

# PILGRIMAGE

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### INITIAL IDEA / DEVELOPMENT

In 2009 writer Jamie Hannigan met with producer Conor Barry and director Brendan Muldowney. He had had an idea and his enthusiasm spread contagiously as he laid it out.

*Ireland, 1209. An island on the edge of the world. A small group of monks begin a reluctant pilgrimage across an island torn between centuries of tribal warfare and the growing power of Norman invaders. Escorting their monastery's holiest relic to Rome, the monks' progress is seen through the eyes of a pious young novice and a mute lay-brother with a violent past. As the true material, political and religious significance of the bejewelled relic becomes dangerously apparent, their path to the east coast becomes increasingly fraught with danger. The monks belatedly realise that in this wild land of ancient superstitions, the faith that binds them together may ultimately lead to their destruction.*

The script started as a seed about a double team of monks: a big silent guy and a young defenceless monk, who did all the talking for him, who wander across Ireland getting into adventures.

A small country torn apart by war, a land at the edge of the known world at the mercy of chaos, Ireland in the Middle Ages would constitute an incredibly fertile ground to set the story in.

As soon as the monks leave the monastery it becomes a journey movie. The journey acts as a solid spine to rest the story on, a story about a group of holy men carrying a stone across Ireland to Rome.

The project went into development with the Irish Film Board in late 2009. It became evident that although the themes that play through the film seem historically removed from the modern world, we can understand and relate to them. POWER and RELIGION seem to be very current issues. Religion continues to be exploited for political and economical gain, as people in power still consider is a strong means of supremacy.

## CHARACTERS

**Diarmuid** (Tom Holland) is the young “Novice”. A number of years before he found **The Mute** (Jon Bernthal) washed ashore on a curragh, with no food and no oars. The big silent warrior fought in the crusades and witnessed unbelievable horrors. He seeks peace and redemption by taking a vow of silence and humbly offering his services to the monks. The Novice knows nothing of the outside world, and by embarking into this journey with his fellow monks he finds himself growing from being a terrified boy to a young adult, ready to take lead.

**Geraldus of Albi, The Cistercian** (Stanley Weber) directly represents the authority of the Pope himself and immediately poses as a powerful and new reference figure for young Diarmuid. The Novice finds himself torn between the diverging paths embodied by Geraldus and **Brother Ciaran, the Herbalist** (John Lynch), a senior monk of the congregation.

Geraldus, a true believer, is driven by a mix of pious duty and personal ambition, and he seems to have lost his love for humanity in a desperate search for absolute faith. On the opposite, Brother Ciaran has travelled the world but stepped away from the temptation of power and retired from worldliness in search for more spiritual matters. Reluctantly, he obeys to the task entrusted to him and leads his brothers into the perilous land.

**Sir Raymond de Merville** (Richard Armitage) lives with his clan in Southern Ireland, as part of the Norman invasion. His primary motive is to steal the relic from the monks. He took part to the crusades, alongside the Mute, whom he seems to recognize. The violence he perpetrated and attended to, made of him a damaged man.

## **FIGHT COREOGRAPHY**

Once the script was completed, and preproduction started, Paul Burke came on board to design the fight choreography to fit the new script.

He is utterly passionate and highly skilled in sword fighting.

The main aim was to create two visceral and realistic fight sequences a brutal, spontaneous kill-or-die scenario.

Ua Mordha Ambush scene,

Regaining consciousness after being hit by a projectile in the head, the Mute sees the fight is full on and his friends are in danger. In a trance-like state, he is sucked back into the world of blood and violence he experienced in his past and he fights back.

Final Battle on the beach,

Single hand combat one to one, the Mute and Sir Raymond confront each other.

Given the calibre of players like Jon Bernthal and Richard Armitage, it was important to take advantage of their background and the skills they brought to the table: Jon Bernthal has extensive training in boxing, so it was only natural to incorporate his natural movements in the fighting. On the other hand, Richard Armitage has fencing and sword fighting background experience from previous movies he worked in, which was also a terrific asset.

Each particular individual brought his particular taste and style to the fight, and as a result a pretty unique, fluid sequence was created.

## **LANGUAGES**

Different languages are used in this film, Latin for the Christian prayers; Gaelic as the local language of native Irish people; French as brought onto the island by the Normans and English. The Mute also speaks his own language, which is made of no words at all.

It constituted a big challenge for the actors, and a testimony of their amazing versatility and commitment to the film, to learn, in some cases from scratch, to communicate and act using a completely foreign language, such is the case with Tom Holland, who learnt to master Irish language with much dedication and impressive results.

Richard Armitage's character, Sir Raymond, was born in Rouen and comes from a Norman clan, hence French is his first language. 'Speaking French allowed me to get better into the character' says Richard, 'I feel more comfortable when he [Raymond] speaks French. One of things I really worked on was making the English language uncomfortable and difficult for him. He is more violent in his own language than he is in English. He sees English as a kind of gentrification, which he doesn't necessarily like.'

## **LOCATIONS**

PILGRIMAGE takes the monks from wilderness to a more sanitized version of Ireland where the Normans had taken over. The landscape plays a vital role in the film, the country itself being a character in all respects.

The countryside set the scene for the wild and violent journey physically and metaphorically ahead. Being totally dependant on the Irish weather made for a tough but authentic experience. Cast and crew lived for weeks in very remote locations of Connemara, on the West Coast of Ireland, which not only favoured a certain bond especially among cast, but also made for a real sense of inhabiting the place and the set up.

At the very beginning, it was the choice of location for the Kilmannan Monastery that steered the scouting towards that particular region of Ireland.

Norman Camp

Ambush

Beach

GREECE

## **MUSIC SCORE**

The score was done by composer Stephen McKeon, who has worked with Brendan for many years and scored his previous feature films, *Savage* (2009) and *Love Eternal* (2013).

The conversation about music started very early on, when the film was still at script level.

Creatively, a decision was made to create a focus on three key elements: skin, iron and bone, to reflect the very elemental, basic nature of the film.

The percussions represent the skin and the bone - primal humanity.

Low brass represents the iron - fight.

A big choir was grouped together, over 20 male low singers, to create a dark sound maintain a consistent atmosphere throughout the long journey across paganism, Christianity and war.

In the film there are no female characters, therefore the only female voice in the score is that of a single soprano, representing the voice of faith or death - a great equalizer of all human destinies.