

# PROVINCIAL ROMANCE



# Summary



Through a series of misfortunes, a young Estonian woman reconsiders her career in the mafia when she gets pregnant unexpectedly. Crime drama/ dark comedy.

This criminal drama with elements of dark comedy is in Estonian and some Russian.

Short film, as proof of concept, was filmed in Estonia as the MFA thesis project. Post production finished in 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions. Final budget \$28K.

<https://vimeo.com/554426416/7aa669af61>



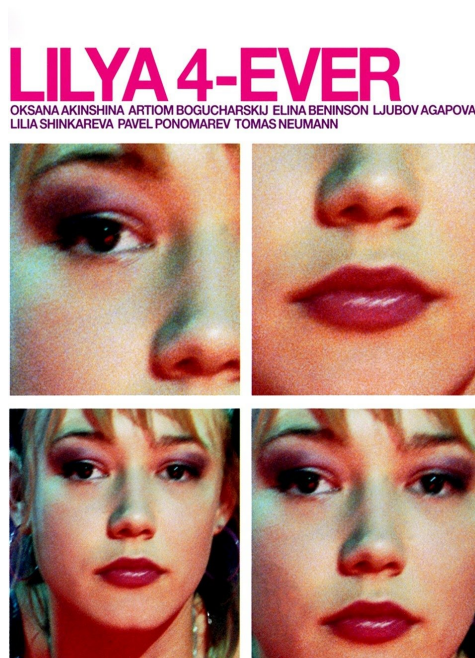
Originally from the USSR, the writer and director Dmitriy Rozin is a New York filmmaker with an MFA in Film Directing from *Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema* and an MFA from *Pratt Institute* in Graphic and Media arts.



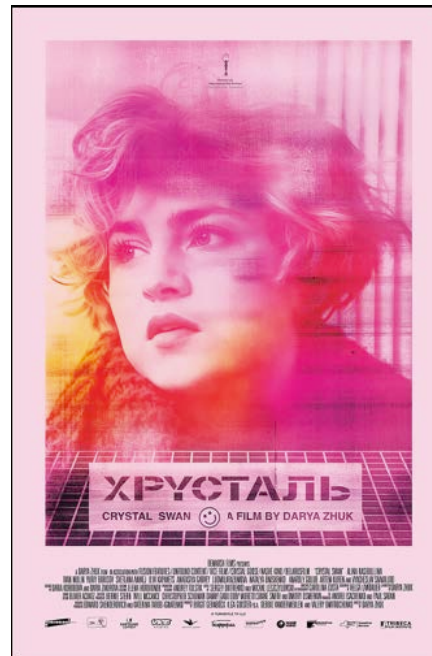
# Advantages

- the story provides the opportunity of inexpensive execution, taking place in a provincial town of a post-Soviet environment.
- shooting a film in and about Estonia, but with universal appeal, will position it uniquely for international film market and festival awards.
- there has been a significant local demand for Estonia-based stories in the Baltic region itself and in the rest of Europe. Both TV and theatrical are eager for compelling material.

Comparable titles:



Budget: €300K



Budget: \$350K



Budget: €250K

# Tonal References



-Fish Tank (Andrea Arnold, 2009) An angry rebellious teenager on the verge of being kicked out of school and her hard-partying mother compete for the affection of a married man while hurtling toward a lifetime of misery.

-Climax (Gaspar Noe, 2018) French dancers gather in a remote, empty school building to rehearse on a wintry night. The all-night celebration morphs into a hallucinatory nightmare when they learn their sangria is laced with LSD.



-L'enfant (Dardenne Brothers, 2005) a young couple living off her benefit and the thefts committed by his gang, have a new source of money: their newborn son.

-Run Lola Run (Tom Tykwer, 1998) After a botched money delivery, Lola has 20 minutes to come up with 100,000 Deutschmarks.



-Lilya 4-ever (Lukas Mudysson, 2002) 16-year-old Lilja and her friend, the young boy Volodja, live in Estonia and dream of a better life. Lilja falls in love with Andrej, who is going to Sweden, and invites Lilja to come along and start a new life.



# SYNOPSIS





With criminal activity on the rise, post-soviet Estonia in the 2000's is overwhelmed by a national identity crisis and weak economy.

In a small town, 23-year-old Molly steals newborn babies from maternity wards for her mafioso boss, Ben-- who claims that these babies will have amazing lives once they are sold to new, rich families. He happily profits off of what he truly believes is a good deed. With her physical training and cold exterior, Molly is the perfect candidate to carry out his bidding - until she realizes she is pregnant.



Molly confides this news with her older colleague, Paulina, who immediately tells her to get an abortion. Meanwhile, Serge, the father of Molly's unborn baby and Ben's right-hand man, tells her he wants to raise the child with her. Molly begs him to help her leave the business.

When Ben tells Molly that there is no way she can leave the business, Serge steals Ben's gun and shoots him in the head. While he drags Ben's body away, Molly escapes onto a ferry bound for Finland. She realizes her escape is short-lived, however, when she is approached on the ferry by two of Ben's partners, who immediately bring her back to Serge.



Now the head of the enterprise, Serge no longer trusts Molly, and has assigned Molly's job to his new girlfriend, Diana, while Molly is assigned to sex work under the supervision of Paulina. After seeing a doctor, Molly realizes she doesn't want to get an abortion.





Paulina sends Molly to her first client, Gert. Their relationship evolves, even though their sexual interactions are awkward. Meanwhile, Serge realizes that Diana doesn't have the same capabilities as Molly when she steals an older child from a parking lot, resulting in less pay for the business.

When Diana tries to steal a baby, Molly impulsively calls the police. Diana is killed by an ensuing car accident on the run from the police, and the baby she kidnapped is returned to its parents. The gang immediately suspects Molly as the cause of Diana's death.



Recalling her adolescence with her high school friends--a glue-sniffing Russian-Estonian gang living in the sewers--she calls upon them for help to escape, promising weapons and money in exchange. While Molly is handcuffed to a bed, the gang starts a fight with the mafiosos which ends in a shoot-out.

Paulina rescues Molly from the violent scene, and together they take the money and weapons from the safe. When Molly goes into labor and gives birth prematurely, Gert offers to raise the child with her, but she decides to give it up for adoption.



# Director's Note

My family comes from Soviet Union; we immigrated as Jewish refugees in 1992, to New York City. Some of my work has reflected my identity, yet to me, a big part of my life is about being one with the world, being able to wander freely, to meet and understand people from different communities, learn their ways of life. My interests, therefore, lie in the common human themes. I like working in languages I do not speak, as is with this film. It is an exciting process of realizing how similar we all are, even when trying to tackle personal issues in different parts of the world.

The main theme in the script is the responsibility we have for this world when we procreate. In this criminal drama, all characters are bound by the necessity to locate their place in rebuilding the identity of their country through relationships with others and the circumstances they find themselves in.

National pride is an integral part of the post-Soviet environment, since many of the newly formed independent states (except for some, like Estonia, which reinstated their independence) have been long part of the union of republics known as "Russia" to the rest of the world. The film is set in the dystopian period of the decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in a world where harsh realism has replaced optimism and hopes for the new beautiful world to evolve. Crime started flourishing there in the '90s and reached its peak towards the end of the decade. In the early 2000s, the sense that anything was possible by illegal means eventually gave way to a softer, more humane approach to change.

We likewise observe our heroine, Molly, change from cold and stern to caring and emotional--not only because of her physical state but also due to a collective state of heightened self-awareness. As the world (in a global sense) progresses, so does our protagonist. Her partner and antagonist – namely, Serge, the father of her child, also wants to progress, but we see how he fails every step of the way. The world he represents does collapse eventually.

Molly is a strong young woman who is lost. For her, it is the world of crime that she builds with her colleagues. As she realizes she has a new life inside of her, she feels the need to escape. However, it is impossible to escape the jail you are building, you can only destroy it.

I also wanted to portray the dance culture in Estonia, especially in Tallinn. I've worked with several modern dance collectives there, and I myself was an avid classical and modern dancer back in the day. I do feel close to that environment. It seems right that people should dance in the film, it's part of the place.

Children of the underground is another theme I feel close to. Back in the day, I worked as an editor on an Icelandic documentary on children of the underground in Kyiv. Visually stunning and blood-chilling details of the world of the abandoned children in the 21st Century are a reality and a story worth telling. *Liliya 4-ever* is a film where this theme is dominant; I definitely feel inspired by it.

Estonian film, as well as Baltic and Scandinavian film has made a resurgence lately, and I hope to reach audiences both at home and abroad.





**Dmitriy Rozin** is a writer, director and editor living in New York since 1992. He has a BA from Film Production from Brooklyn College and an MFA in Computer Graphics and Interactive Media from Pratt Institute, as well as an MFA in Cinema Arts, Film Directing from Feirstein Graduate School Of Cinema.

His editing and camera work track record includes both narrative and documentary films, commercial spots for TV and web, industrial promotional videos, and music videos.

Rozin has also worked internationally in Western Europe, Russia, Japan as a cameraman and editor. He speaks 3 languages and often works in languages he does not speak. To this day Rozin wrote and directed about a dozen short films and documentaries.



**Fedor Lyass** is one of Russia's top award-winning cinematographers. A Moscow's famous VGIK graduate, Lyass has worked with many of the top Russian mainstream and independent directors and gained widespread recognition for his work. With technically innovative and modern visual style being his trademark, he shot some of the most high-grossing films in local box-office, like the soccer drama *The Coach*, and *Soulless*, an atoned trader story based on a best-selling novel.

Lyass has worked in different genres, being it a small-budget art film (*I'll Be Around*) or a period TV show (sixties-set *The Thaw* is considered one of the best shows in Russian language to this day).

Lyass has received many awards for his work. Following the box office hit *Hardcore Henry* (2015), a POV action film directed by a renowned director Ilya Naishuller, Lyass has started working in the US. He has shot a crime thriller *Awake*, starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers, an arthouse romance *Middleground*, and a sci-fi thriller *AntiSocial.App*. His most recent works include cyberpunk series *Darknet* and a sci-fi film *Free Fall* about an astronaut lost in space, the latter filmed using virtual production technology. Lyass lives in Los Angeles.

# VISUAL APPROACH







Late summer cold of the Baltics, dark blue colors meeting with occasional orange, dark waters, seagulls and ferries in the background, all contribute to the failure of the characters to find common ground, to the sense of alienation. They are lonely, they wish to find love, but this world is yet the world of cruelty.

Most times, the camera is dynamic, it moves freely and adds visual energy to the piece. The still shots are mixed with tracking shots and with handheld camera keeping it fresh and powerful without bringing too much attention to itself. The audience should be engaged and be as close to the action as possible. However, landscapes are part of the story and wide shots here are inevitable. Therefore, closeups in wide backgrounds are dominant.



High contrast is used in the scenes with artificial light, that adds to the nervousness of the situation. In the dark, available light scenes, mainly street scenes, the contrast is low. The characters are constantly dwelling between natural twilight overshadowing their souls and the electric artificiality of their habitat.

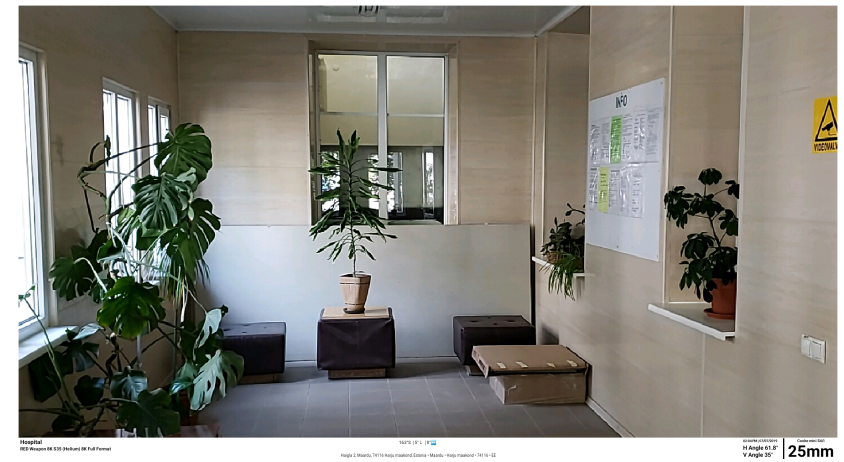
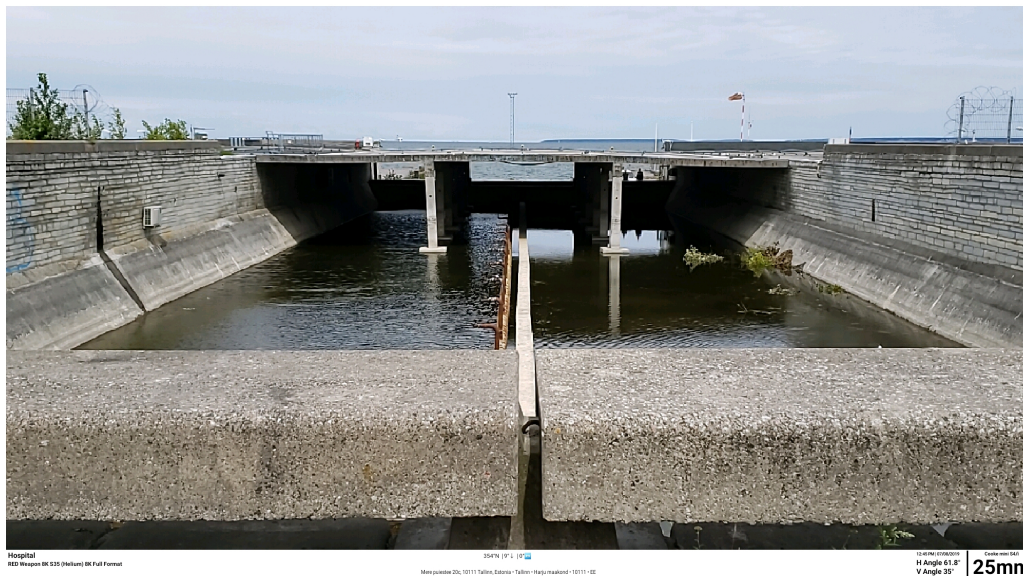
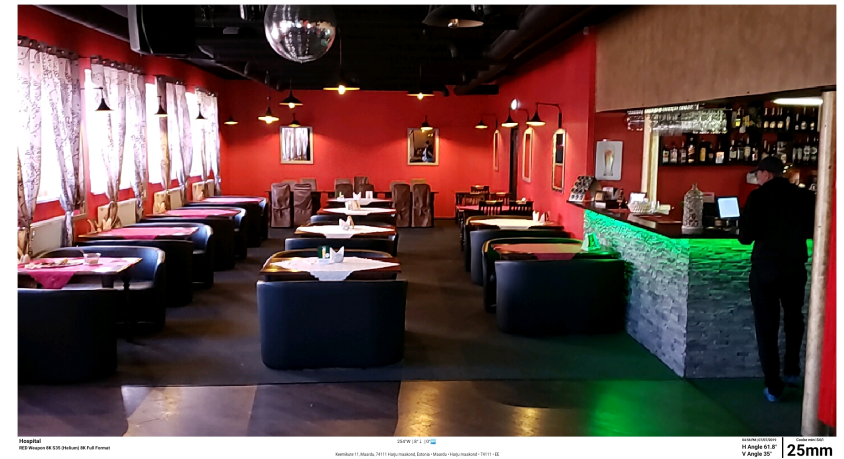




# Locations

Post-Soviet dystopia:

- former grandeur of the empire is underscored with wide shots and collapsing architecture
- European environment pointing at the end of one era and start of a new life







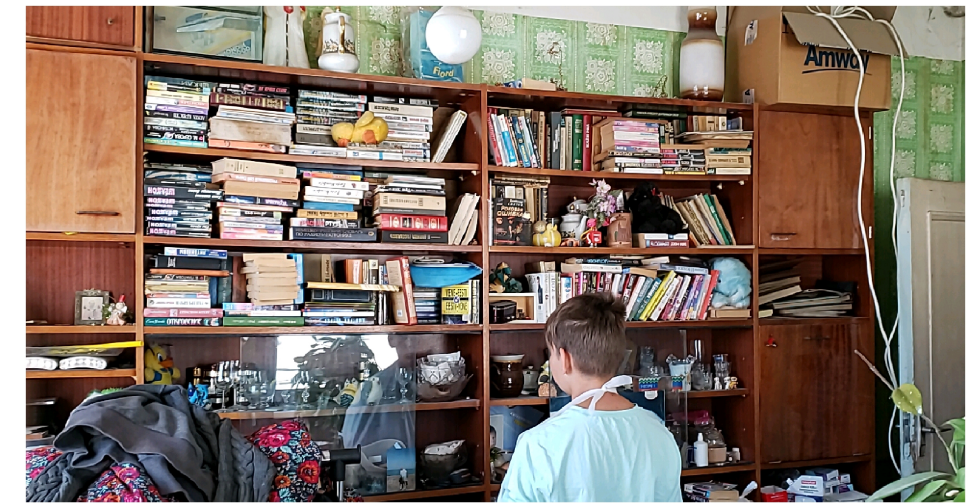
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## CHARACTERS

Molly: determined young woman with mixed feelings about what she does in life. Her emotional path start from stern and determined ending at confused and vulnerable when she gets pregnant and needs the way out of the hell she ahs lived in since adolescence.

Cast: Helen Preis. Helen is an ex-model, who is also a music composer and a performer Xeven. She wrote the soundtrack to the short film. She lives in New York.



## SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Serge: sweet young man, striving for love, but capable of violence. He wants to build new life, but only destroys it. He is the only child in his family to not be in jail and wants to do the right thing, but keeps failing and dives deeper into the world of crime. And ends up destroying that world as well.

Cast: Karl Jacob Bartels. Karl is a young dramatic actor living near Tallinn.





Ben: mafioso, violent and greedy. He has found a great way to self-forgiveness and is not taking prisoners in his business. He convinced himself, he makes lives of the stolen children better, and is a devoted follower of this conviction. He tries to make sure everyone near him also believes his views, and that is a proof of loyalty he requires.

Cast: Andrey Jakovlev. Andrey is an artist and a traveler living in Tallinn.



## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

It's worth mentioning that the actual crime of stealing babies to sell for adoption is a pretty common part of the European universe. It may not be big in Estonia per se, but this story does not rely on naturalistic research. The tone strikes that of melodramatic fantasy while relying on real events taking place in "a provincial town in the middle of Europe." It is an original story.

This practice is also known to take place in Mexico, the US, UK, China, Malaysia, and others. There are no particular events that led to the writing of the story, yet it comes from reading on the topic from various resources around the world.





## **CONTACT**

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