



# BLIZZARD OF SOULS

War through the eyes of innocence



# BLIZZARD OF SOULS

Academy Awards® 2021, Best International Film. Official Entry - Latvia  
For consideration in all categories including Best Picture, Best Director,  
Best Score, Best Cinematography

**Directed by** Dzintars Dreiberģs

**Written by** Boris Frumin, Dzintars Dreiberģs

**Based on** the novel by Aleksandrs Grins

**Starring** Oto Brantevics, Raimonds Celms, Martins Vilsons,  
Jekabs Reinis, Gatis Gaga, Renars Zeltins, Vilis Daudzins,  
Greta Trusina, Ieva Florence, Rezija Kalnina

Web [www.blizzardofsouls.com](http://www.blizzardofsouls.com)

Trailer <https://vimeo.com/366724445>



Producer:

Distributor:

Press contact:



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123 min | 2019 | English | Latvia | War | Drama | History | Color

## *Synopsis*

Based on the true story of young Arthur (16), enlisted in WW1's Eastern Front; too young to fight, but old enough to die, he experiences the loss of his home and loved ones. The battlefield is his home now and he must find the strength to mature fast as half the population of Latvia is lost to war.

## *Long synopsis*

Based on true events and the novel by Aleksandrs Grins, which was forbidden in the USSR, the film follows a coming-of-age story of a sixteen-year-old Arthur. After the loss of his mother, he enlists to fight in WWI with dreams of becoming a hero, but after surviving the brutalities of trench warfare and the loss of his family, he wonders if his efforts in battle were futile and if hope is only to be found in rebuilding a family and a home as Latvia itself is born from the atrocities of war.



# ***Blizzard of Souls in a Glimpse***

Based on a true story, *Blizzard of Souls* is an adaptation of Aleksandrs Grins' novel, written in the trenches by the author, a Latvian soldier in the First World War.

His novel is now regarded as a unique testimony to the events which led to Latvia gaining independence.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Latvia was brutally occupied by the USSR. Along with countless other intellectuals, Grīns was deported to the gulag by Stalin's regime and eventually shot. *Blizzard of Souls* was forbidden throughout the Soviet Union.

The No.1 Box Office Sensation in Latvia, surpassing Hollywood blockbusters *Avatar* and *Titanic*. The film was shot in authentic locations and historical battlefields.

Latvia's official OSCAR® entry for Best International Feature Film.

For consideration in all categories including Best Picture, Best Director (Dzintars Dreiberģs), Best Score (Lolita Ritmanis), Best Cinematography (Valdis Celmins).

The Film is Dzintars Dreiberģs' feature debut as a director.

It is also a feature debut for producer Inga Pranevskā, cinematographer Valdis Celmins (IMAGO nominee), and editor Gatis Belogrudovs.

It is the acting debut for Oto Brantevičs', the leading male actor. He was only 15 years old when production started.

Composer Lolita Ritmanis is a ten-time Emmy Award nominee. She won an award for her work on the series *Batman Beyond*.

The scriptwriter for *Blizzard Of Souls* is Associate Professor at New York University's Institute of Film and Television Boris Frumin.

## ***Director's statement***

The movie is based on the novel *Blizzard of Souls* by Aleksandrs Grīns. The book was written in the trenches of the First World War by the author, who was a Latvian Rifleman.

I despise war movies that glorify war through film tricks, using slow motion, beautiful shots of death and unreal heroism. War is the most dreadful experience a human being can endure. It is confusing, cruel and unjust.

The film's main character is a 16-year-old boy in love, with plans for the future. But the war interrupts everything, and he has to fight, never knowing the grand schemes of the generals. As he is totally alone in this bewildering environment, the entire movie is shot in a very strict form, with just three shots (the main character, his point of view or over-the-shoulder).

We never know what happens outside the place where he is. If danger is just around the corner, we don't know. Thus all the suspense is made within the shot, with no parallel editing and no chance to go wider if he kisses or kills someone. He sees the eyes of his victims, and the victims see his eyes. There are also no camera speed changes or effect shots. The result is a claustrophobic feeling of the war and a very personal experience. The closest visual parallels are *Son of Saul* and *American Honey*, but a little less edited.

Despite the horrifying events our character experiences, humour is also a vital aspect of the film. When the boys get together, they joke around and show off. The jokes are taken from Riflemens' memoirs, just as the appearance of the movie is inspired by real photos and paintings from the First World War.

Almost all the events are taken from true stories, including the mother's letter to her dead son. It was important for me not to portray any of the warring parties as evil. They are just human beings, caught up in the war.

None of us knows what beasts we might become in such an environment. However, the underlying theme of the movie is that what we do in war is ultimately our own decision.

## ***Production notes***

*Blizzard of Souls* is an adaptation of a novel by Aleksandrs Grins, written in the trenches by the author, a Latvian rifleman in the First World War. His novel is now regarded as a unique testimony to the events which led to Latvia gaining independence. **The film is a realistic depiction of the horrors of war as seen through the eyes of an innocent young farm-boy turned soldier.**

Latvia was part of the Russian Empire during WWI. Latvian riflemen fought on the Russian side, until, feeling betrayed, they responded to the idea of forming national battalions. This was the base of the national army fighting for an independent Latvian State. The newly formed army also comprised children, adolescents, seniors, and deserters. The victory and independence of the State were gained through heavy bloodshed. Due to the events of WWI, the population of Latvia was reduced by half.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Latvia was brutally occupied by the USSR. Along with countless other intellectuals, Grins was deported to the gulag by Stalin's regime and eventually shot. *Blizzard of Souls* was forbidden throughout the Soviet Union.

*Blizzard of Souls* broke box-office records in Latvia upon its release. *Blizzard of Souls* has become the most watched film in Latvian cinema history. This historical drama surpassed Hollywood blockbusters *Avatar* and *Titanic*.

Aleksandrs Grins' heirs entrusted this work to the young documentary director Dzintars Dreiberģs, who was always searching for new viewpoints yet finding a way to tell stories that the audience can relate to. *Blizzard of Souls* is his first feature film and it took him six years to create it.

The scenes from *Blizzard of Souls* were filmed in four major stages and during all four seasons – winter scenes in freezing weather (-17 degrees) were shot on authentic battlefields; historical battles were also revived on hot summer, windy autumn and promising spring days.

In order to precisely depict the historical events in the film and not to miss the smallest detail, eight historians advised the crew and cast on the specifics of the events – on costumes, weapons, props, army regulations, melee, as well as other important details.

In order to deeply comprehend this difficult period of time that is covered in the film, Dzintars and other crew members read everything written by Aleksandrs Grins, on whose novel the film is based and who himself was a rifleman. His works, in addition to being poetic, are documentary in nature and contain accurate details.

Hundreds of riflemen's notebooks of personal accounts were also read during the research phase. The notebooks consisted of accurate descriptions of battles, personal memories, and even such precise information as the air temperature during each battle. The crew also researched photographs and 20th century war movies.

It was crucial for Dzintars that the cast have a deep understanding and feel for the fate of their characters. For this reason, during and in between shooting, conditions as realistic as possible were created for the cast to understand the harsh reality that riflemen had to experience just 100 years ago. For example, the leading actors participated in a real military training camp and spent few days in the forest surviving only on bread and water. They also attended the reburial of the remains of the fallen riflemen, as well as spent up to 10 hours a day shooting in freezing weather.

In order to make this historically significant and personal story emotionally effective and relatable to the broadest audience possible, a Latvian composer was hired to compose the film's music, ten-time Emmy Award nominee Lolita Ritmanis, whose family emigrated to the USA during WWII. She won an Emmy Award for her score of *Batman Returns*.

The music created by Ritmanis for the film has already won national and international awards. She won *Best Original Music* from the *Lielais Kristaps* Latvian National Film Awards, *Best Instrumental or Inter-Genre album* from the *Zelta Mikrofons* Latvian Music Record of the Year Award, as well as won the Alex North Award for *Best Achievement in Music Written for a Feature Film* at the *Fimucite* Tenerife International Film Music Festival.

The director of photography is Valdis Celmiņš, one of the most visible and demanded professionals of the new generation in the Latvian film industry. This was his debut in the role of DOP of a feature-length film. For *Blizzard of Souls* he won the Latvian National Film Award - *Best Cinematography in a Feature Film* and was nominated at this year's *IMAGO International Award for Best Cinematography for a feature film*, together with Roger Deakins (*1917*) and Anton Mertens (*The Spy/Spionen*).

Oto Brantevics, the leading male actor Arthur, was cast from more than 1200 candidates. It was Oto's acting debut, and when the production started, he was only 15 years old. He enters the movie as a young, naïve teenage boy, but leaves it as a grown up with very deep emotional and physical scars.

The Latvian filmmaker, Associate professor at New York University's Institute of Film and Television, Boris Frumin, who was forced to leave the USSR due to his banned film *The Errors of Youth*, became a co-screenwriter. Prior to his work for *Blizzard of Souls*, he had not been aware of Aleksandrs Grīns and his novel. The director of the film summarized the novel to Boris chapter by chapter. Boris based the story not only on the novel, but on other sources that depicted WWI. Boris himself did not actually experience the war, but he takes war very seriously and sees it for the tragic experience it is. Also, the movie is about the fact that war is truly a human tragedy. The first script was written by Boris, later being corrected and updated by Dzintars himself. Thereby, the script is the joint work of Dzintars and Boris.

OFFICIAL ENTRY - LATVIA

BEST INTERNATIONAL FEATURE FILM - ACADEMY AWARDS® 2021

# BLIZZARD OF SOULS

"A MORE REALISTIC 1917."  
-THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

BASED ON TRUE EVENTS

THE FILM THAT BROKE ALL DOMESTIC BOX OFFICE RECORDS

KULTFILMA PRESENTS BLIZZARD OF SOULS DIRECTED BY DZINTARS DREIBERGS

CAST: OTO BRANTEVICS, VILIS DAUDZINS, MARTINS VILSONS, REZIJA KALNINA, RAIMONDS CELMS, GATIS GAGA, JĒKABS REINIS, RENĀRS ZELTINS, Ieva FLORENCE,  
GRETA TRUSINA. SCRIPT BY BORIS FRUMIN AND DZINTARS DREIBERGS. MUSIC BY LOLITA RITMANIS. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY VALDIS CELMINS. PRODUCTION DESIGNER JURIS ZUKOVSKIS.  
COSTUME DESIGNER SANDRA SILA. MAKE-UP BY DZINTRA BLJUBENA. EDITOR GATIS BELOGRUDOVVS. SOUND DIRECTOR ALEKSANDRS VAICAHOVSKIS. VISUAL EFFECTS BY MARIS ABOLINS.  
PRODUCED BY DZINTARS DREIBERGS AND INGA PRANEVSKA. [blizzardofsouls.com](http://blizzardofsouls.com)



## *Film Festivals & Awards (2020)*

### **Latvian National Film Awards Lielais Kristaps**

Won Best Fiction Feature Film

Won Best Director

Won Best Cinematography in Feature Film

Won Best Editing

Won Best Original Music

Won Best Make-up

### **The Tenerife International Film Music Festival Fimucite**

Won Alex North Award for Best Achievement in Music

Written for Feature Film

### **3rd IMAGO Internation Awards for Cinematography**

Nomination: The IMAGO International Award for Best  
Cinematography for Feature Film for Valdis Celmins

### **World Soundtrack Awards**

Public Choice Award for Lolita Ritmanis

### **53rd WorldFest Houston**

Best Actor for Oto Brantevics

Best Supporting Actress for Ieva Florence

### **Tallinn International Film Festival POFF**

The Baltic Competition

### **Shanghai International Film Festival 2020**

Nominee Audience Choice Award for Film

## *Crew*

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### ***Dzintars Dreiberqs***

*Director*

With a master's degree in economics and after several years of a stable international business career, Dzintars Dreiberqs decided to follow his heart to become a filmmaker. Under the supervision of New York University professor and filmmaker Boris Frumin, Dzintars completed his film education at the Baltic Film and Media School in Tallinn, Estonia.

With his passion for making films about social change and the cultural inheritance of Latvia, Dreiberqs made his feature directorial debut with *Blizzard of Souls* based on Aleksandrs Grins' novel. The film has been a record breaker at the Latvian box office and continues to be embraced by audiences as well as international critics. At the *Lielais Kristaps* Latvian National Film Awards, the film has already won *Best Director, Best Fiction Feature Film, Best Cinematography in a Feature Film, Best Editing, Best Original Music* and *Best Make-up*.





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## ***Valdis Celmins***

*Director of photography*

Valdis Celmins is a director of photography who looks for emotion in documentaries and documentary qualities in fiction. He is a five-time winner of the Latvian National Award for Best Cinematography. Valdis studied filmmaking at Ohio University, USA, under a Fulbright scholarship.

*Blizzard of Souls* was his debut in the role of DOP of a feature-length film, nominated by the IMAGO International Award 2019 for best feature cinematography alongside Roger Deakins for 1917. For *Blizzard of Souls*, he won Best Cinematography in Feature Film at the Latvian National Film Awards Lielais Kristaps.

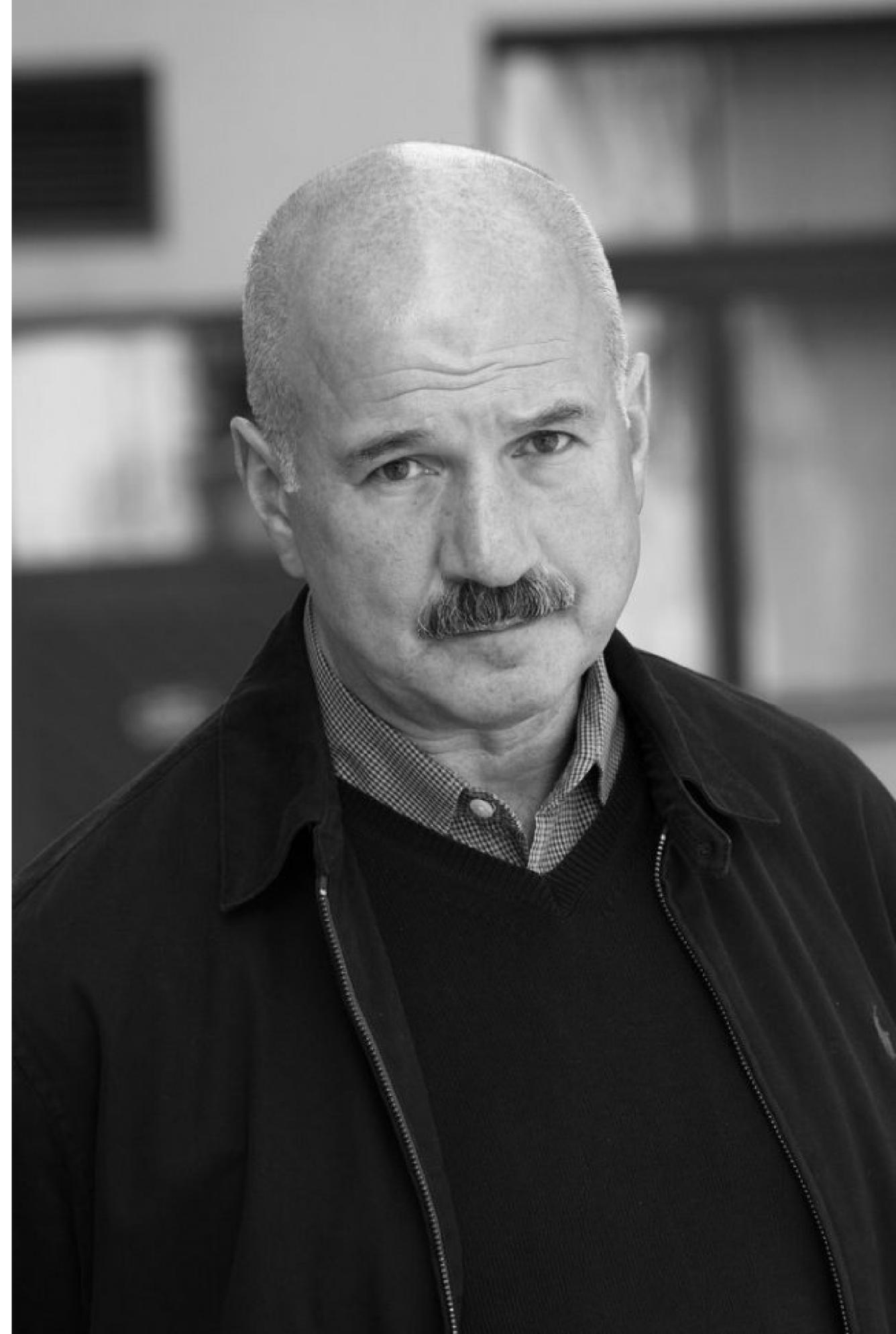
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## ***Boriss Frumins***

*Scriptwriter*

Latvian filmmaker, Associate Professor at New York University's Institute of Film and Television, scriptwriter and consultant for Oscar nominees and world-class festivals in Berlin and Cannes. The latest films with his involvement are *Oh Lucy!*, *Give Me Liberty* and, *Hostages*.

He emigrated from Soviet Union in 1978 after his third movie *Errors of Youth* was banned by State censorship. Once banned by Soviet censors, the film was restored and screened as part of Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 1989.





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## ***Lolita Ritmanis***

*Composer*

Lolita Ritmanis is a ten-time Emmy Award nominee. She won an award in 2002 for her work on the series *Batman Beyond*. For *Blizzard of Souls* she composed a 70-minute symphonic score, working with the award-winning state choir *Latvia* and a full symphony orchestra.

This film also earned the Alex North Award for best score at the Tenerife International Film Music Festival, and was nominated for the 2020 World Soundtrack Awards, Public Choice Award.

Lolita is one of the founders of the Alliance for Women Film Composers, serving as president 2016-2018, and a founding member of Dynamic Music Partners.

Lolita's family emigrated from Latvia to the USA after the Second World War.

## *Cast*

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### *Oto Brantevics*

*Leading role*

Oto Brantevics, the leading male actor playing Arthur, was chosen from more than 1200 casting hopefuls. This was Oto's acting debut, and when the production started, he was only 15 years old. He enters the movie as a young, naïve teenage boy, but leaves as a grown up with very deep emotional and physical scars.





***Martins Vilsons***  
*Vanags*



***Raimonds Celms***  
*Edgars Vanags*



***Jekabs Reinis***  
*Mikelsons*



***Vilis Daudzins***  
*Sala*



***Gatis Gaga***

*Konrads*



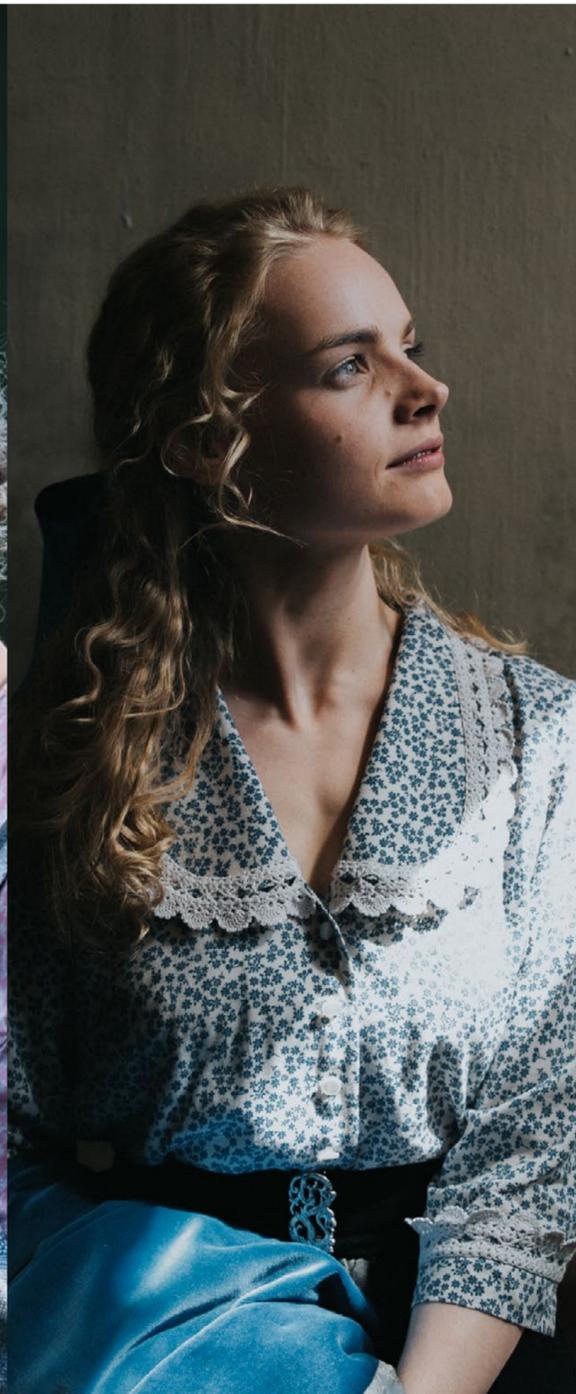
***Renars Zeltins***

*Spilva*



***Greta Trusina***

*Marta*



***Ieva Florence***

*Mirdza*



***Rezija Kalnina***

*Mother*

# Reviews

*“A lavishly mounted, lion-hearted first world war epic based on a book banned by the Soviets for 60 years.”*

– Ellen E Jones, The Guardian

*“A different point of view on the First World War told with the chilling truth of someone who has lived through combat and its shocking aftermath, *Blizzard of Souls (Dveselu Putenis)* derives its power from its strong, simple depiction of war seen through the eyes of an innocent 17-year-old soldier. In this it may be compared to Sam Mendes’ *1917*, which was also based on eyewitness accounts of the war. The difference is that here the drama is underscored by evident, old-fashioned patriotism as the small Baltic country of Latvia tangles first with Russia and later the Soviet Union...Exceptionally atmospheric cinematography....”*

– Deborah Young, The Hollywood Reporter

*“...an honest yet frenzied interpretation of the veracity of warfare, with utterly breathtaking cinematography, reminiscent of the brilliance of *Band of Brothers*.... As the young, endearing lead, Brantevics is extraordinary....”*

– Guy Lambert, The Upcoming

*“Thanks to Oto Brantevics’ effective and realistic performance as Arturs and a tense plot filled with brutal deaths, Dreibergrs’ war drama cannot leave anyone indifferent.”*

– Oleksandra Gumeniuk, Loud and Clear

*“This lushly mounted historical drama was, not surprisingly, a huge success at the box-office in Latvia, and an impressive first feature for Latvia’s Dzintars Dreibergrs.”*

– Meredith Taylor, Filmuforia

# *Credits*

## **Script**

Boriss Frumins  
Dzintars Dreiberģs

## **Director**

Dzintars Dreiberģs

## **Director of Photography**

Valdis Celmiņš

## **Gaffer**

Juris Zemītis

## **Production Design**

Juris Žukovskis

## **Property Master**

Zanda Zeidaka

## **Costume Designer**

Sandra Sila

## **Make-up Designer**

Dzintra Bijubena

## **Casting Director**

Gunita Groša

## **Editor**

Gatis Belogradovs

## **Music**

Lolita Ritmanis

## **Sound Director**

Aleksandrs Vaicahovskis

## **Visual Effects Supervisor**

Māris Āboliņš

## **Color Grading**

Andrejs Rudzāts

## **Associate Producer**

Gatis Sniedziņš

## **International Producer**

Ilona Bičevska

## **Assistant Producer**

Ilze Faļkovska

## **Background Actors Casting**

Annija Korpa

## **Production Manager**

Gatis Kelle

## **Producers**

Inga Pranevska  
Dzintars Dreiberģs

## **Starring**

Oto Brantevics  
Raimonds Celms  
Martins Vilsons  
Jekabs Reinis  
Gatis Gaga  
Renars Zeltins  
Vilis Daudzins  
Greta Trusina  
Ieva Florence  
Rezija Kalnina



