

OLEKSANDR MYMRUK

O L E G

SENTSOV



Kharkiv
«Folio»
2018

About “Gamer”

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A story of the film *Gamer* is a story of persistence and of express desire to achieve your own goals. This film was not only a debut film for Oleg Sentsov, it was really a turning point in his filmmaking career and basically his ticket to the world of cinematography. Making his first cinematography attempts and mastering his filmmaking skills creating short-feature movies, Oleg has traveled his own path of attempts and mistakes. Many people emphasize that this is a quite rare phenomenon when a person decides to totally change his career path and field of activity at such a serious age and starts making the first steps in filmmaking. Eventually, it is not that easy to become a part of this world and to begin in this field. Some people spend their entire lives for the things like that, trying to learn more and to master all the tricks of the profession, to build the necessary connections and networks in the filmmaking community and industry and to ensure support of the influential patrons. But Oleg is definitely among those people, who prefer to rather skip the shortcuts, then to take the more traveled roads. Even despite the lack of any professional and academic education in the field, despite the lack of financing and technical basis, he took a decision to leave all his doubts behind and to take that risk. And one should mention that this bravery and this determination were totally justified and paid off in spades.

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**A fragment from the article called “Gamer by Oleg Sentsov.
A review with the noose around the neck”:**
seance.ru, Maria Kuvshinova, 25 August 2015

“Three years ago, in one of his articles from the film festival ‘The Spirit of Fire’, where the movie *Gamer* by Oleg Sentsov received the prize of the film critics, Vasyl Stepanov compared this movie with the films of Aleksei Balabanov. At the beginning of the 2000s an equivalent of Danila Bagrov from Balabanov’s legendary films becomes a teenager, who wasn’t really affected by any war conflict, neither the past one nor the future one, and who wasn’t called to join the military after school, but who rather joined the gamers’ club instead. And it’s worth mentioning that Oleg Sentsov himself once owned one of such clubs too. However, this teenager is still surrounded by the same old empty reality with the eternal prefix ‘post’. His mother somehow manages to combine her study at the institute with her work at the shop, filled with the baked loaves of bread,



At the *Gamer* filming

chips, and beer, and she still struggles to understand what kind of a career a computer club owner promises to her son, when he sends him first to the regional and later to the international gamers' tournament. Same as Danila Bagrov in Balabanov's film, Lyosha from *Gamer* is very focused, concentrated, quite isolated from the mankind, he is a little bit repressed and uneasy, when he has to come back to the real world of people, so the logic behind his actions isn't always clear and understandable.

The main character of this film, which kind of balances on the verge of a sports drama genre, is deprived of the thrill of the competition, as the game is not his primary goal. He is unprejudiced and dispassionate, both at the keyboard and when he meets a girl he studies with and the girl he actually likes. Life copies arts, or FSB (Russian security forces) follows Balabanov's movies: while reading materials of the 'Crimean case', you can always feel that you are facing something very similar to the fragment from the *Brother* movie: a beaten female character Sveta there wasn't a victim of a domestic violence, but rather a fan of sadism and masochism.



Gamer film crew

This motive wasn't actually included in the film, yet it relocated to the film called 'Of Freaks and Men', and later found itself also in the statement of the refusal to initiate criminal proceedings regarding tortures, when the bruises and marks, found on Sentsov's body after his arrest, were explained as the consequences of his sexual practices.

Our team has recently interviewed Aleksandr Sokurov, who is one of those, who supports and defends Oleg these days openly and consistently. It was a different occasion, but he stressed out that computer games and generally sedentary lifestyles of the modern young men and women, when they spend too much time in front of the glimmering computer and laptop monitors, actually equalize them in their apathy, dullness and static character of their lives. But while a woman can afford herself being a little static, a man in our society needs the energy of movement and changes.

That was how Sokurov described in his own words the new type of a contemporary character, the appearance of whom Dmytro Mamulia was talking in a quite more complimentary way during the last year discussion regarding the works of the Moscow school of the new cinema. This is a young man, who is quite easy to recognize, who exists literally everywhere and who is so easy to be described with the means of the special film language. It is easier to call such a young man a hipster. However, Lyosha from *Gamer* is far from being a real hipster. This person, this character and his prototype in the real world, is like always in some sort of prostration. One of the best scenes in Sentsov's film is the one, where the main character travels by train and looks at his own hands, as if he saw them for the first time in his life or as they were not his hands, and his hands feel so awkward, like moving somewhere above the abyss, far from his comfortable computer keyboard. This young man is quite melancholic, he

isn't active, he looks just like table jelly, but this impression is wrong: if only he will not want to move from his place, nobody would be able to move him. His static character turns out to be his own kind of power.

Probably, an appearance of this new type that has entered the post-Soviet cinematography from the reality and was noticed and described by Oleg Sentsov back in 2011, was a consequence and a product of a certain social and political breakup, which was also seriously affected with the global breakup that had to do with the advancement of the new digital technologies. The generation gap, which is quite a usual and normal thing for any epoch, is nowadays as deep and enormous as it was never before. These young people live in the world that was created before them and not for them. This is a world where getting a job at the shop or at the market feels easy and quite understandable, even desirable in a way, while a perspective of a stunning career in cyber-sport provokes lots of questions of the elder generation. Melancholy in general can be considered being a symptom of a restarting and reloading, of a necessary sleep, of unwillingness to waste the energy and to act among the old and ineffective decorations that would fall apart in the next moment. Maybe, that is the way the main character of the film *The Messenger Boy* behaves, somehow fearing the failure and disruption of the old world.

Danylo Vradiy:

A close friend of Oleg Sentsov

“Oleg always loved cinematography. In addition to our passion for computer games and to some other things as well, we used to watch lots of various movies. We had different tastes for the movies, but our tastes sometimes could fit. And while he was already training his cyber-sportive team, he just got that idea suddenly, at some point in time that he wanted to try his hands in the filmmaking.



Vladislav Zhuk during the *Gamer* filming

As far as I understand, he first attempted to enroll at some movie directing courses in Moscow, but something went wrong, and this didn't work out. That is why he took a decision to invest in self-education, and that there was nothing so scary or strange in that. The decision to start the filmmaking and directing career when you are in your thirties could seem to be quite strange and maybe even insane to many. Usually, creative people start their paths significantly earlier than this. But nevertheless, Oleg decided to make this step, and we, his friends, totally supported his initiative.

It was very difficult to make a film directing career in Simferopol. It is not Kyiv, it is not Kharkiv and it is not even Odessa, where it is way easier to find the people and connections one would need in this field. All the professionals, who achieve something and reach a certain professional level in the field, relocate to the bigger cities, where there are more opportunities for the realization of their creative potential and

abilities. They never stay in the provincial cities for too long. It is a huge problem to find a good cameraman in the province, it is a problem to find a good sound designer and sound producer too. There are even certain difficulties with the actors as well. Movie directing is actually a form of management. If you are a film director, you should constantly resolve some problems and issues, and they can arise one by one, in sequence. But Oleg didn't feel scared to accept these challenges”.

Vladislav Zhuk:

An actor, who performed the main male character in “Gamer”

“He used to say that it was his dream. He said that he always loved cinematography. He used to write regularly for one cyber-sportive website, he had his own column there, and he used to publish in that column various interesting and exciting stories from his life. He also wrote sketches, essays, short novels, he used to fantasize a lot about the cyber-sportive and related topics. And later it developed into his passion for filmmaking. As he said: “I was lucky to jump on the last wagon of a departing train”.

Natalya Kaplan:

A cousin of Oleg Sentsov

“The way Oleg himself tried to explain it was that he used to watch lots of ‘pop’ culture and mass-market movies, some kind of action or horror movies etc. And then someone, I can't really remember now, who exactly that was, but someone later suggested that he better watched some more serious films, the films that weren't created for the viewers' entertainment, but rather for the intellectual viewers' thought.

He watched all the classics of the world cinematography, he always tried to deepen and expand his knowledge in this field, and at some point of time, he suddenly came to the realization of the fact that he himself has something to say.