


a film by

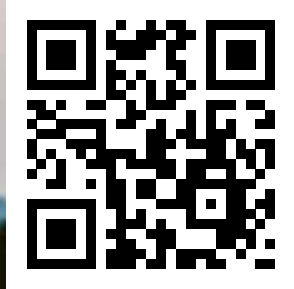
Rainer Sarnet



 Locarno Official Selection
Concorso internazionale

**“The Invisible
Fight” is a kung
fu comedy set
in an Orthodox
monastery
in the Soviet
Union during
the 1970s.**

USSR-China border, 1973. Rafael, is in the army on guard duty when the border falls under attack from flying Chinese kung fu warriors. Utterly fascinated by the long-haired Chinese hippie black-clad kung fu aces flying around blasting forbidden Black Sabbath music from their portable radio Rafael gets struck by a revelation; he too wants to become a kung fu warrior. Faith leads Rafael to an Orthodox monastery where the black-clad monks do their training but his road to achieving the almighty power of humility required is long, winding and full of kick-ass adventures.



“If my film was to carry any message, it would be an invitation to be more joyful”

An interview with Rainer Sarnet
By Tristan Primägi

“The Invisible Fight” contains a blend of elements that are seemingly incompatible - kung-fu, Black Sabbath, Soviet era, Orthodox church. How did this mix arise and become a cohesive movie?

It all started when I brought my friend in the hospital a book called “Not of This World”. It contained real life stories of two Orthodox monks who both died young. The gift was meant to be taken with black humour - we are both fans of decadence. My friend proposed an idea: to make a movie about monks. So, he gave me a present in return.

The story that stood out for me in the book, spoke about a young monk, Father Rafael, who was active in the Soviet Union during the Seventies, at the monastery in Pechory. I began to explore the era and it turned out that many young Russian monks were ex-hippies. There was a resistance to the material world, and, as hippies, Orthodox monks wear their

hair long, have black clothes, and there are skulls in the catacombs. You might say that their universe seemed quite rock’n’roll to me. The idea to use the music of Black Sabbath developed from there, and to start the arc of the protagonist with some kind of rebellious act. For him, the catalyst is outer coolness, like it is with youth. Exploring Father Rafael’s life, it turned out that he had served in the army near the Chinese border, his military unit was attacked by Chinese bandits, and he alone survived. At that point, the thought of adding kung fu emerged: Rafael sees the Chinese use it while in the army and is inspired to learn.

Just as religion, martial arts were forbidden in the Soviet Union. So, it’s a sort of double rebellion. I also chanced upon a website called “Death to the World”, run by an ex-punk Orthodox monk. There was a line: the last true rebellion is the monastery. So that kung fu, Black Sabbath, and the monastery are joined together by rebellion.

My contact with Black Sabbath happened in school, thanks to my nephew who had all the Sabbath records, and barely listened to anything else. He tried to write similar poetry, containing hell, demons, and old graveyards. Making this film, I asked an Orthodox priest if it’s okay to use Black Sabbath in this context, and he answered that Ozzy sings about the same religious things - Ozzy is a religious man.

What does the film talk about? The burden of being human, and the responsibility that comes with it? Is that something you ponder a lot?

For me, “The Invisible Fight” is about authenticity. Be who you are. My protagonist is dumb and joins the monastery for the wrong reasons, but he is authentic in his stupidity, and that is crucial for any kind of development. The fake does not evolve. You need to have some sort of an infantile open mind. The Gospel emphasizes the role of a child; we are children of God. Our relation to God is like that of a child, who is to be forgiven and loved. Finding and maintaining that childish spirit was crucial while making this film. And writing it. I tried to switch off the intellectual role of a grown-up as best I could. In me, and also in Rafael. I discovered that my 10-year-old son is a fan

of the film, as well as the son of Katrin Kissa, our producer. Some kind of childish spirit entered “The Invisible Fight”.

I do not dwell much on how to be human, at least not consciously. As the clerics say: in Christianity, everything should come simply and naturally, without effort. You cannot do all the right things here and now either. And we cannot achieve everything relying only on our own strength. But what is impossible for man, is obtainable for God. This is the state of the child.

“The Invisible Fight” offers a whole array of quasi-religious doctrines that are wildly exaggerated at times. Should people learn something from these? Or the film?

When I met the monks for the first time, I was very surprised by their humour. A sense of the absurd, even. As one monk said, without a sense of the absurd,

PLAYING A FOOL IS AN ANCIENT ARTFORM BECAUSE IT UNLOCKS SOMETHING IN THE HUMAN ESSENCE THAT WE KEEP HIDDEN ALL THE TIME. OUR IMPERFECTION



**THE MAIN
ACTIVITY IS
INSIDE, THE
INVISIBLE
FIGHT.
WE RISE WE
FALL AND
RISE AGAIN**

there is no way to put earth and heaven together. I discovered a lot of joy there. Not artificial joy, but the real one. Orthodoxy has been called the faith of the heart. There is very little that is scholastic, or rational. Heart leads the way; emotions, love and beauty. Saint Siluan, a 20th century saint, says that there is no understanding of the Bible without the grace of the holy spirit. What's important is the condition, the state of love. It is one thing to understand the Bible with reason, the other, with the state of love. The clerics say that it's not even of importance what we do or say (we all do and say something stupid from time to time), but our state of mind. Joy is the objective. Then there is no malignancy. There is joy behind the cross. If my film was to carry any message, it would be an invitation to be more joyful. An ode to joy, if you will.

Is "The Invisible Fight" not in danger of becoming didactic with all its teachings? People tend to run away from preaching.

Such is the style of the Bible. The film is also divided into chapters - lessons in humility. The master teaches the apprentice. Like in Seventies kung fu films. A certain didacticism is part of it already aesthetically.

I do not like missions in real life, but I don't think this topic is much of a taboo that cannot be discussed. Religions have disgraced themselves, no

question there. But who's to blame? This is who we are. I am a Christian too and I disgrace myself constantly. But church is not an institution where you have a contractual relationship; some paper that you have to respect, or you will get fired. No-one can live without fault. The main activity is inside, the invisible fight. We rise, we fall, and rise again.

In religion, I was not drawn so much to the teachings, but the sensory experience. Music and beauty, icons, liturgy that I really relish. You are more connected with it by a sensory state than reason. Psalms are read in singsong, the words of the scriptures have a divine energy that works even if you don't hear everything or understand it. It is not the word of God by reason, but by saturation with the divine spirit.

It is sometimes said that humour is the universal language, but it most certainly is not. People have wildly different ideas about what is funny. You have been very bold with the humour in "The Invisible Fight" How did you approach that topic, and did you think a lot about its essence and quantity in the film?

True, making jokes is hard. What if nobody laughs? The joke reveals the joker - what if I'm a jerk? With "The Invisible Fight", I knew from the beginning that I cannot make a serious film about monks. I felt that it doesn't fit the theme, at least not according

to my own experience. In the Pechory monastery, we had a lot of laughs. The pilgrims are weirdos as well. We laughed ecstatically at times.

"Without humour, things don't work", one old Russian man said to me in church. There is no consensus to be achieved with humour, we don't need to all laugh unanimously at something, and be all serious about something else. Playing a fool has other objectives. In Russian Orthodox, there is a tradition called *yurodivyi* - a Fool-for-Christ. *yurodivyi* is a holy madman who expresses his faith in an untraditional way, turning things on their head. There is truth about man in that. This kind of expression brings forth a lot of things

that the reasonable mind couldn't capture. Hamlet acted mad too, to find out the truth. Playing the fool is an ancient artform, because it unlocks something in the human essence that we keep hidden all the time. Our imperfection. Religion has a very adequate and relaxed attitude towards human imperfection. Religious thought and art have the same effect on me as the absurd or surrealism. The undefinable aspects are commonplace. Suffering and death are taken lightly, even with joy. It provides peace of mind in difficult situations, but without rose-tinted glasses. Christ is full of contradiction, and this is captivating.





CINEMATOGRAPHER

MART TANIEL

(b. 1976)

“Before shooting “The Invisible Fight”, me and director Rainer Sarnet took a trip to Mount Athos, searching for the right frame of mind,” says the awarded cinematographer Mart Taniel. “Early in the morning we went to a new monastery. Every single day. The faith we encountered on this journey is looking for beauty in itself and the surroundings. Monks are as sharp and attentive as stand up comedians. Or children.”

Mart Taniel studied cinematography at the Baltic Film and Media School in Tallinn and at the FAMU Film School in Prague. His accolades include a best cinematography award at the Tribeca International Film Festival and the Spotlight Award from the American Society of Cinematographers (both for “November”, 2017). Taniel is known for his longtime collaborations with

the Estonian directors Veiko Õunpuu and Rainer Sarnet as well as Russian filmmakers Natalya Merkulova and Aleksey Chupov.

“One can assume that I have some kind of an established scheme: I’m always tempted to be drawn by chance and keep everything open until the last moment. Friends, forgive me, this is my method. I’m ignited by the unknown, something that lurks behind the corner, something you cannot come up by yourself,” says Taniel

**MONKS
ARE AS
SHARP AND
ATTENTIVE
AS STAND UP
COMEDIANS*
OR CHILDREN**

Selected films:

“The Invisible Fight” (2023, Rainer Sarnet, Locarno IFF Official Competition), “Captain Volkonogov Escaped” (2021, Natalya Merkulova, Aleksey Chupov, Venice IFF Official Competition), “The Man Who Surprised Everyone” (2018, Natalya Merkulova, Aleksey Chupov, Venice IFF Orizzonti), “November” (2017, Rainer Sarnet, Tribeca IFF Official Competition), “The Temptation of St. Tony” (2010, Veiko Õunpuu, Sundance IFF Official Competition), “Autumn Ball” (2007, Veiko Õunpuu, Venice IFF Orizzonti).









ACTORS

**KAZAREL
POGGA**

(b. 1996)

IRINEI

Kazarel Pogga graduated from the Drama School at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in 2020 and has since been working as an actor in one of the biggest theatres in Estonia, Vanemuine. Kazarel describes "The Invisible Fight" as the most crazy and fascinating work of his life. The young man who at the age of three dreamt of becoming John Bonham of Led Zeppelin and plays the accordion himself says he trusted the director Rainer Sarnet immediately from the first day of shooting: "He has a unique imagination and an insane amount of energy." Kazarel plays the role of Irinei - a man becoming a true monk.

**URSEL
TILK**

(b. 1995)

RAFAEL

Ursel Tilk is a country boy, who studied at the Drama School at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, has frequented European theatre stages, has lived in Paide as well as in Antwerpen and while being actor at the Estonian Drama Theatre, has today rooted himself to the Estonian countryside between two moors, where he lives with his wife, cat and grandmother. He has always been fascinated by physical theatre, the beauty and pain of the human body and its physicality. Ursel is playing the main character of "The Invisible Fight", Rafael, a hooligan who wants to become a monk. The role has had an enormous impact on the actor himself and his attitude towards life. "My character Rafael believes that God has plans for him and by its nature, this is something that inspires to have trust in life and its ways and to have trust to one's heart," says Ursel.





ESTER KUNTU

(b. 1990)

RITA

“I like the theatre, but my heart is in film,” says Ester Kuntu, an awarded film and theatre actress. An avid figure skater as a child, Ester later turned to martial arts, a passion of hers until this day. “But as it happens I only have one blow in this kung fu movie - a simple slap in the face,” she says. “Rainer wasn’t looking for learnt skills - he was searching for hidden purity, the invisible.” The actress describes making “The Invisible Fight” a rampant journey on the borders of reality: “I would compare it to flying.” Ester plays Rita, who represents the Orthodox female archetype, where humility is combined with sexuality.

RAINER WASN'T LOOKING FOR LEARNED SKILLS HE WAS SEARCHING FOR HIDDEN PURITY. THE INVISIBLE

INDREK SAMMUL

(b. 1972)

NAFANAIL

Indrek Sammull started as an actor in the early nineties and has since played over 50 roles in theatre, film and television. He is also a director and a Nordic Stage Fight Society teacher and choreographer. Indrek has created more than 50 stage fight scenes in Estonian theatre and considers the rapier and the dagger among his favourite weapons. “The Invisible Fight” marks his first encounter with kung fu, but one of the other important keywords of the film - the orthodox faith - has played an important role in his life for more than 20 years. Indrek plays Nafanail, a man who verbalizes the main message of “The Invisible Fight” - the image of Christ is in all of us.



PRODUCERS

HOME- LESS BOB PRODUCTION

Estonia
Producer Katrin Kissa

A production house for adventures, Homeless Bob Production was founded in 2006. Since the beginning Homeless Bob has been known for bold artistic choices, original stories, and auteur cinema. “There is nothing more fulfilling than beating the challenges coming along the road taken to reform form, find playfulness in action and depth in content”, could be the motto of Homeless Bob Production. The company has made Estonian film history with Veiko Õunpuu’s “Autumn Ball” (2007) becoming the first ever Estonian film to win an award at the Venice IFF. Other awards have followed, as well as

international co-productions, the last of which, “Captain Volkonogov Escaped” (2021, directed by Natalya Merkulova, Alexey Chupov) was nominated for the Golden Lion at the Venice IFF. “The Invisible Fight” is Homeless Bob’s third collaboration with the Estonian director Rainer Sarnet.

Selection of films:
“Sügisball / Autumn Ball” (2007, Veiko Õunpuu, Orizzonti Prize Venice Film Festival), “Püha Tõnu kiusamine /The Temptation of St. Tony” (2010, Veiko Õunpuu, Sundance IFF), “Free Range” (2013, Veiko Õunpuu), “November” (2018, Rainer Sarnet, Tribeca IFF), “The Man Who Surprised Everyone” (2018, Natalya Merkulova, Alexey Chupov, Venice IFF), “Underdogs” (2020, Chino Moya, FantasiaFest), “Captain Volkonogov Escaped” (2021, Natalya Merkulova, Alexey Chupov, Venice IFF).

WHITE PICTURE

Latvia
Co-producer Ailise Gelze

A film production company based in Riga, Latvia, that was founded by Ailise Gelze in 2006. Her works have premiered at various prestigious festivals, including Cannes, Berlinale, Rotterdam IFF, Karlovy Vary IFF, and more. Nurturing and developing young talent is a central focus for White Picture, with several debut films, including Anna Anson’s “Summer Blues,” already receiving national production funding.

Collaboration with Homeless Bob Production for Rainer Sarnet’s “The Invisible Fight” marks White Picture’s first co-production with Estonia. This partnership has been exceptionally fruitful and creative, leading to continued collaboration with Estonia for upcoming projects.

Selection of films:
“Oleg” (2019, Juris Kursietis, Cannes, Director’s Fortnight), “Mother, I Love You” (2013, Janis Nords, Berlinale IFF), “Mellow Mud” (2016, Renars Vimba, Berlinale IFF).

NEDA FILM

Greece
Producer Amanda Livanou

Neda Film was established in Athens, Greece in 2014 by producer Amanda Livanou. The company has produced films that have made an impact nationally and internationally, as well as engaged in co-production and servicing for interesting, independent productions to be filmed in Greece.

““The Invisible Fight” is a film that we are particularly proud of,” says producer Amanda Livanou. For one thing, shooting flying monks in the mountains surrounding Athens

is an experience that will be hard to follow. For another, it is the first time we are involved in a film with partners exclusively from the Baltics and Scandinavia, with women producers who approach films with a passion and resilience that is not easy to find nowadays.”

Selection of films:
“L” and “Pity” (2012, 2018, Babis Makridis, Sundance IFF), “Park” (2016, Sofia Exarchou, Best New Director, San Sebastian IFF), “Days and nights of Demetra K” (2021, Eva Stefani, True/False Film Fest), “New Worlds: The Cradle of Civilization” (2021, Andrew Muscato, Official Selection Cannes IFF).

HELSIN- KI- FILMI

Finland
Co-producer Helen Vinogradov

One of the leading production companies in the Nordics with a focus on feature films. Founded in 2002, the company’s content is produced by producers Aleksi Bardy, Helen Vinogradov, Tia Ståhlberg and Mia Ylönen. Dedication to the development and constant search of extraordinary stories defines the core of the company, and priorities are wide audiences, quality and originality. In its 20 year history, Helsinki-filmi has participated in many European co-productions with production companies from all across the world.

“Who comes up with an idea of a Soviet border guard wanting to become a kung fu rock monk?,” producer Helen Vinogradov asks when talking about “The Invisible Fight”. “It’s just such

**a fun, bizarre, weird
and stylish film, an
instant classic and
I'll be happy to be
watching it with
family and friends,
and kids, still again
when I retire."**

Selection of films:
"Tove"
(2020, Zaida Bergroth,
Toronto IFF),
"Dogs Don't Wear
Pants"
(2019, J-P Valkeapää,
Cannes, Director's
Fortnight),

"Tom of Finland"
(2017, Dome
Karukoski,
Gothenburg IFF).

International Sales

LevelK

Homeless Bob Production
Tööstuse 58-17,
Tallinn 10416,
ESTONIA
info@too.ee
+37256677855
www.homelessbob.ee

White Picture
info@white-picture.lv
+371 26 156 356
www.white-picture.lv

Neda Film
15 Bouboulinas Str.,
Athens 10682,
GREECE
+302103230294
www.nedafilm.gr

Helsinki-filmi
Bulevardi 2,
Helsinki 00120,
FINLAND
helsinkifilmi@helsinkifilmi.fi
+358 40 354 0540
www.helsinkifilmi.fi

LevelK
Gl. Kongevej 137 B, 3rd Fl.
DK - 1850 Frederiksberg C
DENMARK
www.levelk.dk

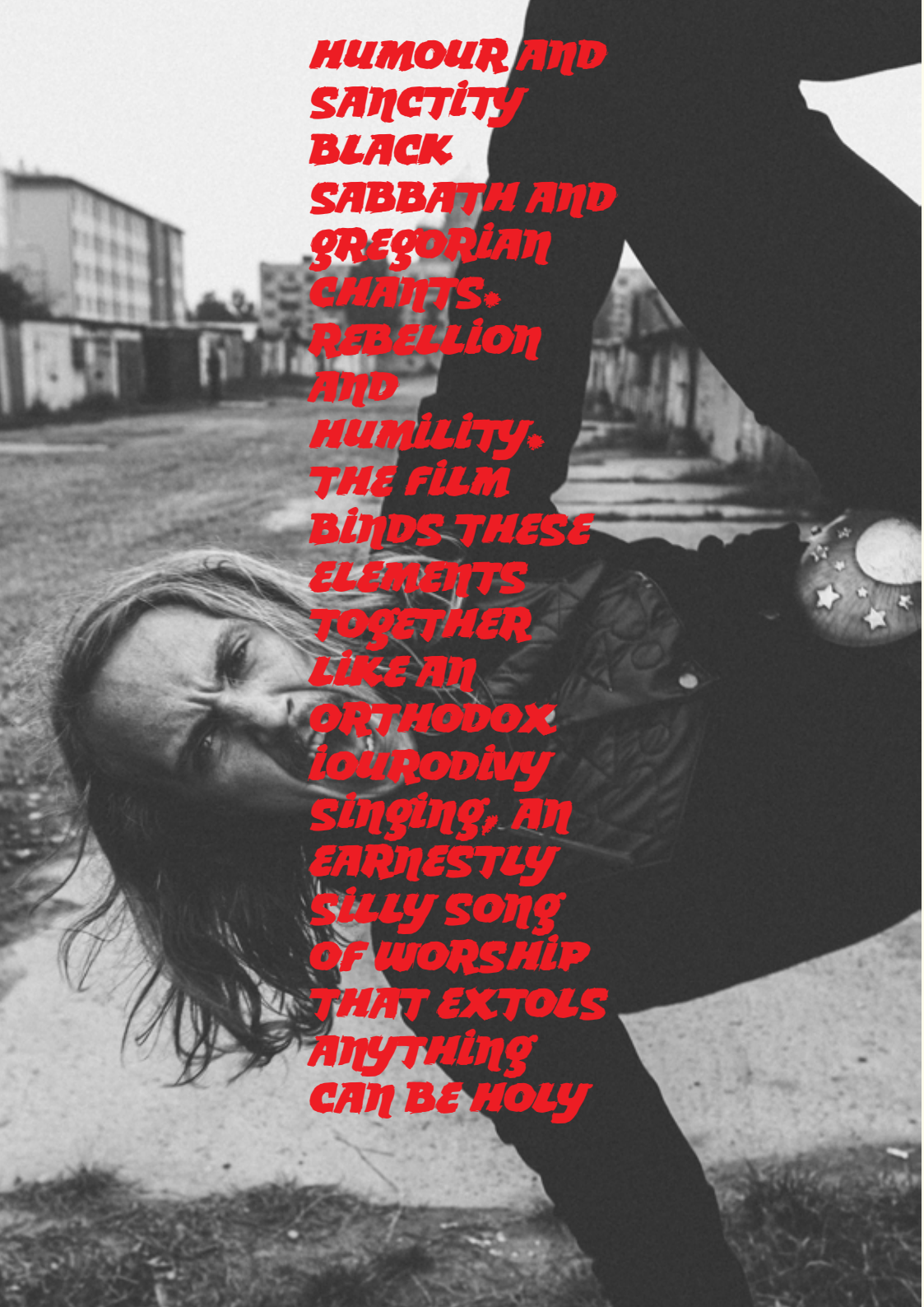


WHITE
PICTURE

nedafilm

HELSINKI
FILMI





**HUMOUR AND
SANCTITY
BLACK
SABBATH AND
GREGORIAN
CHANTS,
REBELLION
AND
HUMILITY.
THE FILM
BINDS THESE
ELEMENTS
TOGETHER
LIKE AN
ORTHODOX
LITURGICAL
SINGING, AN
EARNESTLY
SILLY SONG
OF WORSHIP
THAT EXTOLS
ANYTHING
CAN BE HOLY**

Title: **The Invisible Fight**
Original Title: **Nähtamatu võitlus**

115' / 1:2.39 / colour
Estonia / Latvia / Greece / Finland
Homeless Bob Production /
White Picture / Neda Film /
Helsinki-filmi

Genre: Kung fu gospel

Production year: 2023
Month of start & end of shooting:
August 2021 - April 2022

Shooting locations: Latvia, Greece,
Estonia
Post-production locations: Finland,
Greece, Estonia
Language Spoken: Estonian
Duration: 115'
Shot on: 3,2K Arri Alexa
Frame rate (native): 24
Screen ratio: 1:2,39
Format (ex. DCP, 35mm): DCP
Sound format: 5.1

CREW

Director & scriptwriter - Rainer
Sarnet

Director of photography -
Mart Taniel, C.S.C.
Gaffer - Taivo Tenso

Editor - Jussi Rautaniemi, F.C.C.

Sound designer - Janne Laine
Composer - Hino Koshiro

Production designer - Jaagup
Roomet, Märtinš Straupe
Art director Greece - Evelynna
Darzenta
Make-up designer - Anu Konze
Costume designer - Jaanus Vahtra,
Berta Vilipsone-Ieleja

Still photographers - Iris Kivisalu,
Gabriela Urm
Graphic designer, poster design,
typo - Margus Tamm

Fight choreographer - Eddie Tsai
Dance choreographer - Tiina
Mölder
Stunts coordinator - Enar Tarmo

VFX supervisor - Antonis Kotzias
Colorist - Gregory Arvanitis

Producer - Katrin Kissa
Co-producers - Alise Gelze, Amanda
Livanou, Helen Vinogradov

Executive producers - Hiroko Kubo,
Hiroko Oda, Mami Akari, Rain
Rannu, Yohann Comte, Aleksi Bardy

CAST

Rafael - Ursel Tilk
Rita - Ester Kuntu
Irinei - Kaarel Pogga
Nafanail - Indrek Sammul
Melhisedek - Taimo Kõrvemaa
Big Hat - Rain Simmul
Marfa - Tiina Tauraite
Zinaida - Mari Abel
Mother - Maria Avdjushko
KGB agent - Rein Oja
Lady - Marika Barabanštšikova
Rudolf - Ekke Märten Hekles
Chinese bandits - Eddie Tsai,
Kyro Wavebourne, Johnny Wang
Captain - Aleksandr Okunev
Avvakum - Fisha

**“The
Invisible
Fight”
is a
kung fu
comedy
set
in an
Orthodox
monastery
in the
Soviet
Union
during
the
1970s.**

