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Sommario/riassunto	From endless sand dunes and prickly cacti to shimmering mirages and green oases, deserts evoke contradictory images in us. They are lands of desolation, but also of romance, of blistering Mojave heat and biting Gobi cold. Covering a quarter of the earth's land mass and providing a home to half a billion people, they are both a physical reality and landscapes of the mind. The idea of the desert has long captured Western imagination, put on display in films and literature, but these portrayals often fail to capture the true scope and diversity of the people living there. Bridging the scientific