

PRESS KIT

# DREAMLAND



What do you own when you have sold everything?



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Directors: **Porfinnur Guðnason**  
**Andri Snær Magnason**

Producer: **Sigurður Gísli Pálmason**

Co-Producers: **Hanna Björk Valsdóttir**  
**Hrönn Kristinsdóttir**  
**Pórir Snær Sigurjónsson**  
**Hlín Jóhannesdóttir**

Production Coordinator: **Svanhildur Thors**

Based on a book by: **Andri Snær Magnason**

Cinematography: **Porfinnur Guðnason**  
**Guðmundur Bjartmarsson**  
**Hjalti Stefánsson**  
**Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson**

Editor: **Eva Lind Höskuldsdóttir**

Sound design: **Kjartan Kjartansson**  
**Björn Viktorsson**  
**Huldar Freyr Arnarsson**

Music: **Valgeir Sigurðsson**

Graphics: **Sírnir Einarsson**

Color grading: **Steinþór Birgisson**

Online editing: **Steinþór Birgisson**  
**Elísabet Thoroddsen**

Post-production: **The Engine Room Reykjavík**  
**/ Nordisk Film Oslo**

Genre: **Feature length documentary**

Running time: **89 minutes**  
**55 min TV version available**

Language: **Icelandic, English subtitles**

Aspect Ratio: **16:9**

Formats: **35mm, HDCAM, DigiBeta**

Audio: **Dolby digital**

Production format: **35mm, 16mm, 8mm, HD, DV**

Premiere date: **Iceland, April 2009**

International Premiere: **IDFA, Amsterdam 2009,**  
**Feature-length Competition**

Media Contact: **hanna@groundcontrol.is**

Copyright: **Ground Control Productions, 2009**

Website: **www.dreamland.is**



#### SYNOPSIS:

How much unspoiled nature should we preserve and what do we sacrifice for clean, renewable energy? Dreamland gradually turns into a disturbing picture of corporate power taking over nature and small communities. The mantra was economic growth. Today Iceland is left holding a huge debt and an uncertain future. It's the dark side of green energy.

Dreamland is a film about exploitation of natural resources and as Icelanders have learned clean energy does not come without consequence. Iceland is a country blessed with an abundance of clean, renewable, hydro-electric and geothermal energy. Clean energy brings in polluting industry and international corporations.

Dreamland tells the story of a nation with abundance of choices gradually becoming caught up in a plan to turn its wilderness and beautiful nature into a massive system of hydro-electric and geothermal power plants with dams and reservoirs, built to power the increasing heavy industry that will soon make Iceland the largest aluminum smelter in the world.

This highly controversial matter goes largely unnoticed by the public until the plans are already in action and the industrial machine has been turned on. Although most Icelanders are against the idea of turning Iceland into the world's biggest smelter of aluminum the locals where the smelters are meant to be built, celebrate the idea of increasing investment in their region and more jobs. For decades they have been getting desperate, facing depopulation as the young generation finds education and better jobs in the capital.

This multilayered story is also the story of a small nation's continuing struggle for its independence, and today from multinational companies roaming the world. We try to grasp peoples fear for the future. The insecurity created by the constant news of looming economic slowdown, and uncertain future.

## WHAT THE CRITIC'S ARE SAYING...

"...it offers impassioned visual and rhetorical arguments that put the island nation's environmental and financial problems in historical perspective. Illustrating how the government blithely sold precious natural resources to predatory multinationals and used economic fear-mongering to push the deals through without proper study or reflection."

**Variety**

"The film is worth seeing for the visuals alone. The documentary is all the more exceptional given its ability to seamlessly weave a sense of poetic narrative with stark journalistic storytelling. The story is so well told that the film becomes its own cultural art form. It's rare to find a documentary so complete and well-directed."

**The Concordian**



"Once every five to ten years a film comes along that shakes your soul, rattles the cage of your conscience, and awakes you from a media-immersed cryogenic dream state ... the audiovisual awakening is the magnificent breathtaking political documentary Dreamland."

**Art Threat**

"This is one of the best environmental films ever made. An incredibly, moving, inspiring and fantastically political film that will make you want to be a better steward of this planet."

**Cinema Politica**



"Dreamland is an epic film on a world-scale, and a creative force into red-hot current affairs."

**H.S., Morgunblaðið (Morning Paper)**



"The film shakes the viewer to his core, and forces him to look within."

"Powerful and necessary reminder that today we cannot allow ourselves not to take a stand."

**B.S., Fréttablaðið (The News Paper)**



"Straight to the point, the sharpest documentary ever in our humble history of cinema."

**O.H.T, RÚV, Rás 2,  
(Icelandic Broadcasting Company)**



"What a scenery, what selection of old and new footage, what beauty in cinematography and music. The film floats by under strong visual direction, and skillful research, there are no dead moments."

**E.E., DV (Daily Newspaper)**

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## AWARDS:

### EDDA ICELANDIC FILM AWARDS

4 Nominations: Best documentary, best directors, best music, best sound

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:

**Porfinnur Guðnason**  
Director



Porfinnur Guðnason is a documentary filmmaker of genuine talent being Iceland's most established filmmaker in the field. He has made award winning documentaries with worldwide distribution (including National Geographic, TBS, ARTE, ZDF, NRK, TVP, Discovery Europe etc.) Porfinnur graduated from California College of Arts and Crafts in 1987. He began his career working for the Icelandic Broadcasting Company and worked for years as a cinematographer, editor and producer. In the early nineties he started making his own exceptionally creative and charming documentaries. Porfinnur's first film was Húsey (1993), a journey into Icelandic reality where man lives in complete harmony with nature, and won the DV Cultural Award. His second film, Woodmouse-life on the run (1997) essentially a love story between two mice trapped at an Icelandic farm, is also his most critically acclaimed film internationally, receiving many awards and broadcasted around the world. His third film Lalli Johns (2001), about a homeless small-time criminal in Reykjavík, broke all records for documentary attendance in Icelandic cinemas, and received the Edda Award for Best Documentary. He went on to document the legendary bar Grand Rokk (2003) and in 2004 he made Running with the Herd, bringing him back out into nature filming horses in their natural habitat, also broadcasted widely on European channels. In Dreamland (2009) he teams up with author/director Andri Snær Magnason for the first time delivering an epic film about a nation standing at cross-roads, and again breaking records for attendance in Icelandic cinemas.

**Andri Snær Magnason**  
Director



Andri Snær Magnason is one of Iceland's most celebrated young writers. He has written novels, poetry, plays, short stories, essays and CD's before directing the documentary Dreamland (2009). His work has been published or performed in more than 25 countries. His novel, LoveStar was chosen "Novel of the year" by Icelandic booksellers in 2002, it received the DV Literary Award and a nomination to the Icelandic Literary Prize. His children's book, The Story of the Blue Planet, was the first children's book to receive the Icelandic Literary Prize and has been published in 18 countries. The Story of the Blue Planet received the Janusz Korczak Honorary Award 2000 and the West Nordic Children's Book Prize 2002. The play from the story was performed on the main stage of LKTYP in Toronto in 2005. Andri has collaborated with various artists, such as the band múm and he was one of the organizers of the Nattura concert in Reykjavík 2008 with Björk and Sigurros. Andri was vice-president of The Icelandic Writers Union, he is a board member of The Culture House in Reykjavík and has been active in the fight against the destruction of the Icelandic Highlands. His book - Dreamland - a Self Help Manual for a Frightened Nation takes on these issues. Dreamland has been published in English and is now a feature length documentary film. Andri was born in Reykjavík where he lives with his wife and four children.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:

### **Ground Control Productions Production Company**

Ground Control Productions is a young production company with a bright future. The company was established in 2006 by Sigurður Gísli Pálmason, a well established and well known entrepreneur in Iceland. Sigurður Gísli started his business career at an early age and his career expands a wide-range of business and cultural activities, book publishing and art collecting among them, in locations such as London, California and Reykavík. He founded Ground Control Productions with the aim to produce high quality documentaries with a social agenda for local and international market. Dreamland (2009) by Þorfinnur Guðnason and Andri Snær Magnason is Ground Control's first feature length documentary and already broke the record for cinema attendance in Iceland for a documentary and received raving reviews from critics. Previous co-productions include At The Edge of the World (2007) by Ari Alexander Ergis Magnússon and Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson and Dieter Roth Puzzle (2008) by Hilmar Oddsson. Several new documentaries are now in development at Ground Control Productions.

### **Zik Zak Filmworks Co-production Company**

Zik Zak Filmworks was founded in 1995 by Skúli Fr. Malmquist and Þórir S. Sigurjónsson. The company is leading in Icelandic film production, its films have been sold worldwide and been selected to prestigious international film festivals (Cannes, Toronto, Rotterdam, Telluride, Karlovy Vary etc.) receiving numerous awards and special mentions, including an Academy Award nomination for The Last Farm by Rúnar Rúnarsson in 2006 in the category of Best Live Action Short Film. The film Nói Albinói by Dagur Kari became an international hit. Zik Zak's catalogue of projects consists of works by Iceland's most promising and successful screenwriters and directors. Zik Zak focuses on feature film production and documentaries. Seeking and tending to new talents is a priority within the company. Zik Zak also co-produces films from the US and Europe.

### **TC Films Co-production Company**

TC Films is an Icelandic film production company, established in 2002 by producer Hrönn Kristinsdóttir and director Valdimar Jóhannsson. The company produces documentaries, shorts and features. Among the company's latest documentary releases are "Beneath the Stars" directed by Helgi Felixson and Titti Johnson and a "A Writer with a Camera" directed by Helga Brekkan. TC Films is currently co-producing two Icelandic documentaries, co-producing a documentary with CosmoDoc in Denmark and two documentaries with Felixfilm in Sweden.





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**Posted: Thurs., Feb. 11, 2010, 9:46pm PT**

## Dreamland

(Documentary -- Iceland) A Ground Control Prods., TC Films, Zik Zak Filmworks production, with the participation of RUV, Icelandic Film Center. (International sales: Cat & Docs, Paris.) Produced by Sigurdur Gisli Palmason. Co-producers, Hanna Bjork Valsdottir, Hronn Kristinsdottir, Thor Snaer Sigurjonsson, Hlin Johannesdottir. Directed by Thorfinnur Gudnason, Andri Snaer Magnason. Written by Magnason, based on his book "Dreamland."

With: Andri Snaer Magnason, Erla Stefansdottir, John Perkins, Valgedur Sverrisdottir, Alain Belda.

By [ALISSA SIMON](#)

**Eco-activist docu "Dreamland," from helmers Thorfinnur Gudnason and Andri Snaer Magnason, seems even more pertinent in light of Iceland's October 2008 economic meltdown and the country's moves toward recovery. Based on Magnason's bestseller, it offers impassioned visual and rhetorical arguments that put the island nation's environmental and financial problems in historical perspective. Illustrating how the government blithely sold precious natural resources to predatory multinationals and used economic fear-mongering to push the deals through without proper study or reflection, this well-researched pic should prove dreamy for docu programmers, liberal broadcasters and the alternative circuit of universities and cinematheques.**

Pic documents the high costs of what was billed as "green energy" by mixing talking-head experts and farmers (whose livelihood was ruined by aluminum smelters and hydroelectric dams) with archival materials and gorgeous footage of the country's unique landscapes (contrasted with similar views post-industrialization). Providing background, author John Perkins ("Confessions of an Economic Hitman") describes how underdeveloped countries are persuaded to accept enormous development loans, making them vulnerable to outside pressures. Although this ode to a threatened environment is unequivocally pro-conservation, the helmers do include a few dissenting voices.

Camera (color, widescreen, HD-to-35mm), Gudnason, Gudmundur Bjartmarsson, Hjalti Stefansson, Bergsteinn Bjorgulfsson; editor, Eva Lind Hoskuldsdottir; music, Valgeir Sigurdsson. Reviewed at Gothenburg Film Festival (Nordic Light), Feb. 3, 2010. (Also in Intl. Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam -- competing.) Original title: Draumalandio. Icelandic, English dialogue. Running time: 89 MIN.

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# Giving a damn about Iceland's hydro electric dams

Cinema Politica screens *Dreamland*, outlining the fall of the country's economy

By Michael Connors

**Published:** Tuesday, January 19, 2010

**Updated:** Friday, January 22, 2010

In Iceland, if you walk along a river towards its source, you might be less struck by the country's raw beauty than by the massive hydro electric dam blocking the way. In the last decade, many of Iceland's iconic waterfalls and valleys have been lost to hydroelectric projects.

As exposed in the powerful documentary *Dreamland*, the country is quickly trading its serenity for big business. The film is worth seeing for the visuals alone. The documentary is all the more exceptional given its ability to seamlessly weave a sense of poetic narrative with stark journalistic storytelling.

The story is so well told that the film becomes its own cultural art form. It's rare to find a documentary so complete and well-directed.

As *Dreamland* shows, it's not Icelanders who need power from the hydroelectric projects. Rather, it is one big company. Alcoa has built — and has plans to build more — smelting plants to process vast amounts of aluminium, which is an extremely energy intensive process.

"Iceland sacrificed two large rivers to Alcoa," said Andri Magnason, one of the film's two directors, and author of the novel *Dreamland: a Self Help Manual for a Frightened Nation*. "Our government sold them cheap energy and doubled the energy production of Iceland - just to meet Alcoa's needs. Alcoa needs enormous power - about four times more energy than the whole nation uses."

Although Alcoa briefly helped lead a spike in Iceland's economy, global aluminium prices dropped dramatically in 2008. At the same time, Iceland had to declare bankruptcy after its private banks failed to restructure and pay back enormous debt loads.

"The private banks seem to have dumped the debt on the nation," said Magnason. "Many believe our only hope is building more dams for Alcoa."

As Canadians caught in our own "economy versus the environment" quagmire, *Dreamland* certainly serves as more than just "something that's happening to some island." This is a Faustian bargain that economies more often than not deem obligatory. Industry and progress, for all the good and bad it has brought, has us exploiting our natural resources at breakneck speed. Sometimes, we may lose track of our national interest when multinational businesses are given a substantial amount of pull.

"When one company buys half your power production, it has great power," said Magnason, referring to Alcoa's use of more hydroelectric power than the entire population of Iceland combined.

And this is the point this film so effectively gets across: *Dreamland* eloquently argues that big business is the new imperialism. Iceland has effectively succumbed to "economic hitmen" who have convinced politicians that since these projects are good for the economy, they are in fact necessary for prosperity in Iceland. The catch is, these companies have no citizenry to answer to once given free reign, and will turn countries into "self-feeding machines" that need to exploit more and more heavily.

"Much of the economic infrastructure becomes addicted to this boom economy. It diverts natural resources in an unsustainable direction," warned Magnason.

"Iceland catches about one per cent of the fish that is caught in the world. That is quite a lot for 300,000 people. We already produce enough meat and milk for the whole nation. We have more tourists per capita



Courtesy of the Artist

Dams mar Iceland's scenery, say the makers of *Dreamland* - and are useless for the economy?



than most nations in the world. We have 100 per cent renewable energy in our homes and business – this in itself should be quite enough to sustain the economy,” charged Magnason. “But pressure groups think that we are not using the waterfalls and geothermal areas if they are left unspoiled. They want to sell it to global giants, like Alcoa, Rio Tinto Alcan, and other companies.”

The film shows, through Iceland's example, that when it comes to economy and industry, you have to really be careful what you wish for, and what you think you need.

Dreamland screens at Cinema Poltica Monday, Jan. 25 at 7:30p.m. in H-110 in Concordia's Hall Building.

[Click here](#) for more information at

Some Hard Facts on aluminium:

- Aluminium is the most abundant metal on earth, making up about 8 per cent of the Earth's solid surface. It is not found as a free metal, but can be found scattered in over 270 minerals.
- Aluminium is typically extracted from bauxite-ore in places like Jamaica. It is then transported to smelting plants, which are located near power sources due to their prodigious use of energy.
- Aluminium is 100 per cent recyclable. If the United States recycled all of its aluminium every year, it would equal the 400,000 metric tonnes that Iceland produces every year.

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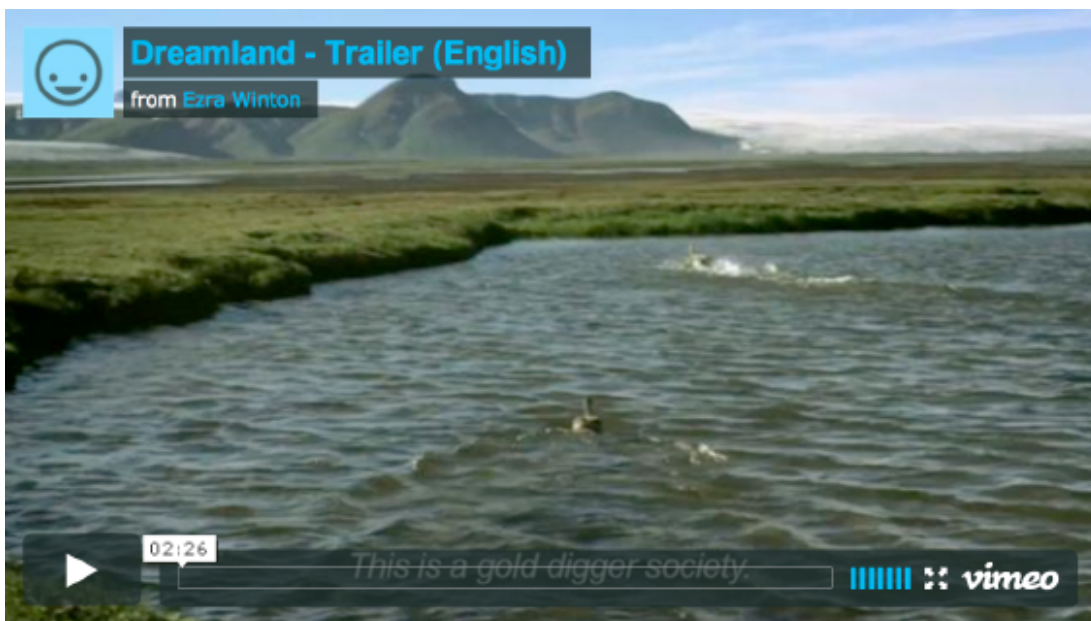
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# One of the best environmental films ever made, Dreamland shakes the soul

by Ezra Winton on January 24, 2010 · [Comments \(1\)](#)



There is one reason, above all the others, that the Academy Awards are not worth paying any attention to this year: the documentary [Dreamland](#) is not up for best picture, best documentary, or best anything.

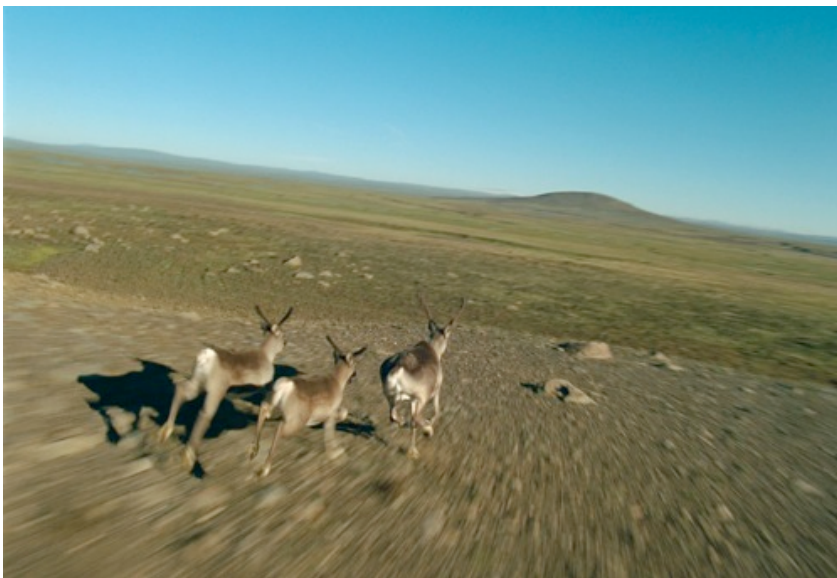
Once every five to ten years a film comes along that shakes your soul, rattles the cage of your conscience, and awakes you from a media-immersed cryogenic dream state. The technical perfection and power of the message rearrange the synopsis in your circuitry and leaves you feeling like a wave of clarity and inspiration has washed over you. This sermon on the mount, the audiovisual awakening that has knocked me from safe and comfortable passage into a world I had temporarily forgotten was there, is

the magnificent breathtaking political documentary *Dreamland*.

*Dreamland* asks us how much is a mountain worth? Two billion? Twenty billion? Then challenges the capitalism calculi that conjures these figures, re-orienting the audience toward another framework, one of eco-logic, and argues for 89 minutes that the value of the natural world is of course not measured in dollars, or barrels, or extractions. The value of the natural world we inhabit is immeasurable: it is beauty, harmony, health, co-existence and much, much more.

If I'm sounding like a hippy that's likely because three viewings of this documentary from Iceland have changed my purview. It's not that I didn't give a damn about ecology before *Dreamland*, it's just that this film was the much-needed kick in the ass that I required. *Dreamland* is like a drug: a truth serum that wrestles memories out of their webs, that beautifully captures the "reality" of the natural world, and that connects our fears with our needs with our wants. The fear of the antithesis of progress – of simply preserving and protecting the environment because its value is immeasurable; the need to push for a kind of progress defined and managed by elites who have disdain for the natural world and who answer to constituencies, not rivers, rocks, tundras, the hooved and the winged; and the want, as it is articulated by CEOs attracting politicians attracting large amounts of small pieces of paper with abstract symbols on them.

*Dreamland* is a documentary like no other. This 2009 film by Porfinnur Guðnason & Andri Snær Magnason is a visual treatise that exposes the greed and corruption that has befallen Iceland like a plague of myopic and avaricious infection of the mind and heart. It is a poem to the natural world and speaks for ecology through stunning cinematography and the pacing of a practiced orchestra.



*Dreamland* shows us how mining multinationals and hydro-electric companies have steered Iceland toward a precipice of pillage. The country already produces more than enough energy for its 300,000 inhabitants, but Alcoa (based out of Montreal) and politicians in Iceland see resources that exist without intervention as willful waste and neglect. There is money to be made, and through massive mining operations as well as monstrous hydro-electric projects, the corporate and political elite argue, Iceland can have more, much much more. But what is needed when the country's needs are met and the people live in one of the most beautiful and pristine environments in the world?

The documentary powerfully examines the psychology of fear that leads to progress and consumerism that leads to apathy and support for the eco-criminals currently destroying Iceland's natural world. And the film, through gorgeous photography and a perfectly complimentary soundtrack, inspires, provokes and dare I say initiates change.

It is telling of this film's potency that I left the cinema in Amsterdam back in November full of rage, but also full of plans. Rage at the injustice and immoral acts that I had bared witness to. But plans, inspired

by the moving argument played out so politically and emotionally on the screen, to be a better environmentalist. And that the story I had seen was about a country so far removed from my immediate reality, yet I was so compelled to change and effect change, further illustrates the powerful masterpiece that is *Dreamland*.

[\*Dreamland\*](#) is an experience, and one that you do not sleep through. Once this film grabs hold of you, it is a tight and cathartic embrace that does not end when the lights go up. It is one of the most important and powerful documentaries I have ever seen, and deserves not just an Oscar, but a place in every person's conscience – a reminder of who we have been, but also who we can be, what we have and why it is worth fighting for.

To learn more and join in the fight for Iceland's natural world, visit [SavingIceland.org](http://SavingIceland.org).

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## Don't Thank Icelanders For Iceland

*Given the chance, we'd have made it into Murmansk*

8.5.2009

Words by [Haukur S. Magnússon](#)

Dreamland is the result of collaboration between documentary filmmaker Þorfinnur Guðnason and author, playwright and poet Andri Snær Magnason. It is based on the latter's best selling, award winning 2006 non-fiction book, 'Dreamland: A self-help manual for a Frightened Nation' (available in English translation through Amazon.co.uk and at local bookstores). The book stirred a lot of controversy in Iceland, as it shed new light on some of the issues surrounding the conflict between environmental preservation and the build up of heavy industry in Iceland. It furthermore examined the government's hope to sell cheap energy from hydroelectric power plants in order to place Iceland among the world's biggest aluminium manufacturers – and why on Earth we'd aspire to that.

The film goes even further, using the full potential of the medium to conjure up a truly chilling vision of recent events. And it's effective. As we exited a screening of the film, my friend Geiri summarised the experience perfectly, saying: "Most of the time, I didn't know whether to laugh, cry or vomit in disgust." That somehow says it all. A scathing indictment of Iceland's recent "all in" industrial and environmental policies, Dreamland combines archival news footage, exquisite nature shots and select interviews to achieve its goal of waking Icelanders up to the very real, very serious consequences of selling off some of the last bits of pristine wilderness remaining in Europe.

We caught up with Andri Snær – whom many of you tourists might know from his heavily lauded children's book 'The Story of the Blue Planet', released in 20 some countries to this day – to learn more about Dreamland and its subject.

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“The movie is about a small nation that doesn’t recognise the advantages of its smallness. And overvalues its need to be “saved” by giant, instant solutions. A nation standing at crossroads. Why should people go see it? Because it is stirring to watch, it’s important to see it to realise why we are in the position we are today, so that history doesn’t repeat itself.

The book was rooted in worry, mostly. My worries about how I felt people harboured all these misconceptions about our society and economy, based on a dearth of information and a wrong approach to human nature. It remains. We could have made a much longer film. You could say that every two pages in the book could be fodder for forty minutes of film, putting it all together as a whole was quite the challenge.

We initially wanted to present viewers with a lot of the startling facts we’ve discovered in our research, to expose things that maybe haven’t gotten a lot of news coverage or none at all. But we soon realised that the biggest contribution we could make was the “emotional angle,” our artistic experience of the whole debacle. Of how the machine takes over as well as our own experiences of the whole frenzy surrounding the events.

We’re really projecting our emotions so that the viewer senses that this is what we felt reviewing all the footage; our awe when confronted with the majestic nature and our sense of despair when witnessing how those in authority treat unique, invaluable landmarks with such irreverence. Juxtaposing the two creates such an inner tension that you want to laugh and cry at the same time. In the end, we decided we simply had to convey our reactions to it all; we could have said that carbon dioxide emissions will go up by 50.000 tonnes, etc., but such numbers aren’t really comprehensible to normal people.

## Direct Action

*You seem very passionate about the subject. Have you yourself considered partaking in some direct guerrilla action, like chaining yourself to some heavy machinery, Saving Iceland-style?*

Yes, well, I did want to do that. But circumstances didn’t allow for it. I fathered two children during that period, and was also making this movie. I have participated in such protests, but never taken the full step towards direct action. But there are places in this country that I would do that for. January’s Saucepan Revolution proved that it’s easy for authorities to ignore articles and letters to the editor; it isn’t until you get physical, by banging on the house of parliament or chaining yourself to building cranes that they’re forced to pay attention. The government showed no reaction at all to people’s arguments until they raised their voice.

And that’s probably what needs to be done in this case too. The Saving Iceland protests enraged a lot of people, I’d meet a lot of folks who’d espouse all these opinions on their clothing and hairstyles while ignoring their very vital point altogether. Based on their hair. Instead of looking into what these people were actually protesting against, they focused on their taste in clothes. All the while, respectable-looking, suit-wearing men were busy bankrupting our country.

Anyway, Landsvirkjun [the state power company] uses direct action to achieve their goals. They’ll start shovelling roads and blasting foundations for aluminium smelters before the factories are even sanctioned by municipal planning agencies. A bit of direct action from the other side is surely justifiable, to counter them.

What’s really striking is this structure, how the corporations integrate whole communities into their empire, by luring its chieftains to their sides. How communities that lead decent lives without this authority become dependent on it and start thanking it for saving their lives. Even though it’s really us that are saving the companies. It’s a colonial mindset; the nation can never be truly independent because it owes everything to the very master that it maintains just by existing. This is very much what’s happened in the east of Iceland. Alcoa are benefiting hugely from being there, but they never thank Reyðarfjörður [where they built their smelter]. Instead, Reyðarfjörður thanks Alcoa for its purported prosperity.



## **Apolitical, cynical no more**

*And that prosperity seems rather fickle, according to recent reports.*

We thought about showing that in the film. It would have been an emotional high point, talking about the 200 empty apartments in Reyðarfjörður, the blowing tumbleweed. And we thought it was a bit too much. We assumed people knew that already, that despite the smelter, the growth spurt in Reyðarfjörður is slowly but surely diminishing.

*So you maintain that no good came of these developments?*

Society will never reach the place where unemployment is eradicated. It's ironic that by undertaking the project, the government destroyed more long-term jobs than they created.

The peripheral effects of the damming and smelter projects are the ruination of so many jobs in the fishing industry and in various export sectors. Marel [Icelandic high-tech food system company] only grew outside of Iceland during the project, and many high-tech companies moved their operations abroad. Due to the inflation caused by the project, the ISK strengthened by 10-20 % and thus our companies weren't able to compete with their peers in neighbouring countries. Of course, now, post-collapse, we're back at the starting point and need to re-build these companies. But that takes time, and we've lost four years advantage. We're still talking about Össur, Marel and CCP as our high-tech exports, there hasn't been room for any new companies to grow.

*What do you hope to accomplish with the film?*

We hope that people start giving more thought to these matters, and maybe get a glimpse of the grand scale of the nonsense that's been going on. But we also wanted to make a movie that was a work of art in and of itself, one that people can watch and enjoy and gain something from. I have no great hopes that it'll change anything in the short run, or cause any sort of sea-change, but hopefully it'll be one of many steps in the right direction of showing people that these things matter a great deal, that they need to be thought about and dealt with. And we're actually seeing such results already, I was recently interviewed for a pop music station in Reykjavík, and its host was furious after seeing the movie. He realised that some regions that he held sacred and had assumed were protected were actually being developed for exploitation by the aluminium and power companies. He was in a state of shock.

And I believe that if the film reaches and touches some of the folks that have up until now allowed themselves the luxury of being apolitical and cynical – if it lights a spark within them that turns them away from being this neutral mass – then we've accomplished something.

## **Excellent salesmanship**

*Have the aluminium companies and Landsvirkjun responded to your criticism at all?*

They'll give these standard PR answers where they draw out five points that are all pretty much irrelevant to the heart of the matter. The local president of Alcoa has even come out saying that I'm "doing a character," that this is my shtick to sell more books. And they'll give lectures and throw around references to carbon dioxide emissions, green energy and export revenues that have no basis in reality.

*That's a pretty hefty claim for you to make.*

They've gone on record saying that their projects are creating 100 billion ISK in export revenue for Iceland. So I thought I'd verify their claims, and after making some basic calculations I saw that what's left when everything has been accounted for is around two to seven billion ISK in pure export revenues. So they were exaggerating that number tenfold to give people the impression that a lot was to be gained.

It's old-fashioned salesmanship, but at a much greater scale than we're used to. These companies are selling an entire nation the idea that it ought to become the biggest aluminium smelter in the world – a nation that had no pressing problems, really. They

surely deserve some sort of marketing award. Reviewing all the information and all the deals that have gone down, you get the same feeling as you will when your friend comes home from a presentation with a sackful of Herbalife products to re-sell. She had a good job, but wanted to make a little extra on the side. So she bought the idea that if she stocked up on these products she could sell them to her friends and make a nice profit, instead of them gathering dust in her basement.

The problem is that even if it's easy to sell you something, that does not make you a good salesman. Quite the contrary. For instance, we have been unable to secure adequate prices for the energy we're selling. We're not basing them on energy prices in other countries, or how much money we're ultimately saving companies like Alcoa. It's interesting to observe the local technocrats deal with these huge corporations, how naïve they seem. Like watching a team of your local amateur football dads compete against Juventus or Manchester United. They imagine they're on the same level, just because everyone's wearing a costume. But Juventus, like Alcoa, have played this game all over the world. For a long time. And they know how to win; they know how to get the upper hand.

*You offer up some economic arguments, but less so than in the book.*

We had to decide what to emphasise. We had a lot of economic arguments and calculations lined up, but ultimately you've got to consider the message you're sending out. Let's say that there were no empty apartments in Reyðarfjörður, and that our export profits would have exceeded 100 billion ISK, and the Kárahnjúkar-dam wasn't a losing venture. Would that have justified the whole scenario? We'd rather question the incentive behind these actions, and how Iceland as a nation got caught up in big corporations' plans.

### **Don't thank the Icelanders!**

*How do you view the local discourse on these matters thus far? In the media, etc?*

You know, it's surprising. One would have thought that matters of such grave importance and consequence should merit a balanced and rational discussion. Instead of any of that, it was pretty much gold rush from day one; those who voiced dissent or doubt were often ridiculed or, more commonly, ignored. And no one questioned the motives behind it all either, no one stepped aside and said, "Look, do we really need this? Are we starving yet?"

This confirms that Iceland owes its majestic and unspoilt beauty not to us, its inhabitants, but to the fact that we haven't been able to gather the money and manpower to lay waste to it properly. But we've been saving up. Don't imagine that Icelanders as a nation have anything to do with the enchanting country they inhabit. That's just confusion. That's like thinking that someone's an artist just because he lives nearby the Louvre. Don't confuse the country with its people; the two aren't necessarily connected. If it were up to us, we'd probably be living in Murmansk. Just look at our suburbs. We're maybe not what you think we are.

They are already planning more dams and smelters, up north in Húsavík and a series of geothermal plants to power a proposed smelting plant in Helguvík. The problem with that is that the energy is not renewable. Many areas are harnessed too aggressively, and they will cool down and be useless for energy production in the future. You can call them energy mines.

All of the energy, all the rivers in the north and east of the country, they want to sell them to Alcoa. Save for Jökulsá á Fjöllum, which is located in Jökulsárgljúfur National Park. Which is sponsored by Alcoa. So now Alcoa can publish pictures of Skaftafell in their press materials saying, "we saved the north of Iceland, the east of Iceland – and helped them preserve this majestic landscape." This is how dignified us Icelanders are today. Our jobs, as well as our rivers, are "given to us" by Alcoa.

### **Let them eat bakery!**

*One of the criticisms Dreamland has gotten is that it's dismissive and disrespectful of Icelanders*

*outside of Reykjavík, from the East coast and the North. That the film portrays them in a negative light – as naïve villagers – and disregards their towns' need for growth, the townspeople's need for work.*

The fact is that people – both in and outside of Reykjavík – have acted in an irresponsible manner towards our nature and our interests, welcoming people and corporations to “save them.” They invite and welcome huge entities that they haven’t done any proper research on, that they haven’t even googled. Celebrating projects that practically demand violations of basic human rights, and that huge, unspoiled parts of nature be destroyed – both here and in the third world nations that supply the plants with bauxite – and our whole economy driven into the ground. Even if a community is on the defensive, there are limits to what its members can demand from the world in terms of being “saved.”

And we aren’t working on the assumption that there is a divide between Reykjavík and the rest of Iceland – we’re all Icelanders, and we’re all responsible. We have this image of the noble small-town dweller that is always right, and much more grounded and connected to reality than the latté-sipping hordes of the city. Yet if he needs a job, nothing less than a hydroelectric plant that could power the entire city of Copenhagen will do. These are some hefty demands we are making of our country: “If I am to be able to live in this country, I will need to exploit it relentlessly. I want Iceland to provide me with a pleasant, well-paid factory job for the rest of my life.”

You could try and shift the blame on politicians, and they are to blame for a lot of this. But we are all voters in a democratic state, and as such we are all responsible and we can and should be held responsible for what we’ve allowed to happen. The people we show celebrating so vulgarly in Reyðarfjörður when they announced the dam, they aren’t the ones taking the loans to build it, they aren’t the ones sacrificing their nature and they aren’t the ones that will suffer the consequences. We all are. All of Iceland is. And the world.

In the end, no one bled worse from this than our fishing industry that used to employ people in small towns all over Iceland. When the Kárahnjúkar dam project commenced, 2,000 jobs were lost. We just didn’t notice because we were in the midst of our self-created inflation bubble.

Of course you have sympathy for these people who feel their communities are dying, that they need prospects and projects and construction. But when the help lies in a factory that employs 400 people and requires amounts of energy that could power a city of millions, that’s going overboard. That’s not a loaf of bread to quell the hunger; it’s the entire bakery, bread, cakes, pastries and all.

The aim was not to portray anyone in a negative light or demean them. We were merely trying to accurately portray the atmosphere in Reyðarfjörður at the time, an atmosphere that seemed manic and tense to us at the time, and our footage seems to support that.

### **...and all you can do is laugh**

*Do you imagine that the industrialisation of Iceland will move on at full speed now that the economy has collapsed, in the name of “rebuilding Iceland”? Or do you expect our new government to put a halt to these developments?*

Well, the Independence Party’s campaign promised unfettered progress and projects, if they had won the election and regained power this would have been the case. It’s worse with the Social Democrat Alliance, they pretend as if they’re not working with those ideas, they play environmentalists and lead a lot of well meaning people on when all of their action thus far gives evidence to the contrary.

It’s farcical. Now they’re saying that the industrialization process is coming to an end. We only need to build those little smelting plants in Helguvík and Húsavík. But when you peer into the numbers, you learn that when they finish those they will have doubled what we have now. And they’re talking about it as if it’s a final measure of no consequence – while it’s really a whole new chapter in the destruction of Iceland.

For the record, there’s no such thing as a “small aluminium smelter.” An aluminium

smelter has to be at least 360.000 tonnes, the technology requires it. Century Aluminium, for instance, is a very dishonest company. They were campaigning to build a 200.000 tonne plant. Which is comparable to building a three-legged chair. It doesn't add up. And lo and behold, three days after the crash, they offered to expand their plans to a 360.000 tonne plant. Out of their good nature, to help us out. These companies, if they manage to cram one foot in the doorway, soon enough they'll be moving in with you.

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