

Cryin' Times

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "Based on True Events"

FADE IN:

TEASER

EXT. IRISH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Arial view of green-topped, coastal cliffs. Ocean waves crashing against them. Gray windjammer clouds. Seagulls.

SUPER: "1847, Western Ireland"

Gorgeous Irish scenes: Mountains. Purple heather carpeted hillsides. Tree-lined, clear brooks in green glens. A herd of WILD CONNEMARA PONIES running freely...etc.

Remnants of ancient human activity: Stone fences--some collapsed, some still standing. Long-forgotten stone building foundations hidden in tufts of grass.

A peat bog swale. Lumpy coffin-shaped mounds of turned sod tell of recent human activity. SEAGULLS stir over them.

Some eroded coffin-mounds reveal human bones; desiccated meat, rotting cloth still clinging to them.

The RUMBLING SOUND OF GALLOPING HOOVES approaches o.s.

A GULL pulls on a meaty fibular bone. Flies off with it.

An exposed human skull sticks out from a mound. Its jaw, missing some teeth, yawns in frozen horror.

The sound of HOOF BEATS grow thunderous. Then...

The legs of a horse fly over the skull. Seconds later, a stampede of pounding hooves obliterate it. Dirt and bone explode into the air.

A SOLDIER on a WHITE CONNEMARA PONY races ahead of a scattered PLATOON OF BLUE-JACKETED BRITISH CAVALRY at a full, easy gallop. We get the impression he is leading them in a steeplechase of sorts.

The lead soldier, MICHAEL MURPHY (26), leans forward, clasping the reins loosely against the pony's neck. The arms of a master horseman and the pony's neck pumping in sync.

The dashing pony's hooves beat rhythmically against the turf. His extra-long mane and tail flow like streamers. He's in love with his speed.

They gain distance as they race over the land swells.

BLAM! BLAM! Two soldiers fire their pistols...at Michael! They are pursuing him!

A bullet slams into Michael's hip. He arches in pain.

MICHAEL

Oomph! Shite!

He falls forward against the pony's neck. The pony's long mane whips past his desperate face. He looks back, then forward. His startled eyes seeing what the soldiers see...

Ahead, an 8-foot-high stone wall stretches for hundreds of meters perpendicular to Michael's approach.

He looks back again. Sees the soldiers spread out. They know he must now run his pony along the wall to escape. They got him.

Michael leans back. Reins in. The pony rears on his hind legs, pawing the air with his hooves. He settles, obedient to the reins, pumped to go.

Blood seeps from Michael's hip as he leans forward and strokes the pony. The pony cant's his excited head to listen.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Show 'em what ye got, Pegasus.

Leap that fuckin' wall.

Michael grabs a fistful of mane. Pegasus nods, jerks his head forward. He rears up, readying himself. Then...in a rocket-like burst of energy, charges at the wall.

Pegasus approaches the wall as it gradually fills his field of view. We hear the blasts of his muscular breaths, sense his supreme confidence.

His spring-loaded hooves take off from the ground. Michael and Pegasus catapult into the air. They soar over the wall, clearing it by centimeters as a bullet PINGS off it.

The soldiers pull back hard on their reins, horses sliding to a halt on their haunches at the foot of the wall. They stare at it, then at each other, gob-mouthed.

We see a green, treeless hill beyond the wall. Michael and Pegasus race up it and disappear over it.

ACT 1

EXT. WET BOG - DAY

Michael and Pegasus splash into the bog. He reins him to a halt and jumps off. He hurriedly rummages through his saddle bag. Pulls out a nail pullout pliers.

He winces as he kneels on one knee. Picks up Pegasus' hoof and rests it on his other knee. He quickly pries out the nails of the horseshoe. Tosses it into the bog. He goes to the other leg. Raises it up onto his knee...

MINUTES LATER

He tosses the final horseshoe and pliers into the bog. Leaps back on Pegasus and splashes through the bog.

EXT. COASTAL TRAIL - LATER - SAME DAY

Michael trots along on his high-stepping pony, glancing back occasionally. He stops. Unbuttons his bloody jacket and shirt and peeks in at his wound.

He winces as he quickly takes off his jacket and shirt. He wraps the shirt around his waist over the wound and puts his jacket back on.

EXT. WET BOG - DAY

Cavalry soldiers are spread out searching the bog's perimeter. A CORPORAL meets up with a SERGEANT BEALE (30).

CORPORAL

No sign that he came out, Sarge.
Just wild pony tracks. What do we
do?

BEALE

Widen your perimeter. He didn't
just evaporate.

EXT. COASTAL TRAIL - DAY

A horse grazes off the side of the trail. A saddle hangs upside down from its belly. Michael approaches on Pegasus, stops, glances around.

He winces as he dismounts. Goes up to the horse and strokes her. Gazes down at the upside-down saddle.

MICHAEL

Where's your rider, eh?

He looks around. Espies a wide-brimmed black hat on the ground in front of a boulder. A pair of booted feet stick out from behind it. He walks over to it. Peeks over.

A CATHOLIC PRIEST lies there, his head resting on a blood-covered rock, his eyes locked into infinity.

Michael stares at him, his quick mind scheming. He looks off, checks all directions.

LATER

Michael picks up the black hat and dons it. He's wearing the dead priest's black clothes now.

He looks around, picks up a rock of choice. Goes over to the corpse, now dressed in Michael's military uniform.

He kneels beside it. Gazes into the dead man's eyes. They stare back, as if daring him. Michael promptly closes them.

He raises the rock, hesitates; his face squeamish. Then, his mind made up, hammers it on the corpse's face. The CRUNCH SOUND drives him into a mad, hammering frenzy, every blow accompanied by a CRY OF REVULSION.

Michael jumps up, out of breath. Flings the rock away and shoves the corpse over the cliff's edge.

He reluctantly looks over. Gags. Turns away and vomits.

EXT. CLIFFSIDE - DAY

Michael rummages through the priest's saddle bag. Pulls out priest garments, a Bible, glasses. Crams them back in. He opens the second bag. Food rations and bottles of red wine.

MICHAEL

A man after me own heart.

He removes a bottle, puts it on the ground, closes the bag.

He opens the priest's satchel, pulls out a string-bound folder. Opens it. Removes a letter and reads. He stares at it incredulously for a moment, ponders its significance.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Of all the dumb luck!

He slips it back into the folder, re-ties it, and puts it back into the satchel.

He reaches over to his military saddle bag. Pulls out a tome entitled, "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare." Stuffs it into the satchel and cinches it.

He drags his military saddle and bags to the edge the cliff and heaves them over.

He strides over to Pegasus, now bareback, waiting patiently for his master's orders. Michael leans his head against the pony's head for a moment, connecting. He breaks away. Strokes the pony's head as he speaks.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

My noble Pegasus...No man has ever had a better companion than ye have been to me. It breaks my heart that I have to let you go, but I must leave this cursed land and I can't take thee with me. Tis best for the both of us that we don't get caught together, or I will be hanged and you will be confiscated.

Pegasus WHICKERS, shakes his head. Butts it against Michael. Fighting back emotion, Michael slaps him on the flank.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Go, Pegasus! You're free! Run with your own kind.

Pegasus dances before him as Michael waves his arms and SHOOS him away. The pony stops, looks at him, then gets it. He rears up and takes off, bounding, kicking across the turf. Michael watches for a minute, then turns away.

Something on the ground catches his eye. He picks it up. A four-leaf clover. He stares at it. Raises his eyebrows at a thought: A portent of good fortune?

He puts the clover between the pages of his Shakespeare book. Crams it back into the satchel and cinches it.

He picks up the wine bottle. Mounts the priest's horse. Pops the cork off the bottle and drinks. He looks off. SEES Pegasus join a herd of WILD PONIES. Pegasus seems to dominate them as they surround him, accept him.

Michael turns away satisfied and trots off.

EXT. COUNTY DIRT ROAD - DAY

The countryside is filling up with small stone cottages nestled in the hills and valleys. Some don't have roofs.

Along the roadside, PEASANTS huddle eerily silent in the openings of makeshift shelters of turf and sticks and stone. Filthy rags cover their thin bodies. Their eyes, large and bright with hunger, reflect doom.

Michael stares at them with unease as he trots by. A COUPLE beckons him with out-reached arms.

PEASANT MAN

Father, might thee give us thy
blessin' in passin'?

PEASANT WOMAN

Can ye spare some bread, Father?

He turns away, shaken, and spurs his horse to a canter.

EXT. COUNTY DIRT ROAD - SAME DAY

A SHEPHERD walks alongside his SHEEP.

A SHETLAND SHEEPDOG dashes after a straying sheep. Moves it back into the group, then squats on its haunches, ever alert.

Michael approaches from behind them. Gets aside the shepherd.

MICHAEL

Hello there, friend.

The shepherd looks up, surprised to see a priest.

SHEPHERD

Oh. Hello there, Father. I'll
have Prince make a way for ya.

He WHISTLES at the dog. The dog leaps up, moves the sheep to the side of the road.

MICHAEL

I say, you seem to be the most
prosperous man about these parts.

SHEPHERD

Looks are deceivin', Father. Me
day of reckonin' is nigh, 'tis,
when they take all me sheep from
me.

(beat)

Say, might thee be the new priest
they be expectin' at St. Brendan
parish?

MICHAEL

Aye. Father Michael Murphy.

SHEPHERD

Gannon here. Murphy, ya say.
Mighty common name 'round here.
And were thee acquainted with
Father Joseph, God rest his soul?

MICHAEL

Never met the man. Perhaps you
could tell me a little about him so
I know whose shoes I'm fillin'.

SHEPHERD

Well, if ye want to know the truth,
Father, I be the one givin' it to
ye. Father Joseph preferred the
good life-like, always mixin' with
the well-heeled than tendin' to his
poor flock like the Good Shepherd
hisself woulda done.

(beat)

It might be more respectful-like--
to the deceased man--to say he
tended to the sick and dyin' with
selfless devotion, then catches the
famine disease hisself carin' for
'em and died like a true martyr.
But that would be lyin', Father.
He was gored to death by a bull at
a judgin' contest, he was.

MICHAEL

Interestin'.

Michael tips a drink of wine, hands the bottle to the
shepherd.

SHEPHERD

Ta. Don't mind if I do partake of
the Lord's bounty.

Drinks. Offers it back.

MICHAEL

You keep it. I got another.

Michael reaches back to the saddle bag. Pulls out another
bottle. Pops the cork and drinks as he looks off. He
freezes as he SEES a calvary squad emerging around a bend.

SHEPHERD

(off Michael)

Blasted English. They be everywhere these days helpin' the protestant landlords evict their poor tenants. So far, I've been able to keep up with me rents by handin' over a sheep now and then. Other poor souls don't have a pot to piss in. They even took that away, they did.

The sound of RUNNING HOOVES approaches behind them. Michael double-takes on a glance back. A BRITISH SOLDIER gallops toward him. Michael suddenly feels trapped, readies to bolt.

The soldier races by. Michael relaxes his reins, somewhat relieved, but keeping his eyes on the soldiers.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Looks like the troubles for some poor bugger.

The soldier meets up with the calvary squad. They conference. The soldier points back towards Michael and rides onward. The squad canters towards Michael.

Michael looks down at his blood stained coat. Thinks quickly. Hides the bottle underneath.

The squad halts beside him. The LIEUTENANT gestures for Michael to stop. Michael reins in with his free hand.

MICHAEL

Good day to ye, Lieutenant.

The lieutenant suddenly draws his pistol on him.

LIEUTENANT

Show me your other hand!

MICHAEL

Easy, there. No need for a gun.

Michael slowly withdraws the bottle from under his coat.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(slurring for effect)

Just sharin' a little sacramental wine with me parishioner here. Would ye be wantin' a tip?

LIEUTENANT
 (indicates coat)
 Is that blood?

Michael drops a wobbly head to look.

MICHAEL
 Spilt wine. Blast it! Me maid is
 gonna give me the divil, she is.

Michael continues examining his coat. The lieutenant eyes him with loathing as he holsters his gun.

LIEUTENANT
 Maid, huh? You're a pampered
 lot...Have you seen a wounded
 soldier on a white horse in this
 vicinity in, say, the last couple
 hours, or so?

Michael rolls up his eyes, thinks for a moment.

MICHAEL
 Now that you mention it, a few
 miles back me eyes did behold a man
 on the horse you describe runnin'
 hard to the north. Couldn't make
 out if he were a soldier, though.

SOLDIER
 (gestures to the squad)
 Let's go, men! Onward!

They gallop off to the north. Michael sighs with relief.

SHEPHERD
 (at the soldiers)
 Disrespectful wankers!
 (gives Michael a look)
 Did ye lay eyes on such a man,
 Father, if ye don't mind me askin'?

MICHAEL
 I have to confess my eyes may have
 deceived me.

SHEPHERD
 Good on ye, then, Father! Ye might
 have saved the poor bugger's life.
 (beat)
 Well, this is me croft.

He WHISTLES to the dog. The dog turns the sheep through the open gate in the stone fence.

MICHAEL

Can you direct me to St. Brendan's,
then?

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A DECREPIT MAN in rags crawls from a hovel shack. We follow him onto the road as Michael approaches on his horse. He sits back on his haunches in the middle of the road. Waves Michael down with long, outstretched arms.

Michael stops, gazes uncomfortably down at him.

The man looks up pitiably, his voice hoarse, whispery.

DECREPIT MAN

Bless thee, Father. Might I bother
thee to bestow a blessin' on me wee
daughter?

Michael would like nothing better than to spur his horse.

MICHAEL

What kind of blessin'?

DECREPIT MAN

Last Rites, Father, if thee
wouldn't mind. Me infant daughter
has just this moment slipped the
bonds of Earth. Would thee mind so
much?

Michael is torn, looks around impatiently. What the hell.

MICHAEL

Let me get my prayer book, then.

DECREPIT MAN

God bless thee, Father. Follow me.

Michael dismounts. The decrepit man crawls toward his shack.

Michael rummages futilely through the satchel.

MICHAEL

(to himself)

Where the hell is it?...Fuck it.

He pulls out his copy of Shakespeare. Lets it fall open to the page where the four-leaf clover is pressed. He quickly scans the page. This will have to do.

He observes the crawling man for a second, then pulls out a ration of bread from the saddle bag and follows him.