

Leonid Andronov.

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood

INTERVIEW BY IGOR TSALER

*Screenwriter, playwright, director, producer, musician... These are just some of the professions that Leonid Andronov born in Yekaterinburg and currently living in Los Angeles mastered. In September, his fantasy novel called *Amulet: The Chamber of Stolen Hearts* was presented at the international book fair in Moscow.*

*We talked to him about the book and his new film project called *Ten Steps to Fame*.*

Leonid, how did your interest in literature, and then filmmaking, started?

I never thought of literature as a profession, although I've been writing since childhood. In fact, I wanted to be a rock musician. After all, Yekaterinburg is a place where rock stars are born. And I wanted to become one of them. But although I was a determined, hard-working guy, played in lots of bands, I still didn't feel fulfilled. Just like many others. I mused on the reasons in my first film, *29th Kilometer*, based on the story of my first band. Showing the film in Russia and abroad, I see that people understand and relate to the story about failed musicians even many years later—the film was released in 2012.

How did you decide to go to Hollywood?

It was half a conscious choice, half a reckless venture. At one point, I lost my job and family, so in fact, I turned over a new leaf. And this new leaf was used for

writing a new script—a story about a girl who goes to the underground kingdom of monsters to save her family. It was a script of *Amulet* that turned into a book now. I wrote a script in Russian. Showed it to someone in Russia. Got a rejection, gave it up, and flew to America. When I arrived in Los Angeles, I was an unknown director without any connections. I had never even been to the country before. But I had an irresistible desire to turn the story into a movie and show it to everyone in the world. And where could it be done? Only there! At least, that I believed then.

But I guess you weren't received there with open arms, were you?

Of course, not. There are thousands of others, just like me. To get to the top, it's not enough to be talented and hard-working. It's not enough to know and master the main filmmaking professions. You need an agent, a lawyer, a manager. You need to understand how the industry

works, what you can and can not do. And it takes years to get the hang of it. And connections are certainly crucial. The first thing everyone asks you is who you are. And when you say that you made a full-length film that was shown in cinemas, at least the tone of a conversation changes. But it's still not enough for doors to open before you. You need a great deal of good luck. I remember how in 2015 I had an important meeting that I'd been waiting for for several months. I presented my *Amulet*, and, oh my god, I was told it was the new *Harry Potter*. I was offered to make up a list of first-rate Spielberg-level producers that I would like to work with and promised to have a chance to meet them. It was followed by long negotiations and many months of waiting. And then one day my manager got a message, "We won't work with your Russian director." And that's it.

And you turned an unrealized script into a book.

I had lots of other meetings, negotiations, talks. Hopes and disappointments. I was at a party at the American Film Market in Santa Monica once, and one producer told me, “No one will give you money for your project. It’s fantasy. It’s very expensive. Write a book and publish it!” And I did. I worked like mad and completed the first English version of *Amulet* within a month, after which I re-wrote the book from scratch in Russian.

And now it’s coming out in Russia.

And I’m proud of that! The first part was published by the Ridero publishing house in May. On September 4, we presented it at the Moscow International Book

Fair. In winter, we’re going to release an audio book. And by summer, the second part will hopefully be out. I don’t know yet what will follow. I’ve already been offered to make a video game based on the book. Maybe, there will be board games, comics, toys. And a movie, of course. Sooner or later.

So your ambitions are more of filmmaking than writing ones.

Yes, that’s true. I’m working on a new project now. It’s a film called 10 Steps to Fame. It’s a story about an odd European reality show launched to test people’s moral limits. Twenty most beautiful and talented boys and girls from around the world were chosen for the show. They

are sure to become world-famous and rich. All they need to do is go through ten challenges, each of which will turn out to be a major moral dilemma for them. It’s a psychological thriller à la *Black Mirror* and *Saw* at once, reflections on the influence of television on us and our society. My executive producer Eduard Teplyakov and I are touring the world presenting the project at international festivals and film markets. Legal issues are managed by Bianca Goodloe, Al Pacino’s lawyer. Together we make famous actors offers. There are people who got interested. I hope we start shooting in summer of 2020. If you are persistent and know what you do, you’ll get what you want!