

The Pagan King

Production Details

UK-Latvia

Delivering January 2018

Run Time: 100 min (approx.)

Budget: \$4m USD

Synopsis

In the 13th century, the lands along the shores of the Baltic Sea are pagan. The most powerful - and feared - is the land of Semigallia where even the Vikings fear to tread. Semigallia is a rich trading nation, and that has not gone unnoticed in Rome where the Pope's illegitimate son, Max, tells his father that in exchange for some good ships and some very bad men, he will wage a crusade against the pagans and become ruler.

Max arrives in Semigallia amid celebrations, but the mood changes very quickly when it is found that the King and his young son have been poisoned. On his deathbed, the King appoints an unexpected successor to whom he bestows the authority to rule with the transfer of the Ring of Kings. Hardly an adult, but very much a natural strategist, Namejs quickly finds his strength as leader tested as Max launches his crusade. What Namay lacks in experience, he makes up for in courage. As he unites his people behind him and leads them into a series of battles, he forges his legend and ensures that he and his people become an enduring symbol of freedom.

Director's Vision

The Pagan King's story dates back to the beginning of the 13th century when, from upon his deathbed, the reigning king bestows his power to an unexpected heir. Barely a man, Namay is given a ring that symbolises the transfer of power, but the authority he inherits brings the momentous responsibility of protecting his people from the Crusaders.

The interesting detail about this story is the ring of kings. It gained its title "Ring of Namejs" in the 1930s, when two such rings were found in the territory of Latvia. Although, the rings are dated from the end of 12th century and the beginning of 13th century, the King Namejs was not born at that time. Also, it is said that at his time of reign, the ring was not worn. The ring and its title became more popular after the book "Ring of Namejs" written by Aleksandrs Grins in 1931.

Of course, there are a lot of explanations about this ring but, it is most typically referred to as the ring of kings. That is really unique for me as a writer and director - how it is possible that everyone can easily wear this ring of kings - and so many people do! Are we all kings? If we are, what does it mean, what responsibilities does this title put on us?

During the movie the young King Namay is constantly tested. He gets stronger and stronger and realizes that being a king means being responsible for your decisions and for your actions, and most importantly - being responsible for your people's destiny.

The Pagan King will be an action movie in style of Vikings with extensive battle scenes, old traditions, and mysticism. We want to take the audience into the world of medieval times

and bring to life, the epic legend of King Namay. Beyond the story of the King is the story of a strong, independent and self-confident nation defending the threat of foreign rule.

Although, the movie will speak about fundamental and important themes such as freedom, honour and responsibility, it will be dynamic. There will be a lot of different and bright characters and great battle scenes. To make the movie more appealing we used a lot of old rituals and traditions to enhance the historical taste and to make it easier for spectator to feel the atmosphere of old times.

Also, our aim is not to make precise reconstruction of historical events or precise ethnographic decorations and sets. The characteristic way usually for the historical movies is that the characters of the movie are heroic, sentimental. We want our characters to be strong and more modern and easy to identify with.

Creative Team

Aigars Grauba / Writer, Director

Aigars is a renowned Latvian film director, producer and scriptwriter. His body of work as writer-director includes feature films *Dangerous Summer* (2000), *Defenders of Riga* (2007), and *Dream Team 1935* (2012). His productions represent some of the most ambitious projects in the Baltic States and have broken multiple local and regional box office records including an all-time box office record for a Latvian film (*Defenders of Riga*). Aigars can be characterized as a director who sees no obstacles in pursuing his intentions. His ambition with *The Pagan King* is to cultivate a local legend for a global audience.

Max Kinnings / Writer

Max is a novelist and screenwriter based in Oxford, England. He is the author of four novels: *Hitman*, *The Fixer*, *Baptism* and *Sacrifice*. He is the writer and co-writer of a number of screenplays in various stages of development and was the ghost writer on actor/comedian Rik Mayall's autobiography, *Bigger than Hitler Better than Christ*. Max was recently part of the writing team for Sony's *Little Big Planet 3*. He is Programme Leader in Creative Writing at Brunel University in London.

“As soon as I read Aigars’ outline of The Pagan King, I saw the enormous potential of the project. One small nation resisting the military might of Europe’s most powerful armies, as Semigallia did against the colonial aggression of the crusaders in the 13th century, is an intoxicating story. So when I was given the opportunity to become a co-writer, I jumped at the chance. The characters - both protagonists and antagonists - are a gift to a writer to develop and write dialogue for, as they are for those actors and actresses who will have the opportunity to bring them alive on screen. When I met Aigars, I was swept up with his passion and enthusiasm for the story not to mention his vision of an action-packed film with epic battle scenes and raw emotion. This has been an extremely exciting project to work on and I feel certain that the story we have created, a quest for freedom in the face of insurmountable odds, will have a universal appeal to film-going audiences the world over. “

Andrejs Ekis / Producer

Andrejs began his career in broadcast and was the founder and owner of the first Latvian Independent Television Station, LNT. When the opportunity arose to sell the channel, he invested the acquisition of a property outside of Riga which he has since developed into Cinevilla Studios. Servicing his own productions and third party co-productions, Andrejs

currently operates the studio along with his production company and a local television channel. Andrejs has been awarded with the Three-Star Order (the highest Latvian State award for outstanding achievement in serving the country). Recently Andrejs has directed one of the most successful movies in Latvia - comedy *Swingers* (2016). Right now he is working on two re-makes of the movie - for the Estonia (*Svingijad*) (premiere on November 10th, 2017) and Ukraine (*Swingers*) (premiere on February 14th, 2018).

Cast

Edvin Endre / Namay (*Eddie the Eagle, Vikings*)

James Bloor / Max (*Dunkirk, Carnage: Swallowing the Past, La Corrispondenza*)

Aiste Dirziute / Lauga (Berlinale 2015 Rising Star Award; Summer of Sangaile, Low Roar: Nobody Loves Me Like You).