

# SPELEONAUT UNDER THE STONE SKY



*From an early age, I imagined myself as a universal creator, and I have strived to enable myself in that sense. I understood that I was meant for a tough life, which is always on the border of the Unknown.*

**- Milutin Veljković**



*The story of 11,111 hours in a cave, the mystical world of muted sensations,  
and the astonishing character both a caveman and an astronaut.*



## SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 1969, the Yugoslav media were buzzing about the conquest of the Moon, but with the equal attention they reported on conquering the bowels of the Earth.

Previously unknown 34-year-old Milutin Veljković set off to spend the following 15 months in a two-kilometer long cave, in a company of a dozen of hens and ducks and a two months old puppy; he had food supplies and other necessities for the projected time.

The Samar cave was the only electrified spot in this remote village in the southeast Serbia at the time. The light bulbs installed in the cave walls worked at a certain time of day, over the small power generator.

The previous record in cave dwelling endurance was 110 days. But, Milutin wasn't so interested in beating the record - he aimed to penetrate deep into the universe of depth. In the words of the protagonist: *"...caves are specific microenvironments in which everything unfolds according to particular laws. These laws are, however, still largely unclear and unexamined exactly because caves are not suitable for an extended stay..."*

This extraordinary deed is first revealed outside - through a series of portraits of interesting characters, all connected to Veljković: a graphic novel artist, a zoologist, a composer, an off-road traveler. Unexpectedly, we enter the underground world. The various narrated fragments from Veljković's detailed cave diary are brought to life: from his daily routines, such as making coffee and collecting insects - to the dramatic events of pulling out his own tooth, craving for woman, fighting with the flood and hallucinations.

From connecting with primeval ancestors in a disintegrated time and space, all the way to the outer space exploration, *SPELEONAUT* is in quest of our purpose.

The record of 463 days in cave dwelling endurance he established is still undefeated.



*While questioning the man and his boundaries in her film *Speleonaut*, Sonja Đekić boldly crosses the boundaries of the documentary film-making as well, making us to perceive documents as the fiction structure. - Srđan Vučinić, film critic and theorist*



[ stills from the first part: THE OUTSIDE ]

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As long as I can remember, I have had the need to be alone sometimes. One of my earliest memories relates to the enjoyment of observation: watching children play from the floor of my grandmother's balcony. And in recent years my need for lengthy periods spent in nature has become almost physical. This is why, I presume, the forgotten news story of a loner who spent 15 months in a cave half a century ago led me to be persistent in the search for his book of diary entries entitled *Under The Stone Sky*, although it was unavailable at libraries at the time. Even the first contact was exciting: long-bearded face on the front cover, and hand-written inscription: "I dedicate this book to explorers who have burned away on the border of the Unknown." I felt this was an invitation.

The shooting was a real adventure: the darkness, the dampness, the cold and the constant roaring of the underground river, which was almost impossible to avoid throughout the main corridor approximately two kilometers long. Thus, soaked to the skin, we have had a chance to experience just a small part of what the film's main protagonist went through in there.

Our focus was to capture different faces and the raw magnificence of the unarranged Samar cave. The camera is mostly static or panning very slowly, in the rhythm of forever. The only light existing is the led from the speleologist's helmet, and often the big part of the composition is plain darkness. An equally great challenge was HOW to tell a story of this event - an exciting and uncertain feat for the scientific and wider community at the time, and for the main protagonist - an introspective dive into his own self, which is reborn and rediscovered due to the lack of sensations.

The decision to make the film in two acts - from "the outside" and "the inside" perspective is the result of a long creative process, and trying to find answers to the following questions: How can we recreate different aspects of the cave which Milutin had experienced, as described in the book? How is it possible to transfer a world deprived of senses to film, especially to present-day viewers used to constant, pronounced stimulation? In an age of individualism, how can we materialize the spirit of planetary curiosity for collective achievements of humankind?

Watering a tree every day, doing anything with unshakeable perseverance - is one of the thoughts from the silver screen which has reached the depths of my being and has been inscribed into my heart as a sacred task. I recognized the reflexes of this "Sacrifice", in order to reach for the bigger and greater, in the protagonist's aim to delve into the difficult and undiscovered, into a night without day, into a night darker and longer than any night above the ground.

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*The contemplative but skillfully measured tempo with which the camera as a probe enters the cave's interior as into the infinite universe fascinates the viewer; he wishes that road and that dream last to infinity: to the next Big Bang! - Vesna Perić, film critic and theorist*



[ stills from the the second part: THE INSIDE ]

## DIRECTOR'S SHORT BIOGRAPHY & SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

**Sonja (Blagojević) Đekić** is born on August 3 1980 in Belgrade, where she works and lives today. She holds a **M.A. degree in Film and TV directing** from the Faculty of Drama Arts. Sonja has been passionately working for over a decade on her documentary films, acting in multiple roles. These films won 20 awards and participated in 80 festivals.

Sonja has been actively involved in several documentary film festivals in Serbia - **Martovski** (artistic director of the 66<sup>th</sup> edition), **Magnificent 7** (workshop coordinator and producer) and **Grafest** in Gračanica (selector and coordinator). She recently founded a production company **KEVA**, and is currently developing feature documentary film "Dream Collector".

### **Joe Goes To Serbia, documentary, 2008, 50'30''**

The World Premiere took place on the 55th Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival, where the film won GOLDEN MEDAL OF BELGRADE for the best national documentary and the FIPRESCI AWARD for the most engaged film. Screened on more than 20 festivals all over the world, nominated for the "Golden frog" at the Festival Camerimage in Poland.

### **KOSMA, documentary, 2013, 75'**

Participated on more than 50 festivals, won ten awards: SOLE LUNA AWARD for the Best Documentary, BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY IN A DOCUMENTARY on the 9th SEE FEST in L.A., BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE on 15th West Virginia Filmmakers Festival, THE BEST FILM in the National competition of the 22nd International Ethnological FF in Serbia, GRAND PRIX of the 2nd Festival of Documentary Film and Transmedia RIOS in Portugal, and others.

### **Speleonaut / Under The Stone Sky, documentary, 2018, 56'30''**

Premiered within the main program of the prestigious 24<sup>th</sup> Auteur FF in Belgrade. Won two awards so far: BEST MID-LENGTH FILM on the 10th Eho mountain FF in North Macedonia and the BEST MOUNTAIN AND ENVIRONMENT FILM on the 6th Festival Gollut in Spain.

### **Dreams of Vladan Radovanović, documentary, 2021, 70'' \* in development**

Training programs: Lisbon Docs, Eurodoc



#### ROLES ON THE "SPELEONAUT"

- **Screenwriter**
- **Director**
- **Producer**
- **Distributor**

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На дан изласка из пећине

# Милутин на жигу



САМО ЈЕДАН ДАН: Специјални жиг поште Српске

СВЕТСКИ РЕКОРД ЖИВОТА У ПЕЋИНИ ПОД ПОКРОВИТЕЛСТВОМ „НОВОСТИ“

# Милутин против понорнице



## Под земљом До 28 септембра

● Милутин Вељковић дочекаће новогодишњу ноћ са шољицом кафе



# ЗАШТО МИЛУТИН ЈЕДЕ ЉУТО

● Фефероне су у једошнику јер је то Милутинова намирница  
УЧЕНИЦИ НОВОСТИ



# ГОДИНУ ДАНА У ПЕЋИНИ

Копажкошара, 23. јуна  
СУТРА се навршава тачно годину дана од како у пећини Самар код села Копажкошаре у Сврљиншким планинама борави београдски спелеолог Милутин ВЕЉКОВИЋ, који се одлучно на овај подухват под покровитељством „Вечерњих новости“. Још у октобру Вељковић је оборио светски рекорд појединачног боравка у пећини, који је до тада држао један француски спелеолог. Он је том приликом изјавио да ће под земљом остати заједно са животињама које је понео са собом (мачком, козом, кокошкима, канадским паткама), тачно 463 дана колико износи једна хидролошка година.

● Поводом годишњице боравка у пећини Милутин Вељковић ће сутра телефоном разговарати са представницима домаће и стране штампе, радија и телевизије.



МИЛУТИН ВЕЉКОВИЋ

[just a few out of thousand of newspaper headlines on Milutin ]

## PROFILE OF THE PRODUCTION HOUSE / THE BIO-FILMOGRAPHY OF THE PRODUCERS

**Centre for Visual Communications KVADRAT** is a film production and education firm, especially focused on production and promotion of documentary films. It was established in 1990 as the first private film school in former Yugoslavia.

It's run by **Svetlana and Zoran Popović**, film directors, producers and professors.

KVADRAT became one of the first members of EDN from Serbia and the founder of the first European Feature Documentary FF in Serbia called **THE MAGNIFICENT 7**, in 2005. Due to its great success, the directors of the festival Svetlana and Zoran Popović got an **EDN award** in 2007. for special contribution in developing the European documentary culture, and twice **the award from the City of Belgrade** (2012, 2017).

KVADRAT was the first to start documentary workshops for film students and young filmmakers from the region and produced one of the first feature documentaries in Serbia - a documentary omnibus *BELGRADE SOUND*, a collective work from the year 2000. Throughout its existence, over 500 short fiction films and more than 200 documentaries were made within KVADRAT; some of these works were among the most successful in the recent Serbian film production.

In 2017 the Popovićs became the first laureates of the prestigious award "**Nebojša Popović**" for their outstanding contribution and persistence to the promotion and critical deliberation of film art and culture.

*SPELEONAUT* is the third film in a row on which they've been collaborated with Sonja Đekić (*Joe Goes to Serbia* in 2008, *Kosma* in 2013).

*Speleonaut is a story of a great forgotten achievement, the wonders of the universe, the secrets of our planet! It tells of a star-gate that one uncommon hero discovers in the depths of the absolute darkness, by living exactly 11,111 hours in a cave.*



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## PRODUCER'S NOTE

*All civilizations become either spacefaring or extinct.* - Carl Sagan

At the end of the 60s, when our story takes place, the settlement of the Moon seemed like the next inevitable step of the human kind in the quest toward the stars...

Although the space enthusiasm did not last for very long - the mission on Mars is today again in focus, making our story even more actual.

There are very few films dealing with the world of caves outside the usual speleological or scientific angle. The diary of Milutin's cave life, his extraordinary character and achievement give us the exclusive opportunity to dive deep into this other planet within our own, on so many layers. During his long-term underground dwelling, Veljković immersed deep into the ancient cave life through the archaeological excavations he had often exercised. He also made various remarks concerning his cave companions - the insects, the poultry, the dog, but he was meticulously observing his own self as well, thus coming to conclusions that could be of a great value to the space travelers.

In a certain way, Milutin Veljković connects the whole humanity throughout the time: from the cavemen, all the way to the astronauts!

***Speleonaut*** is likely to appeal primarily to the movie lovers - for its distinctive art form, and the mountaineers and the adventurers - for its topic. However, the numerous scientific insights and the overall uniqueness of this outstanding venture itself could also be of a great interest to the widest possible audience!

## LINKS

**SPELEONAUT - TRAILER:** <https://vimeo.com/278810170>

THE PREVIOUS WORKS OF THE DIRECTOR:

**MOJ DRUG SRBIJA / JOE GOES TO SERBIA**, 50'30'', 2008

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/143413686/> Whole film: <https://vimeo.com/19564492>

**KOSMA**, 75'', 2013 | Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/58503715>

*\* Please, get in touch if you want to see the whole films, or for more promo material.*

### Main contact:

Sonja Đekić, director / producer / distributor

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*Future flights to Mars will last long and they will require psychological preparations; Veljković's experience can give us useful information regarding this matter...*

**Vladimir Aleksandrovich Shatalov, Soviet cosmonaut / quote from the 1974-press**



# FACT SHEET

## CREW AND CHARACTERS

Director, screenwriter: Sonja Đekić

OTHER KEY CREATORS: Editing by Nemanja Babić,  
Cinematography by Pablo Ferro Živanović,  
Sound design by Dora Filipović, Narration by Živojin Rakočević  
Music by Arsenije Jovanović, Original song „Speleonaut“ by Milan Sv. Đurđević,



PROTAGONISTS: Milutin Veljković (archive material), Aleksandar Zograf,  
Arsenije Jovanović, Srećko Ćurčić, Aleksandar Veljković

Production company: CVC KVADRAT

Producers: Svetlana Popović, Zoran Popović, Sonja Đekić

*The endurance record for staying in a cave is 463 days by Milutin Veljković (b.1935) (Yugoslavia) in the Samar Cavern, Svrljig Mountains, northern Yugoslavia, from 24 June 1969 to 30 September 1970. - **The Guinness Book of Records**, year 1972*

## TECHNICAL INFO

DOCUMENTARY FILM

Production country and year: Serbia, 2018

Color: color and b&w (archive material)

Duration: 56'30''

Format: HD // Available screening formats: DCP, digital HD files (mp4/mov)

Original language: Serbian

Subtitles available in: English, Spanish, Serbian, Macedonian

## FESTIVALS

The National Premiere: 24<sup>th</sup> Auteur FF - main program, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Serbia

### AWARDS:

BEST MOUNTAIN AND ENVIRONMENT FILM \* 6th Festival Gollut

BEST MID-LENGTH FILM \* 10th Eho mountain FF

Other festival screenings:

26<sup>th</sup> European FF Palić, Serbia - *Eco Dox* | 13th Prvi Kadar, BiH - *EX YU in Focus* |

16th Dokument, Serbia | 4th Galil Adventure FF - *Official selection*

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