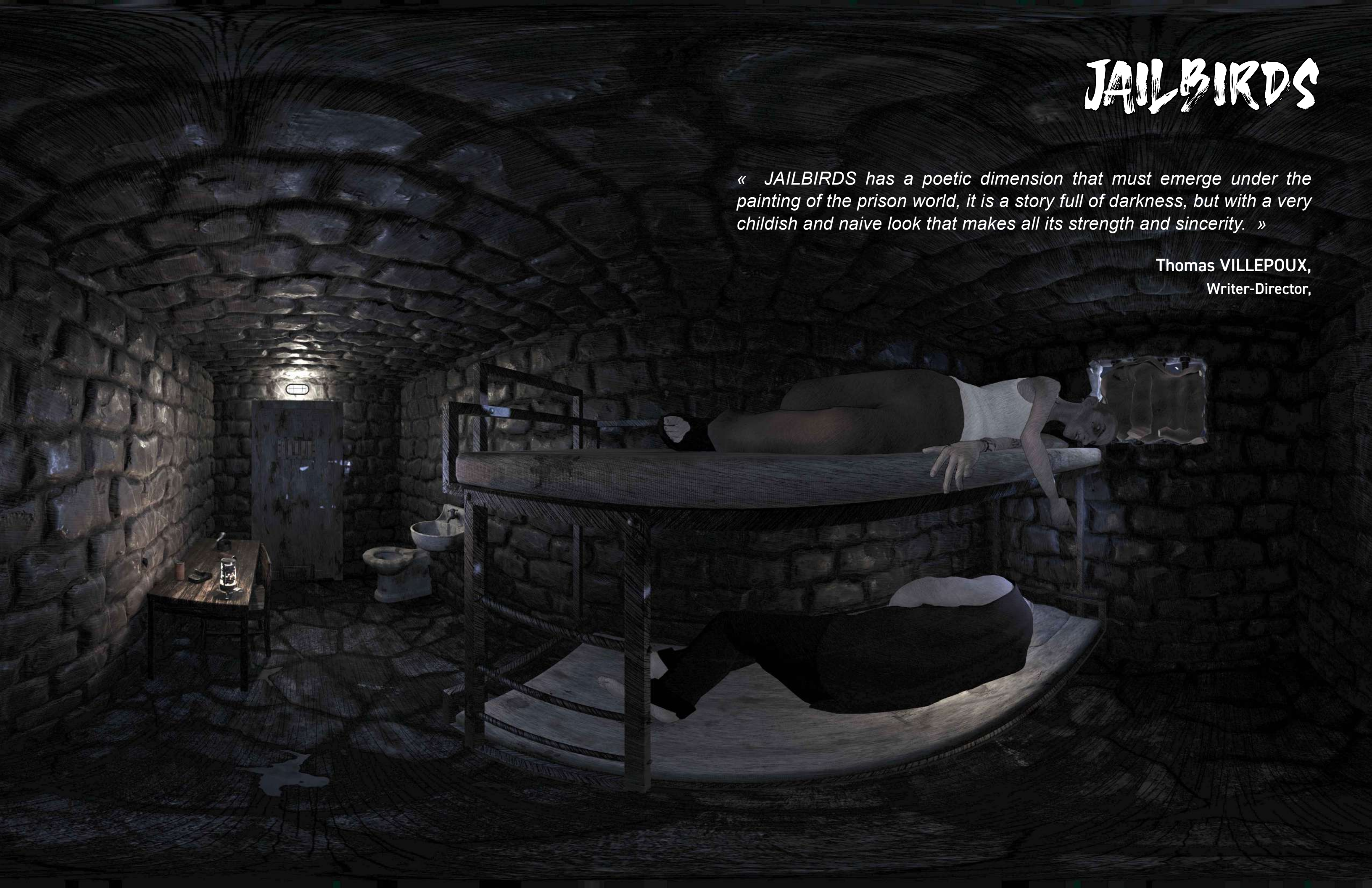
JAILBIRDS



JAILBIRDS

« *JAILBIRDS* has a poetic dimension that must emerge under the painting of the prison world, it is a story full of darkness, but with a very childish and naive look that makes all its strength and sincerity. »

Thomas VILLEPOUX,
Writer-Director,



THE CAST

JAILBIRDS

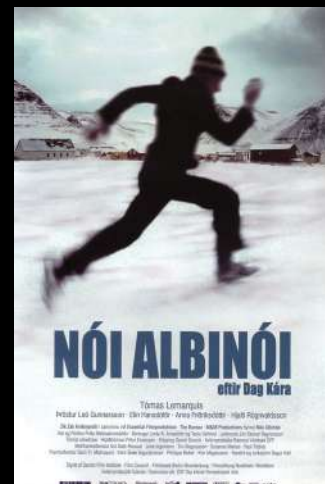


Tómas Lemarquis

(Chief Warden)

Tómas Lemarquis was born in Iceland to a French father and Icelandic mother. He went to study acting in Les cours Florent in Paris then returned to Iceland to study visual arts in the Icelandic art academy. While still an art student he got offered the leading role of Noi in the film *Noi the Albino (2003)* by Dagur Kári Pétursson which launched his film career. The film went on to win numerous awards around the world as well as a nomination for Tómas as best actor at the European film awards. And the next year as one of Europe's shooting stars at the European film promotion. Since then he has been working in various European films and television.

In recent years he has also landed parts in bigger international Blockbusters, such as *Snowpiercer (2013)*, *3 Days to Kill (2014)*, *X-Men : Apocalypse (2016)*, *Blade Runner 2049 (2017)*. But Tómas continues to work and keeps a strong connection to his first love; arthouse cinema like the 2018 Golden Bear winner film *Touch Me Not* is an excellent example of.



THE CAST

JAILBIRDS



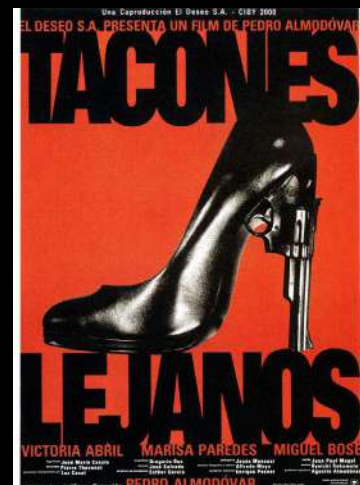
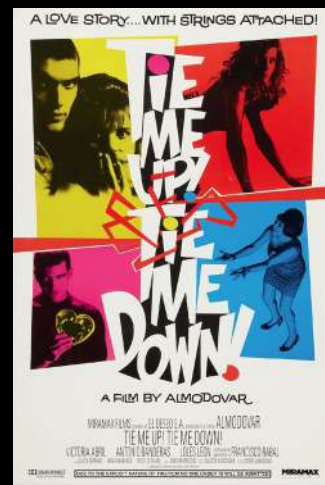
Victoria Abril

(Felix Grandmother)

Victoria Abril is an iconic Spanish actress from Madrid. She made her debut at 16 in the feature film *Obsession* (1975). The following year, it was Vicente Aranda who revealed her with *Cambio de sexo*, in the role of a transsexual. Her performance was noticed and the promising young actress decided to devote herself to cinema. Her career took on an international dimension in the early 80s, with the filming of *Mater Amatissima* in which she played the mother of an autistic little boy. The film is presented at Cannes and meets with great success. The actress chooses to settle in France and pursue her career in this country. She played supporting roles in *J'ai épousé une ombre* (1983), *La lune dans le gaver* (1983), *L'addition* (1984)... then, in 1986, Josiane Balasko offered her a role in the comedy *Gazon Maudit*, which contributes to making it known to the French public.

The consecration came in 1990 when Pedro Almodovar directed her in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* alongside Antonio Banderas. Thereafter, she works again with the director for two other films, *High Heels* (1992) and *Kika* (1994). During the 90s, his work was rewarded twice; she received a Silver Bear for Best Actress at the Berlin Festival for *Lovers* (1991) by Vicente Aranda and the Goya for Best Actress for *Nobody Will Talk About Us When We're Dead* by Agustin Diaz Yanes (1995).

Away from film sets for few years, she has distinguished herself on the small screen in the French series *Clem* since 2010. In 2016, she was in the distribution of the film *Joséphine s'arrondit* by Marilou Berry. She then began a career in theater in 2018 in the comedy *Paprika* by Pierre Palmade and *Drôle de Genre* by Jade-Rose Parker in 2022.



THE CAST

JAILBIRDS



Barry Johnson

(Félix)

Barry Johnson is an American actor with a specialization for the interpretation of animated characters. Beyond dubbing, he is fully invested in the embodiment of his characters, making him a unique actor to play Félix in *Jailbirds*. He is known for his roles in the video games *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013), *Detroit: Become Human* (2017), *Blacksad: Under The Skin* (2019).



Elliot Delage

(Booker)

Elliot Delage is a French-Canadian actor. His versatility as both a photo model and an actor allows him to play different characters in different production formats: Television, theater, commercials, web productions and VR. He plays Booker, Félix's cellmate in *Jailbirds*.

THE DIRECTOR

JAILBIRDS



Thomas VILLEPOUX

Graduate of the famous Louis Lumiere cinematography school in Paris, Thomas first becomes a cinematographer and a 3D specialized DP and Director. In 2012 he joins DVgroup, the biggest VR studio in France and develops with François KLEIN the original content production department. Soon together they create DIGITAL RISE, a creative studio dedicated to immersive innovative experiences and stories worth living. He is the Author and director of both MANDALA and JAILBIRDS experiences.

His credo: Never forget all we are but monkeys giving each other awards. His work puts the human problems in a new perspective, bringing a new vision, sometimes with irony. Getting out of the usual standards help him create a new kind of emotion, more touching and pure.

Thomas has been awarded several times: Best screenplay for Jailbirds, but also best VR experience (Jailbirds, GMF, La tentation de Saint Antoine) and best immersive experience (MANDALA) or the excellence of his stereography (The Builder's Challenge, Gabin, Mechanical Souls).

DIRECTOR MOTIVATIONS - by Thomas VILLEPOUX

JAILBIRDS

Jailbirds is inspired by a wonderful story which has a very simple concept, an original form and a universal purpose. A free spirit, a system restricting it, a frustrated authority who want to control everything. Jailbirds speaks to all of those who were once forced to silence.

I also wanted to transpose Philippe Foerster's unique style: the naive poetry, the impression of being frozen in a universal time, the tragedy combined with the comedy, the irony of the drama and the black humor, and beyond all that, the satire of the system, specifically here the prison world.

A NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH NEW CODES

The adaptation work I did on Jailbirds is a particular work because I wanted to exploit the VR medium in a **cinematographic form, with a virtual «camera»**.

The «6 degrees of freedom» dimension is essential for a project that talks about freedom of movement, and necessary for immersion. But on the other hand, the tools of VR staging are very limited, since we abdicate the frame and the visual and sound composition. The position of the spectator in the scene is therefore crucial. I decided to play on this position, on this frustration of movement, and also to alternate objective and subjective points of view, which had never been done in VR. This allowed me to highlight the beautiful metaphor of the story: Our eyes that escape to discover the world when our body remains trapped in a physical reality.

INVISIBLE INTERACTIVITY

With *Jailbirds*, I want to bring the viewer along into a story, an activity that is essentially passive, while he has absolute freedom of position, of what he want to look at, and thus of rhythm. We therefore created with the studio's developers a **system of loops and invisible interactivity**.

The viewer's experience of Jailbirds will be linear, but unbeknownst to him, the narrative engine works to provide the most fluid experience possible.

THE ACTOR'S PERFORMANCE

Working since 2014 on immersive experiences, I have seen that the viewer's state of consciousness is a fundamental element of their engagement in virtual reality. It was important that the characters of Jailbirds give off a very strong presence, a humanity.

This is why **I wanted to work with real actors**. Tómas Lemarquis, Elliot Delage and Barry Johnson actually played the scenes together. Their captured performance have been reproduced in 3D animation; and we used facial capture technology for the facial expressions. Working with Tómas Lemarquis, a veteran of big Hollywood productions (*X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Blade Runner 2049*) was a pleasure. He brought to the project his experience and a flawless involvement. His work gives all its density to the character of the Chief Guardian.

A SHADER FOR THE PENCIL EFFECT

Among the visual tools we developed in the art direction of Jailbirds, **the most important is the «pencil» shader**. We wanted to give a drawn effect to our volume characters, but working on textures alone was not enough. So we developed a shader, which is an algorithm that defines how objects react to light. The shadows of the objects appear in real time, like it was drawn with a pencil, like a shadow that an artist would have added on the image.

The effect is striking, especially in scenes with high-contrast light, where each character yet in volume could be a charcoal drawing.

THE PRODUCERS



BE REVOLUTION PICTURES



Griselda Gonzalez
Gentile

BE REVOLUTION PICTURES : A Belgian production company founded by Griselda Gonzalez Gentile, that distinguishes itself by the great diversity of the projects it carries. We produce innovative films in collaboration with writers, directors and co-producers from all over the world. With several productions in progress, ranging from classic feature films to animated films, documentaries and VR, Be Revolution Pictures is always working with the medium that best suits the projects to give them a strong narrative power and form.



Digital
Rise



François Klein

DIGITAL RISE : Founded in 2018 by François Klein and Thomas Villepoux, Digital Rise is an independent producer specialized in the creation and development of immersive and collaborative narratives involving new image and sound technologies. We support authors in the artistic and technical conception of innovative and memorable multi-format works for the public, works that question the border between the real and virtual worlds..

JAILBIRDS

Productions

El Principe (Chili-Argentine-Belgique)

Venise (Queer Lion 2019)

Fashion Victim, from Katia Oliver

Perhaps, from Kastriot Abdyli

Jailbibrds (Belgique-France)

Development

Matilda (Belgium-Spain)

Le Show de Lucifer (Belgium-Spain-France)

Productions

Jailbibrds chap.1 (Belgique-France)

FilmGate Miami (Best Narrative Fiction 2021)

Courant 3D, Angoulême (Audience Award 2021)

MANDALA (China-France)

VRCore (Best Immersive 2019)

Mechanical Souls (France-Taiwan)

Lumiere Awards (Best 3D in VR 2019)

Development

Care (from Cédriane Fossat)

PRODUCERS STATEMENT

JAILBIRDS

Jailbirds is a young adult animation experience that emphasizes storytelling and immersion over concept and technology. The result is a **touching and intelligent story** where the balance between its topic, theme, format, use of medium and user experience makes sense. In his work, the Director Thomas Villepoux uses VR codes and interactive storytelling techniques in an innovative composition.

Jailbirds is a **fantasy tale**, a call to freedom and simple happiness when you are physically locked up, a subject that finds a certain resonance today.

Jailbirds is a particularly exciting experience that immediately appealed to me. Living free despite being locked up is a subject I have always been sensitive to, without knowing at the time we started working on this project that it would be so relevant today. When Thomas and François presented the project to me, I immediately bought into the script without a doubt, as well as the Virtual Reality technique with which they wanted to shape this story. Without having any real knowledge of VR, I **intuitively perceived the potential** of a film where the viewer feels and lives the notion of confinement and freedom with the characters of the scenario.

A film producer, I see new technologies as a source of different and innovative but powerful audiovisual experience for viewers. *Jailbirds* is a perfect example of this.

In terms of production we have combined our strengths and visions to bring this film to life, we have been working hand in hand with François and Thomas on this project since 2017. We **financed this film mainly in Belgium** and more specifically in Wallonia with the support of **Domenico La Porta at Wallimage** who immediately understood our vision and its potential.

**Griselda Gonzalez Gentile,
Productrice, Be Revolution Pictures**

Jailbirds is a project initiated by Thomas VILLEPOUX when he and I were just starting to work with virtual reality. Little by little, the project takes shape in writing and its relevance becomes obvious.

In November 2016, *Jailbirds* is presented at Stereopsia forum in Liege, Belgium where it wins the pitch competition and the prize for best **VR project awarded** by Wallimage. On this occasion we meet Griselda Gonzalez from **BE REVOLUTION PICTURES**. In 2018, Jailbirds receives Tax Shelter approval and financial support for production from Wallimage. We thus consolidate the bases of a Belgian-French co-production that allows us to produce the first chapter of the work.

A decisive meeting was with our **artistic director : Fred Remuzat**. We were looking to give shape to the visual style of Jailbirds. Both a cartoonist and graphic designer, Fred has worked on numerous commercials and was an art producer for the 3D animated feature *Leap !*.

In June 2018, we presented Jailbirds at the XR pitch of the Annecy film market. Once again, the project won **the SACD prize for the best VR script** at the Annecy festival, awarded to Thomas Villepoux, its author.

The Release of the First Chapter of the story in 2021 bring attention from both National Broadcaster **France TV** who join the project as Coproducer and **Astrea immersive as International Distributor**. With their impulse, Jailbirds could finally be achieved in 2022 and be presented in **World Premiere at SXSW23**.

Jailbirds has thus lived a **long but necessary development work** that confirmed its narrative, artistic and technical relevance. The ambition and audacity of the project convinced various public and private partners in an unprecedented Belgian-French co-production.

**François KLEIN,
Producteur, Digital Rise**

Freely adapted from *PAULOT S'ÉVADE* by PHILIPPE FOERSTER, published by **FLUIDE GLACIAL**

TÓMAS LEMARQUIS VICTORIA ABRIL BARRY JOHNSON ELLIOT DELAGE



JAILBIRDS



JAILBIRDS

by THOMAS VILLEPOUX



BE REVOLUTION PICTURES



Digital Rise

stories worth living

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BE REVOLUTION PICTURES PRESENTS « JAILBIRDS, BWA KAYIMAN » | A COPRODUCTION WITH DIGITAL RISE
PRODUCED BY GRISELDA GONZALEZ GENTILE AND FRANÇOIS KLEIN | WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY THOMAS VILLEPOUX
ART DIRECTION FRED REMUZAT | ANIMATION BY THE PACK | ARTISTIC SUPERVISOR JEF DEHOUSE
MUSIC COMPOSED BY CYRILLE MARCHESSEAU | SOUNDMIX BY 64F PROD

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