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PRESSBOOK

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Crew

Director and Producer - Karen Shakhnazarov
Executive Producer - Galina Shadur
Writers - Aleksandr Borodyansky and Karen Shakhnazarov
Cinematographer - Vladimir Klimov
Based on Boris Savinkov's "Pale Horse"
Editor - Lidia Milioti
Original Composer - Anatoli Kroll
Production Designer - Lyudmila Kuskova

Cast

Andrei Panin - Georges
Rostislav Bershauer - Fyodor
Ksenia Rappoport - Erna
Artyem Semakin - Vanya
Alekssei Kazakov - Heinrich
Anastasia Makeeva - Elena
Dmitri Dyuzhev - Azef
Valery Storozhik - Elena's Husband
Vasiliy Zotov - The Grand Prince Sergei Aleksandrovich

TECHNICAL SPECS:

THE RIDER NAMED DEATH
Vsadnik po imeni smert' (2004)
Russia / A Mosfilm Cinema Concern Production
In Russian and French with English subtitles
2004 / Color / 106 Minutes
Dolby Digital / 1:33



SYNOPSIS

An active participant in the killing of Russian governors and ministers (including the 1904 assassination of Interior minister V. K. Plehve), Boris Savinkov (1879-1925) became a leader of the terrorist faction of Russia's Socialist-Revolutionary Party. Perceived as moderates next to the Bolshevik party—which campaigned for a Communist revolution—the Socialist-Revolutionaries were a key segment of a broad leftist coalition opposing the regime of Nicholas II, the last Russian Tzar, before the Bolshevik Party assumed power in 1917. *THE RIDER NAMED DEATH* is based on *The Pale Horse*, the 1909 novel by Boris Savinkov.

Early twentieth-century Russia is shocked by a series of cold-blooded assassinations carried out by the notorious Combat Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, a radical left-wing group that seeks political power by terrorizing high government officials. The group's fanatical and cynical mastermind is George, himself an assassin, a man willing to die for his delusional ideals. His accomplices are the bomb-maker Erne, who is passionately devoted to him, and bomb throwers Vanya, a romantic and naïve student, and Fyodor, a worker leading a miserable, joyless life. Their main objective is to assassinate Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, the Moscow governor general.

Focusing on the group's aspirations and their strongly contrasting feelings, *THE RIDER NAMED DEATH* tells a story of terror used as a last resort to achieve love, revenge, and a better future for the world's largest nation.

An in-depth exploration of the motives and intellectual justifications of a revolutionary assassin, *THE RIDER NAMED DEATH* portrays these controversial events with rare complexity, showing the diverse background of those who joined the terrorist cause against the crumbling Russian Tzar regime at the turn of the century.



Karen Shakhnazarov
Director, Screenwriter, Producer
-- BIOGRAPHY --

Karen Shakhnazarov was born on July 8, 1952 in the city of Krasnodar (southern Russia). When his family moved to Moscow, his father Georgy Shakhnazarov became a top Communist party apparatchik and a close adviser to Mikhail Gorbachev. As a boy, Karen liked drawing and staged plays in a school theater. In 1975 he graduated from VGIK (Moscow School for Cinematography) where he studied film directing under Igor Talankin. For two years he worked at Mosfilm Studios as a director's assistant. He made three short films before he debuted in 1980 with his first full-length feature *Kind Men (Dobryaki)*, a low-key comedy about an ambitious and cynical careerist.

The retro musical comedy *We Are from Jazz (My iz dzhaza, 1983)* marked the beginning of Shakhnazarov's long-term collaboration with scriptwriter Aleksandr Borodyansky, who has cowritten almost all of his films. Another nostalgic musical comedy followed in 1985, *A Winter Evening in Gagry (Zimnij vecher v Gagraxh, 1985)*, making Shakhnazarov one of the most commercially successful directors in Russia. In 1986 he shot *The Messenger (Kuryer)*, – a light-hearted lyrical comedy about an ambitious teenager.

Gradually his style darkened, his vision became satirical and sophisticated. His new affection for surrealism is felt in *Zero City (Gorod Zero, 1989)*, a Kafkaesque portrait of corporate madness, Soviet style. In a quasi-historic drama, *Assassin of the Tsar (Tsareubiitsa, 1991)* the reality of pre-Revolutionary Russian terror is refracted in the twisted mind of a psychiatric patient played by Malcolm McDowell. In the time-travel comedy *Dreams (Sny, 1993)* an 18th-century countess finds herself in contemporary Moscow. The melodrama *American Daughter (Americanskaya doch, 1995)* portrays a struggling Russian father who comes to the US to find his runaway daughter. The meta-physical charade *Day of the Full Moon (Den polnoluniya, 1998)* is a chain of bizarre episodes loosely connected by characters who appear and then vanish. The black comedy *Poisons, Or the World History of Poisoning (Yady, ili Vsemirnaya Istoriya Otravlenii, 2001)* is yet another tongue-in-cheek historical hallucination.

--MORE --

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Karen Shakhnazarov
Director, Screenwriter, Producer
-- BIOGRAPHY (continued)--

A Rider Named Death (Vsadnik po imeni Smert', 2004) brings the director back to his favorite theme, the history of Russia and its political extremes, in a newly engaged realistic style. In addition to directing films, Mr. Shakhnazarov is very active and successful as a studio administrator. For many years he has run his own production unit, Kuryer.

Since being appointed president and CEO of Mosfilm Studios in 1998, he has managed to pull the studios out of a long-term crisis and revive it as an attractive production facility for movies and TV-series.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Rider Named Death (2004)
Poisons or the World History of Poisoning
Day of the Full Moon
American Daughter
Dreams
The Assassin of the Tsar
Zero City
The Messenger Boy
Winter Evening In Gagry
Jazzmen
Kind Men
Na skolzkoy doroge
Shire shag, maestro! (1975)

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Boris Savinkov **--Writer / Terrorist --**

There was no more controversial, radical or adventurous political figure in Russian history of the first quarter of the 20th century than Boris Savinkov. He entered politics armed with a gun and a hand grenade, drastically changed his tactics in keeping with his shifting views, yet he never betrayed his vision of a revolutionary transformation of the world. He was called “a Russian Rider of the Apocalypse.”

Boris Savinkov was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, in 1879. He studied in a gymnasium in Warsaw (at that time Poland was part of the Russian empire). His father worked as a judge until forced to retire for holding liberal views. His older brother was exiled to Siberia. Savinkov attended Petersburg University, but was expelled for taking part in student unrest. In 1897 he was arrested in Warsaw for revolutionary activities. A year later he joined “Workers’s Banner”, a Socialist Democratic group.

In 1901 he was arrested again and a year later exiled to Vologda in northern Russia. In 1903 he escaped to Geneva, where he joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR). The SRs were an extreme far-left group within the anti--monarchy movement that actively practiced terrorism. With Evno Azef, head of the SR Combat Organization, Savinkov plotted several terrorist acts, including the assassination of Interior Minister Vyacheslav Plehve and Moscow’s governor general, Grand Duke Sergei. He succeeded Azef as head of the Combat Organization after Azef was exposed as a police informer. In 1906 Savinkov was arrested in Sevastopol and sentenced to death, but with his comrades’ help, he escaped and fled to Romania.

During World War One broke out, Savinkov saw action as a volunteer in the French army. After the February Revolution of 1917 he returned to Russia and held high office in Aleksandr Kerensky’s Provisional Government. As new rulers tried to establish a liberal democracy, Savinkov, as a leader of the War Ministry, skillfully navigated between different political camps. August of 1917 marked the peak of his political career. For three days he served as military governor of Petrograd (Petersburg) while running the War Ministry. He resigned over differences with Kerensky.

Savinkov’s erstwhile SR comrades expelled him from the party as a renegade in October 1917. Savinkov was elected to the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic, but the October Revolution ruined his political plans.



Boris Savinkov
--Writer / Terrorist (Continued)--

Fiercely hostile to the new Bolshevik regime, he tried to liberate the besieged Winter Palace in Petrograd, but failed and fled to the Don river region in southern Russia. There, Savinkov helped muster the White Army, which fought the Bolsheviks during the Civil War. The passionate revolutionary seemed to cast his lot with “class enemies”.

In February 1918, Savinkov surfaced in Moscow and tried to instigate an anti-Soviet uprising with the help of former tsarist officers. His aim was to establish a military dictatorship. The conspiracy was uncovered and many of its participants arrested, but Savinkov, as usual, miraculously escaped. The leaders of the White Movement sent him to France and then to Poland where he actively lobbied and raised funds for the armed struggle against Soviet Russia. He went on organizing acts of terrorism and military raids. He later confessed that he became disappointed in the effectiveness of this fight.

In August 1924 he infiltrated Soviet Russia, was arrested and tried. In court, Savinkov admitted his guilt and declared his acceptance of the Bolshevik regime. Historians differ on whether torture was used. The Cheka (the state security apparatus) was merciless toward its enemies, but for Savinkov it seemed to make an exception. His initial death sentence was commuted to 10 years in prison. But on May 7, 1925, in the Lubyanka building, which housed the Cheka’s headquarters and a notorious prison, Savinkov committed suicide by jumping from a window (the unofficial version is that he was thrown).

Savinkov combined politics and literature throughout his life. He was not a first-rate writer, but he was certainly gifted. Under the pseudonym V. Ropshin he published the novels, - The Pale Horse, Memoirs of a Terrorist (1909) about his activities in the SR party, What Never Happened: A Novel of the Revolution (1914) about the 1905 Revolution, and The Black Horse (1923) about the “White” movement

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Andrei Panin (Actor) — BIOGRAPHY —

Andrei Panin is one of the most popular Russian actors of the last decade. Critics say that Mr. Panin is especially good at portraying colorful, elusive, slick characters with double standards, at once cynical and conformist.

Andrei Panin is a Siberian, a sibiryak, which for Russians means a genetic combination of honor, perseverance and natural health. He was born May 28, 1962, in Novosibirsk, an industrial and scientific center in Western Siberia. Two years later his family moved to Chelyabinsk. When Andrei was six, the Panin family settled in Kemerovo, an industrial and mining city, and stayed there for 16 years. He graduated from the Institute of Culture and nearly earned a Bachelor's degree from the Food Institute, which he quit. For a period of time he worked in a drama theatre in Minusinsk. In 1991 he graduated from the MkhAT Studio in Moscow, where he studied under the famous actor Aleksandr Kalyagin.

His first role in a full-length feature came in a 1992 movie called In a Straight Line (Po Pryamoi) by director Sergei Chlyants, which was a screen adaptation of short stories by Sergey Dovlatov about young recruits at a military boot camp. He gained popularity thanks to a crime comedy, Mama, Don't Be Sad (Mama, Ne Gorui) by Maksim Pezhemsky and an edgy family drama, Mother (Mama) by Denis Yevstigneyev. Russian TV viewers came to know him from the first season of a detective series, Kamenskaya. Subsequently, he starred in the tragical farce The Wedding (Svadba) by Pavel Lungin, the sentimental melodrama Mistreating Women Would Not Be Appreciated (Zhenshchin Obizhat Ne Rekomenduyetsya) by Valery Akhadov and the action thriller 24 Hours by Alexander Atanesyan.

In 1999 he was named Honored Artist of Russia. In 2000 he received the National Film Festival Golden Aries prize for best supporting actor in The Wedding. In 2003 he took the best actor prize at the "Window to Europe" National Film Festival in Vyborg for Trio, in which he played a plain-clothesman. In 2004 he won a Nika (the Russian equivalent of the Oscar) for Chic by Bakhtier Khudojnazarov. In the retro drama A Driver for Vera (2004) by Pavel Chukhrai, he plays a general's aide and KGB agent.

Panin was later invited to the prestigious Chekhov MKhAT Theater in Moscow. He played starring roles in several productions, including The Three Sisters (Solyony), The Covetous Knight, The Wedding, The Death-Defying Act (Smertelny Nomer), and a theatrical show, Winter. After acting in several productions of the Oleg Tabakov Theater, Panin was hired by the Pushkin Drama Theater in Moscow in 2003.

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Andrei Panin (Actor)
— **BIOGRAPHY (continued)** —

A Rider Named Death is Panin's third collaboration with Karen Shakhnazarov. Prior to that, the actor starred in the mystical thriller Day of the Full Moon (Den polnolunia, 1997) and the black comedy Poisons, or the World History of Poisoning (Yady, ili Vsemirnaya istoriia otravlenii, 2001). To prepare for his role Panin said he had read the entire collected works of Boris Savinkov: "I got very tired during shooting", he said. "The subject matter seemed to suck the life out of me like as a vampire. My character tries to position himself as a rebel god, a demiurge and other such infernal things, and all that took its toll on me as an actor. Since I had already worked with Karen, I caught on to his ideas and suggestions from the slightest hint. I consider myself a fatalist. There are always people in my life who appear and push me to some new limits, and I thankfully follow their advice."

Andrei Panin (Actor)
— **FILMOGRAPHY** —

Mama Don't Cry 2
Boxing a Shadow
Zhmurki (2005)
A Driver for Vera
Vsadnik po imeni smert' (2004)
Trio (2003)
Life Is Full of Fun
Dazhe ne dumay! (2003)
The Suit
Law of the Lawless
Summer Rain
Spartacus and Kalashnikov
"Granitsa. Tayozhnyy roman" (2001)
The Gentle Age
Poisons or the World History of Poisoning
Vmesto menya (2000)
24 Hours
Zhenshchin obizhat ne rekomenduyetsya (2000)
The Weeding
Mama (1999)
Mummy
Day of the Full Moon



The History of Terror in Russia

“Lord save us from ever seeing Russian revolt, senseless and merciless!” wrote Aleksandr Pushkin in *The Captain’s Daughter*. The classic writer had the right premonition. Although his subject was a peasant uprising, Russian revolt manifested itself then, as later, primarily as a gigantic campaign of terror against government authorities by left-wing extremist groups. Assassinations, of course, have occurred throughout history. Yet it was in 19th-century Russia that terrorism as a tactic of political leverage was adopted on a mass scale.

The first terrorist act in Russia aimed at the overthrow of the current order was probably the assassination of Count Miloradovich, a general and hero of 1812, by the Decembrist Kakhovsky in 1825. Thanks to resolute actions by Tsar Nicholas I, who suppressed the Decembrist Uprising on Senate Square, assassinations ceased for a time. Had they prevailed, the Decembrists—who largely professed naïvely liberal views—had planned to slaughter the tsar’s entire family, including small children and grand duchesses living in western Europe. That plan was finally implemented in 1918 by the Bolsheviks, who massacred the family of Tsar Nicholas II in Yekaterinburg.

Lenin wrote that the Decembrists “roused” Aleksandr Herzen. Herzen and other liberal thinkers militated for the overthrow of the Russian monarchy. Their ideas were put into practice by various radical groups. *Narodnaya Volya* (People’s Will), active from the 1870s through the 1880s, was the most prominent antimonarchal group whose weapon of choice was terrorism. *Narodnaya Volya* concentrated its efforts on Tsar Alexander II, called the Liberator for his emancipation of the serfs in 1861. One of eight attempts to kill him, a bomb attack in the Winter Palace by Stepan Khalturin, left dozens killed and maimed, but by sheer accident spared the tsar. *Narodnaya Volya* terrorists finally killed Alexander II on March 1, 1881. The perpetrators were tried and executed.

From the moment the flywheel of Russian terror was up to speed, the authorities tried to stop it but failed, forever one step behind and inclined to leniency. Many terrorists were not imprisoned but instead exiled to remote villages from which they easily fled and carried on their fight. Terror groups received financial support from wealthy liberal sponsors and moral support from leftist, anti-monarchal philosophers and writers. Many revolutionaries cultivated radical views under the influence of the Russian founder of anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin. Dostoevsky, who was himself almost executed for his role in the Petrashevsky conspiracy of 1848, described the views and tactics of Russian utopian socialists in his novel *The Possessed* (*Besy*). He was mainly inspired by Sergei Nechayev, a Russian nihilist and co-author (with Bakunin) of the pamphlet “Catechism of a Revolutionary” who favored terror mixed with mysticism and provocation.

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

The History of Terror in Russia --Continued --

Contemporary public opinion in Russia actually encouraged terrorism, as was seen in the acquittal of Vera Zasulich, who attempted to kill Dmitry Trepov, the governor general of St. Petersburg. News of the acquittal was met with jubilation.

In the early 20th century, the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), various anarchists, and Polish, Caucasus and Baltic nationalists all took up the torch from Narodnaya Volya. Terror was also widely adopted by Social-Democrat parties, including the Bolsheviks. The most active were the SRs with their Combat Organization run by Yevno Azef and Boris Savinkov. The most sensational assassinations of that time were the killings of Interior Minister Vyacheslav Plehve by Yegor Sazonov and Moscow Governor Grand Duke Sergei by Ivan Kalyaev. A telling detail: the Grand Duke's widow visited Kalyaev in his cell and conveyed to him her late husband's forgiveness.

But there was no such "forgiveness" for the hundreds of ministers, governors, mayors, generals, police officers and religious leaders killed in the bloodbath of terror. Addressing the Duma (Russia's parliament), the right wing politician Vladimir Purishkevich unrolled a black ribbon on which photos of terror victims were glued. The ribbon stretched almost to the end of the hall.

At the same time many terrorists of that period were romantic idealists. Some assassination attempts are known to have been aborted because the terrorists wished to avoid harming bystanders.

In November 1905 the SR party announced its decision to abandon individual terror in favor of mass political struggle. But terrorism continued unabated. In 1911 an extremist named Bagrov assassinated Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin.

Several sources claim that from 1894 to 1917, the year of the October Revolution, various terrorist groups carried out some 21,000 assassination attempts, in which 17,000 people were killed.

Historians have written that the turn of the twentieth century in Russia was marked by a large-scale terrorist war in the name of liberating the Russian people from the monarchy. The tragic irony of history is that after the October Revolution, the Bolshevik government unleashed its own unprecedented campaign of state terror against that same people.