

Paladin: The Eternal Battle**Interview with Scriptwriter and Executive Producer Christopher Dickson, 2009**

Q: Having seen the film, it's entertaining on one level, and also seems to get across a lot of information and symbolism. Who is the male character, the Paladin? He's a religious character?

A: We left it a bit open, intentionally, but the titles at the beginning suggest he's some kind of holy warrior, set in a modern setting. He could be Christian, or perhaps just generally spiritual. But then you have to decide if he's a good guy or not.

I wanted to create a character like the ones I liked when I was a kid – the Six Million Dollar Man, the Incredible Hulk, the Man from Atlantis. Something or someone that you could imagine being. A heroic figure that puts the world to rights. I definitely wanted something that worked as a self-contained short film. But with a strong character there's always that potential to make a longer film, or maybe a series.

Yes you're right, there's lots of symbolism. Ravens are symbolic of warriors in Welsh and British mythology. There's the sign at the entrance of the compound – Danger or Anger, which we spotted afterwards! The characters themselves are symbolic. And the gun...

Q: The gun – what's that for? If he's some kind of ghost hunter or holy warrior, with exorcism powers, why does he need a gun?

A: Well he doesn't know what he's going to encounter when he comes into the village. In fact when he understands more about the Dryad, then he knows he doesn't need it [the gun], he puts it away.

Q: But as a character, wouldn't he be stronger without it? With just his spells and power he would look stronger without a gun – like he doesn't need it to help him?

A: That's true, but he's not meant to be all-powerful, but rather all-aggressive. He symbolises the aggression, masculinity, war and so on, while the female character symbolises more the feminine and also the environment. But she's no pushover...she's a strong female who won't give in to him. Yes he's not all-powerful. Of course the gun is also there because it's sexually symbolic...

Q: What's the language he's speaking? Is it Latin?

A: Yes he uses a Latin exorcism rite. That was given to us by an expert in medieval religion, but that person has asked for their identity to remain secret. It's a real exorcism rite from the 10th century! They use a different rite these days apparently.

Q: And the female character, the Dryad – she's speaking in Welsh?

Yes it's actually Medieval Welsh. The translation was provided by Professor Sioned Davies, who is head of Welsh at Cardiff University. She's a brilliant and famous scholar, and she translated the Mabinogion [the well-known collection of medieval Welsh folk tales] into English so we were really lucky that she helped us.

It's important that the Dryad has her own spell, that she's equally as powerful as the Paladin in her own way. So she fights back and they seem to cancel each other out, and no-one seems to win. She starts nice enough but he pushes and pushes till she eventually retaliates. And they're shouting at each other in a language that each can't understand. It mirrors the real world. People, countries fight for years, sometimes generations, but nobody seems to win, they just get hurt on both sides. And they have no common

language when they fight. They stop listening. The world would be a better place if people on all sides could just stop fighting and listen for a bit.

Q: The Dryad disappears at one point, but then you touch her later. Is she a ghost or is she physical?

A: She's a bit of both. She's part corporeal and part spiritual. The original idea for the character was a dryad or wood nymph, a kind of nature spirit in Greek mythology. Or you could say she's a kind of fairy in Welsh or British mythology. She's supernatural rather than ghostly. In fact there are lots of examples in British mythology of fairies disappearing as if they were ghostly, but then actually marrying and even having children with human partners. So there's no contradiction. But she's definitely not a ghost! The fact that she's a nature spirit is really important to the film.

Q: It's a great location, very stark and derelict. Where is it and why did you choose it?

We filmed it at the Boys Village, a derelict village close to St Athan in South Wales. The location partly inspired the story. There's this amazing war memorial there, which states that the people who put it there are going to keep fighting in order to prevent war. That was the way people thought around the time of the First World War. But now some people feel that war sometimes just creates more enemies. I saw that as a cycle of violence, and it inspired the main theme of the film. The Eternal Battle of the film's title.

The Chapel is also great – it's eerie and derelict, and suits the film well.

Q: The music is really good. Who did it?

The music was done by a friend called Nickie Charles, who leads a band called Fallen Painting. She's currently based in Scotland but she's originally from South Wales. I loved her stuff when I heard it. It's really beautiful and haunting and I thought it would be the perfect soundtrack for the film. So we used music that she had already recorded and which suited the film.

Q: Coming back to the dialogue: He says she's dangerous, but not evil. What is dangerous about her? And why doesn't he describe her as evil?

She's dangerous to him because she's upsetting the balance of things...she's from another world, she almost seduces him and he thinks there's potential for great harm...if he can fall into her power then there's a big risk to the natural order as he sees it. She tells him that he's in danger as well. But she's just retaliating to his threats. From her point of view, she's done nothing wrong and he's the aggressor.

It reflects the real world where everyone thinks they're the goodie and the other guy's the baddie. But if you ask the other guy, they think it's the other way round! We wanted to capture that. They're both right, but they still end up fighting. But they have different perspectives - he's more aggressive than her. She's probably not evil because the cross doesn't work and the spell doesn't work. But she's a radical, a free spirit. That's the real reason that she's dangerous to him.

We wanted to show that he's not a straightforward goodie – he attacks her because she's a threat to him and his world, but from her point of view she's done nothing wrong. She's as entitled to be in the church as he is. This is how conflict usually starts. And this is also why people almost never back down, why they don't listen to each other, why fights escalate to battles and why they go on and on in a cycle of violence. We wanted the film and the characters to reflect that reality. [End]

For more information, or to contact the film's producers, please see www.paladinmovie.com.