The Wadi Rum desert, in the Middle Eastern country of Jordan, is one of the harshest places on Earth. Temperatures can climb above 100 degrees, and the sun bakes everything in sight.

But last fall, the Wadi Rum came to life with activity. Robots rolled through the orange sand, and a giant, furry creature named Chewbacca stomped around in the heat. For several weeks, the Wadi Rum was not just a desert on Earth—it was the Star Wars planet Pasaana.

A film crew was making The Rise of Skywalker, the last movie in the famous series. The job was a major challenge for the crew. They had to build roads into the desert and huddle in tents during sandstorms. The actors sweated through chase scenes.

Of course, they all could have stayed home and filmed the movie in a Hollywood studio. The landscapes could have been added to the background.
In *The Force Awakens*, the character Luke Skywalker is found hiding out on the distant planet Ahch-To. But Ahch-To is actually a rocky island called Skellig Michael, about 7 miles off the coast of Ireland.

Skellig Michael rises 715 feet above the Atlantic Ocean. Nearly 1,500 years ago, a group of Irish monks rowed to the island and carved more than 600 stairs into the rock. At the top, they built a home out of stone. Luke lives in the huts that the monks once lived in.

Today, Skellig Michael is home to thousands of seabirds. One species, the puffin, seemed especially cute to the creators of Star Wars. The porgs, the little creatures that live with Luke on Ahch-To, were inspired by the puffin.

Star Wars movies are often filmed in real-life locations like this one. Can you guess why?

**MOVIE MAGIC**

Later by computer graphics experts. But the movie's director—the person who leads all the actors and crew members—wanted everything to look real, with sand in the actors' hair and sun shining in their eyes.

Over the years, the creators of Star Wars have made dozens of imaginary planets seem real. How? With help from some strange places right here on Earth. Here's a quick tour of a few.
**THE PLANET: Hoth**

**THE REAL PLACE: Hardanger Glacier in Norway**

If you love Star Wars, you’ll remember the icy planet Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back*. But you don’t have to be a fan to be amazed by the planet’s real-life location.

The Hoth scenes were filmed in Norway on the Hardanger Glacier, a field of ice and snow that stays frozen all year. No roads lead to Hardanger, so visitors must travel by train—if they dare. Deep cracks called crevasses are hidden in the ice.

No one on the Star Wars crew fell into a crevasse, but the worst storm in 50 years blew in while they were there. However, the weather didn’t halt production. The crew needed to shoot a scene of Luke escaping from an ice monster’s cave. So they filmed him emerging from the hotel’s door into the storm!

**THE PLANET: Crait**

**THE REAL PLACE: Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia**

The end of *The Last Jedi* takes you to the planet Crait. Giant robots from the evil First Order attack across a huge, white field that is extremely bright. It can’t possibly be real, right?

But it is. The Crait scenes were filmed in Bolivia on the salt flats of Salar de Uyuni. Long ago, the area was covered with saltwater lakes. However, thousands of years ago, the water dried up, leaving behind 10 billion tons of salt in a field the size of Connecticut.

In the rainy season, this flat, white field floods with water, which reflects the sky. The water turns the salt flats into the world’s largest mirror—and the coolest battlefield in the galaxy. •
SEARCHING FOR WAKANDA
How do moviemakers find the perfect places to film? Ask Ilt Jones.

Until the 1970s, most movies and TV shows were filmed on giant sets inside studios. The sets were built to look like faraway places. But many moviemakers today like to film out in the world to make their movies look real. How did they find that creepy forest for Stranger Things? Or mountains for the imaginary country of Wakanda in Black Panther?

That’s a job for people like Ilt Jones, a location manager for films. To find Wakanda, Jones traveled all over South Africa, exploring beaches and climbing mountains. At one point, he spotted a rhinoceros that was “as big as a bus.”

In addition to finding the locations for films, location managers also set them up for filming. For one movie, Jones selected a location in the jungles of Vietnam. He had to transport the equipment and crew there in tiny boats—on a river filled with snakes.

Still, not everything presented on-screen is filmed on location. Filmmakers regularly use computer-generated imagery (CGI). For example, most of Black Panther was shot in Georgia, but CGI experts used photos from South Africa to create the backgrounds.

That certainly made Jones’s job easier. Still, he would hate to see CGI take over completely. “I’m paid to find the most interesting, beautiful parts of the world,” says Jones. “It’s a great job.”

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