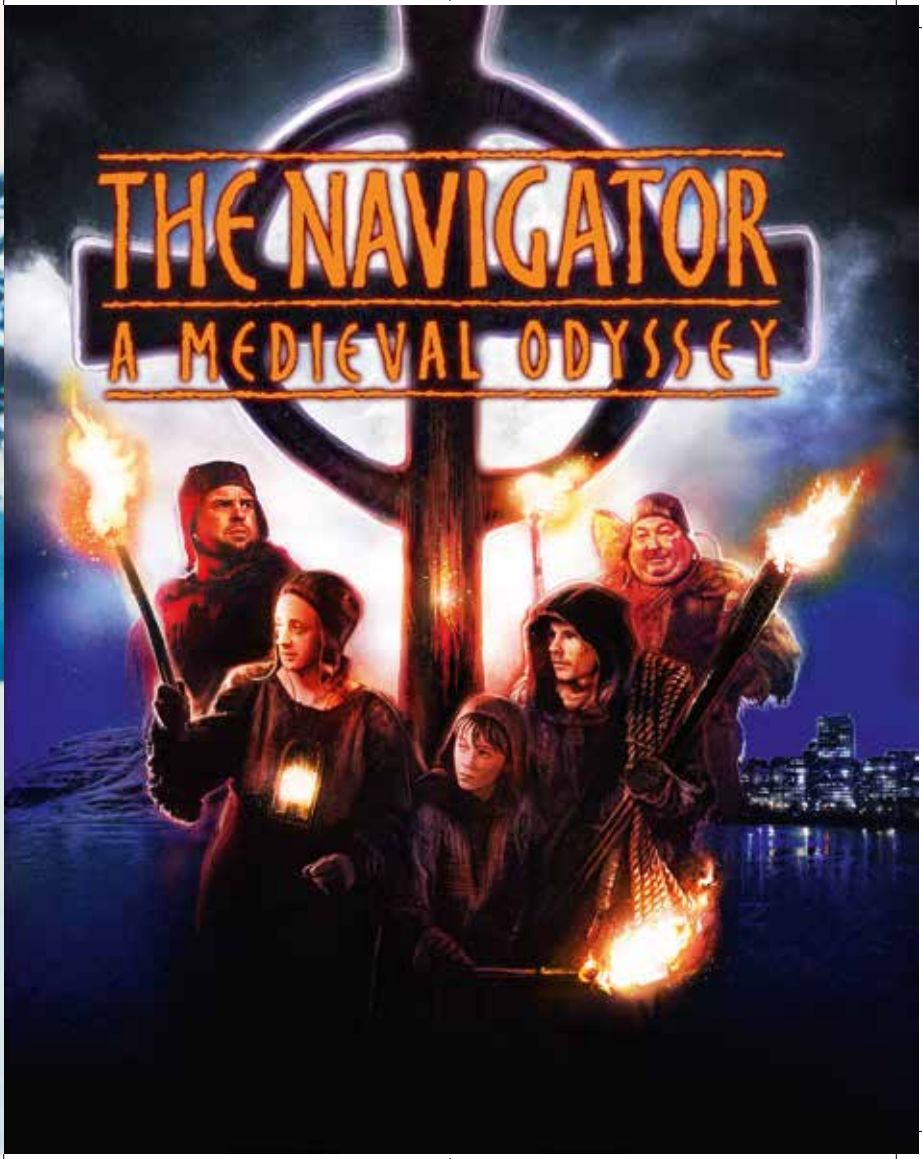
THE NAVIGATOR
A MEDIEVAL ODYSSEY

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FOREWORD

BY NICK RODDICK

The following introduction originally appeared in the Faber and Faber edition of the screenplay to The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey, *published in 1989. Reprinted with permission.*

In early 1984, I found myself sitting in a screening theatre at the New Zealand National Film Unit. It wasn't the best way to see a film. Only one reel had a full soundtrack (the rest just had dialogue, without music or effects). The print wasn't graded, and several of the crew were there to point out, not always in the most hushed tones, the things that still needed to be done. Two hours later, a couple of things were clear. One, I no longer needed to apologise for what most of my friends regarded as a rather quaint interest in New Zealand films (some of them, I think, were convinced I was actually a closet Kiwi who had done a great job on his accent). And two, *Vigil* was the most extraordinary first feature I had ever seen.

Three months later, the film's director, Vincent Ward, came to stay with us in London after *Vigil* had been in competition in Cannes (where, incidentally, it had produced a fiercely divided response). He arrived with a rucksack, and proceeded to buy a large electronic typewriter. They made an interesting combination.

On the typewriter, he began to work at an idea about a group of medieval Cumbrian dwarfs who tunnel through to twentieth-century New Zealand. I wish I could say I thought it was a winner, and that I could see, as clearly from the germ of an idea as from the work print of his previous film, the brilliance of the final result. But I couldn't. Not that this bothered Ward, who continued to work on the idea that winter in New York, then back in New Zealand – though it was clear by then that he had very little interest in being part of the New Zealand film industry.

His interest was with what he wanted to say, and the New Zealand film industry didn't necessarily see that as its top priority. A new film industry is, after all, quite different from a new cinema. New cinemas arise, like those in France, Germany, Brazil and perhaps Britain, when the traditional ones have grown too comfortable and conservative. And a new film industry – and New Zealand's is, to all intents and purposes, even now only ten years old – is a crusading thing that breeds fierce commitments.

For a while, the commitment spreads across the board: financiers feel benevolent, or at any rate patriotic, especially if (as was the case in New Zealand) the government lends a hand with tax concessions; crews work unbelievable hours for (fairly) little money; and critics, who love to discover things, are (briefly) content to join in the celebrations. All that matters is that films are being made: C'mon guys, we can do it!

The problems start when the obvious stories have been told, the novelty has worn off, the financiers have found other, better tax dodges (in New Zealand's case it was kiwi-fruit farms and Broadway musicals) and the critics have reverted to type. By that stage – and that was the stage that had been reached when plans for making what would become *The Navigator* first began to take serious shape towards the end of 1985 – New Zealand's emergent film industry was, to use a graphic local colloquialism, pretty much stuffed.

The film, however, had to be made in New Zealand; so far, all of Ward's films have drawn heavily on the landscape qualities of his native country. But Ward has otherwise pursued a course which is, at best, parallel to the rest of the New Zealand film industry. While Geoff Murphy was filming car stunts up and down the islands to make the country's first commercial success, *Goodbye Pork Pie*, in the late seventies, Ward, who had just finished art school, was making the sort of films that people who had just finished art school tend to make.

Then, as the Kiwi film industry began to expand – the money, thanks to the tax breaks, was still available, and the rest of the world, for a while, was watching – he shunned the car chases and rural melodramas favoured by his peers for the 55-minute *State of Siege* (1978), based on a novel by Janet Frame about a woman in an isolated house. A dark, brooding film, it is more about light and texture than it is about plot. But it was a crucial thing for Ward to make when he did, because it imposed the disciplines of working with a story and working with actors. It was time, he decided, that he tackled those challenges.

Ward is someone who thinks through the process of filmmaking more than any other director I have ever met. Somehow, though, the questions do not seem to pose themselves to him in quite the same way as they do to other filmmakers. Like Martin in *The Navigator* delightedly exploring the properties of the piece of No. 8 wire, Ward has an artisan's respect for his raw material (which sets him apart from his avant-garde beginnings) but refuses to accept that it won't bend any way he wants it to. Increasingly, the result of this thinking through

has helped him carve out a style of filmmaking which is unique way beyond the context of New Zealand cinema.

The film in which it first came together was a documentary, *In Spring One Plants Alone*, which won the Grand Prix at Cinéma du Réal in Paris in 1980. A 45-minute film about an old Maori woman living in an isolated, mud-soaked community, it mirrors the respective rituals of the woman's life in a formal film style all its own. Ward sets the shots up and lets the actions come into them – the exact opposite of tagging along behind them with a mobile camera. He has, through weeks of simply watching, become so familiar with what the 82-year-old woman does, day in, day out, that he can anticipate her actions precisely. The resulting film links a strong stylistic (and therefore artificial) concern to a series of evidently real actions without betraying either. Like all Ward's films, making it was clearly an obsessive process. Watching it is, as a result, a compulsive one.

With Ward's two features, the obsessiveness begins with the script and ends with the final mix. He reckons he drove 16,000 miles before he found the valley he wanted for *Vigil*, and that he looked at between five and six thousand schoolgirls before casting Fiona Kay in the lead. Even by those standards, though, the setting up of *The Navigator* was a marathon. What is more, it is perfectly clear that, if Ward and his producer, John Maynard, had not been obsessive about it, the film would never have been made.

The problems, as is nearly always the case with independent films, were not creative or even logistical; they were financial. Standing apart from the rest of the New Zealand film industry didn't prevent Ward from getting stuffed along with everyone else when that industry all but collapsed in 1986.

Making films is never easy, but it is rarely as hard as it was with *The Navigator*. Not at first, though; with the international critical success of *Vigil* behind them, Ward and Maynard looked all set to move swiftly on to the next project. An impressive slate of international pre-sales (financial commitments from foreign distributors without which very few films are made these days) was racked up and that, combined with the New Zealand Film Commission's biggest ever commitment to a single film, put *The Navigator* on course to be made in July 1986, three years after *Vigil* had been shot. July is mid-winter in New Zealand, and climate – more properly than elements – play an important part in Ward's films. So the room for manoeuvre was limited; if the film didn't start by a certain date, it wouldn't start at all.

The final slice of the budget proved more and more elusive, however, until with half the sets built and a cast and crew assembled, the plug had to be pulled on the whole project days before shooting was to begin, letting a lot of money (not to mention dreams) run down the plughole. There were loud recriminations at the time, with Maynard accusing New Zealand investors of failing to back one of the country's most promising cultural exports. He was right, of course; more concerned (as, I am sure they would argue, is only right) with profit than promise, the potential investors ended up putting their money (NZ$10 million – over twice *The Navigator*'s total budget) into a Broadway musical instead.

With the project necessarily on ice for another year, Maynard and Ward moved to Sydney, in the hope of setting it up there. Finally, they succeeded. And, though the film was eventually made in New Zealand, it was the first Australian-New Zealand co-production, with funding from the Film Commissions of both countries as well as from private sources. Nor could it be made in Wellington, the city around which it was written, so that the very specific juxtapositions built into the original script – hillside, motorway, railway line, harbour, cathedral – no longer existed; the atmosphere and topography of Auckland (where the modern parts of the film were shot) are quite different to those of Wellington.

The vision of the film, however, survives (as it would doubtless have survived a transition to Sydney or, for that matter, Singapore). And it is the vision of the film – the interplay between images and ideas, and the dramatic tension that interplay creates – that determines its achievement, solving any lingering doubts left after *Vigil* that Ward, at 33, is a major-league film director.

In the end, too, for all that he may deny it, he belongs to New Zealand cinema. Only in a new industry would a first feature as unique as *Vigil* have been made. And, without the experience of growing up in what Ward calls "a culture that's very isolated, at the bottom of the world", the vision which became *The Navigator* would never have been had quite those elements of sharpness and strangeness, of intense practicality (see, for instance, the scene in which the spike is cast) and intense peculiarity, like the horse in the boat.

Parallels with the work of other, established directors are obvious – bizarre details break through the studiedly realistic surface of Fellini's early films, too; the dark imaginings of Bergman's middle period have a similarly rigorous set of rules; the quests are undertaken almost for their own sake in many of John Boorman's films. But that doesn't mean there are influences in Ward's work, and there are certainly none of those *hommages* that pepper the

work of Ward's European contemporaries. His films are, intensely and uniquely, his own. But, in a strange and contradictory way, they are very much New Zealand's too; it's not just in his films, but on them as well, that a sense of place exerts itself.

THE NAVIGATOR: A MEDIEVAL ODYSSEY

BY KIM NEWMAN

The opening section of *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* (1988) is an immersive plunge into a past that seems like an alien landscape but turns out to be populated by folks who are all too recognisably human. In 1348, with Europe depopulated by the Black Death, a Cumbrian mining village lives in terror of the approaching plague. Everyone knows the symptoms – a few boils in the armpit can mean a horrible, imminent death.

Child seer Griffin (Hamish McFarlane) recounts his contradictory visions so insistently that he startles and irritates the people he is trying to save. Griffin dreams the disaster can be averted if a party of the community's menfolk dig a tunnel to the other side of the world and erect a crucifix on a cathedral in "God's City". The expedition leader is Griffin's older brother Connor (Bruce Lyons), who is concerned for his pregnant wife Linnet (Sarah Peirse). The stalwart, if terrified, band includes sceptical, angry Searle (Marshall Napier) and his meek, pious brother Ulf (Noah Appleby) – who clutches a wooden statue of "the little virgin", intended as another offering – plus the sensitive, cheerful, gentle Martin (Paul Livingston) and grumpy, resentful Arno (Chris Haywood), who has had his hand chopped off for "borrowing a horse". These archetypal rude rustics could be trudging along on foot behind Chaucer's horseback pilgrims, but could equally be characters in a mud and rags sitcom: the rolypoly, childish Ulf is a dead ringer for Private Doberman (Maurice Gosfield) in *The Phil Silvers Show* (1955-59).

Medieval Cumbria is played by starkly beautiful stretches of New Zealand. While Peter Jackson was still shooting low-budget zombie/gore comedies (*Bad Taste* [1988], *Braindead* aka *Dead Alive* [1992]), his writer-director countryman Vincent Ward – following his compelling, grim backwoods melodrama *Vigil* (1984) with this essay in the fantastic – was already discovering the cinematic versatility of New Zealand's landscape – finding the imaginary realms Jackson would explore in his J.R.R. Tolkien-derived films. With harsh, discordant early music (from composer/arranger Davood A. Tabrizi) on the soundtrack and a great deal of damp, earthy, hard-scrabble detail, Ward's Middle Ages are influenced by the seemingly contradictory visions of Ingmar Bergman in *The Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde*

inseglet, 1957) and Terry Gilliam in *Jabberwocky* (1977). Plague-threatened villagers dance in silhouette on the skyline as in Bergman, though to a different end, and a winged skeleton figure flaps through the sky like one of Gilliam's wonkily animated creatures. In turn, Ward's version of the past has been influential, with echoes in films as diverse as Aleksey German's Russian *Hard to Be a God* (*Trudno byt bogom*, 2013) and Rainer Sarnet's Estonian *November* (2017) – both of which use black and white to depict beauty and ugliness in the same image.

Ward, however, allows splashes of colour even in the framing medieval sections, suggesting the magical – indeed, spiritual – enlightenment that is as much a part of the villagers' world as the plague or the grinding, never-ending work. Some versions of the film open with a title explaining to the audience that colour will be coming along after the monochrome opening – perhaps as a reminder to television programmers not to repeat the error of the UK's Channel 4 in their debut broadcast of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), assuming from the first reel that it was a black and white film then not bothering to switch to colour when the film changes… or perhaps to reassure audiences that they're not just stuck with a gloomy black and white suffering peasant art movie – a staple of upscale boutique cinemas for decades – but an entertaining fantasy that clocks in at just a lick over an hour and a half. The true suffering peasant movie invariably prolongs the agony to merciless lengths. A re-release further shifted the film into a more commercially appealing zone by replacing the subtitle with 'A Time-Travel Adventure', though that probably didn't much please admirers of Bill and Ted.

Burrowing into the earth – using a fabulous wood-and-metal drilling contraption – the pilgrims eventually reach "the other side of the world", as their mine-shaft feeds into a sewer, and they find themselves in Auckland, New Zealand in the 1980s.

Later, director-writer Jean-Marie Poiré would make *Les Visiteurs* (1993), in which a foolish knight (Jean Reno) and his squire (Christian Clavier) are transported by sorcery from the Middle Ages to contemporary France. The knockabout comedy was successful enough to spin off two sequels – *Les Couloirs du temps: Les Visiteurs II* (1998) and *Les Visiteurs: La Révolution* (2016) and a Hollywood remake, *Just Visiting* (2001), all with Poiré, Reno and Clavier. This franchise is squarely in the tradition of time-twisting comedy-dramas like Nicholas Meyer's *Time After Time* (1979) – in which H.G. Wells (Malcolm McDowell) and Jack the Ripper (David Warner) travel from Victorian London to 1970s San Francisco – or

Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* (1985), in which a teenager (Michael J. Fox) jaunts from 1985 to 1955 to tinker with the timeline of his parents (and perhaps the world). These japes, more in the spirit of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) than Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), all play games with the present – which is viewed askance by characters who are transported here, or is seen through the refracted light of a version of the past. Typical of the form are sequences in which Wells, eager to experience the technological utopia he has written about, discovers the culinary joys of a McDonald's happy meal ("pommes frites – fries are pommes frites!") or is shattered by an afternoon cinema viewing of *Exorcist IV*, or the disbelief of the Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) of 1955 in the time traveller's claim that the US president thirty years hence will be Ronald Reagan ("… and who's the Secretary of the Treasury? Jack Benny?"). *The Navigator* takes a more daring, equally witty approach by having its Cumbrians be so firmly locked into their Dark Ages worldview that they never quite realise they've travelled in time. Ward has reported that his first draft of the script – written with Geoff Chapple and Kely Lyons – was "a broad comedy, rather brash and funny and full of warrior gnomes", suggesting that he saw a future represented by the *Visiteurs* films and decided not to go there.

The Auckland section of *The Navigator* is a tour of a world of dangerous wonders as physical and threatening as the plague. It makes much of the peril of crossing a road with demonic-seeming traffic whizzing in both directions but doesn't have the villagers assume speeding cars and trucks are dragons. Ward's original inspiration for the story was a bad experience trying to cross a German autobahn on foot and getting stranded in the middle – where, he says, he had the idea for the film. It's almost a radical twist on the time travel formula that these bumpkins from the past aren't stupid – when they break through into the sewer, they've heard of tunnels to carry away "night-soil", into which each household can empty its bucket, and aren't surprised that the City of God is equipped with such conveniences. As is shown by their rigged-up digging machine and little inventions like Searle's candle-holding miner's hat, they have no superstitious fear of technology, but are simply and sensibly wary of its dangers. They lo cate a foundry which is just on the point of being closed down by its smell – recognising that a smithy is still a smithy even in a strange land, and only mildly piqued by an electric grinding wheel or a plastic faceguard. The most intriguing, telling observation any of the travellers makes comes when the tough, genial workers in the going-out-of-business foundry – typical Kiwis who just think the Cumbrians "have been in the bush for a while" but are happy to help out on a quixotic quest – say that a cross intended for the cathedral hasn't been finished because the promised funds haven't been raised, and Martin muses incredulously, "You mean the Church is poor?"

Though they try to hold to their belief that Auckland is the City of God, it becomes apparent that evils transcend time and place. While boating across the harbour (with a stolen white horse threatening to tip over the stolen vessel and Arno worried about losing his other hand), the party are spooked by the brief surfacing of a nuclear submarine, confirming that there are leviathans in the world. This relates to a snatch of TV commentary on New Zealand's then-current foreign policy controversy involving its at least tacit participation in the US-led nuclear deterrent (allowing, after all, for the shadow of Ronald Reagan to fall). Poor, vision-benighted Griffin is drawn to a bank of TV screens – "the Devil in every window" – broadcasting a surrealist warning film about AIDS, a reminder that the modern era isn't free of plagues. In *The BFI Companion to Horror* (1997), Australian-based critics David Carroll and Kyla Ward note of this public information short, "If there is a single Australian horror icon, it would have to be a succinct image: The Grim Reaper at the bowling alley, bowling down men, women and children to promote AIDS awareness in the mid-80s."

Every quest – and every odyssey – has its perils. *The Navigator* is oddly bereft of sirens – the only significant female character is left-behind Linnet, and there are no night-time encounters with hookers or party girls, who feature in practically every other time-travel-to-the-present story. Instead, Odysseus-like Connor has an encounter with a giant when caught on the front of a train and stuck there screaming like a ship's figurehead as he is given a whirlwind tour of the railway system – Ward uses a subjective camera to whoosh the audience through the city, but also shows the physical stresses of such speeds as Connor's face distorts like an astronaut's during take-off. Meanwhile, Griffin – whom even true believers are getting

fed up with – is troubled by a new, fragmentary vision which reveals that in the process of putting the new-forged cross up on the (relatively modest) cathedral, one of the villagers – the one wearing a single gauntlet – will plunge to his death, which disturbs everyone but Arno (the doomed man definitely has two hands), though it's Connor who has the single glove.

This urgent, stuttering bit of plottiness is an adaptation of another time travel convention by which a terrible future occurrence – usually a death – seems unavoidable, but what actually happens isn't quite what the protagonist has been led to believe. It's a twist in *Time After Time*, but dates back to René Clair's *It Happened Tomorrow* (1944). Ward, who was later invited to develop *Alien*^{3} (1992) on the strength of *The Navigator*, shows in the climax that he can handle Hitchcockian suspense as well as magic surrealism, with an extended instance of precipitous, white-knuckle dangling from fraying ropes or rickety ladders high up above the ground. As it happens, a career in commercial franchise cinema wasn't what lay ahead. After much development, the *Alien*^{3} poison chalice was handed to David Fincher, who had his own woes with the project. Ward has not been prolific, though he expands on his visionary, questing cinema with the war-torn romance *Map of the Human Heart* (1992), whose Inuit protagonist is as strange an import to the RAF in World War Two as the Cumbrians are to the 1980s, the posthumous fantasy *What Dreams May Come* (1998), from Richard Matheson's novel, and the historical drama *River Queen* (2005), set during the wars between British settlers and New Zealand's Maori population in the 1860s.

Essentially, *The Navigator* is a medieval movie: with characterisations out of tall tales, an illuminated visual style, and a clear-eyed, fervent trust in the magic. In its coda, the film returns to black and white and stirs from the dream voyage – which now seems to be a story or fable told by the child to his elders – to face realities in the affecting last few scenes. The City of God was only imaginary, the Cumbrians conclude – but we know it wasn't, that it's the world as it really will be, so a rational ending still finds space for the miraculous.

Kim Newman is a novelist, critic and broadcaster. His fiction includes the Anno Dracula series, The Quorum, Life's Lottery, Professor Moriarty: The House of the D'Urbervilles and An English Ghost Story. *His non-fiction includes* Nightmare Movies *and BFI Classics studies of* Cat People, Doctor Who *and* Quatermass and the Pit. *He co-wrote the comic miniseries* Witchfinder: Mysteries of Unland *with Maura McHugh, art by Tyler Crook. He is contributing editor to* Sight & Sound *and* Empire *magazines.*

PRESS BOOK

SYNOPSIS

It is Cumbria 1384, the year of the Black Death. A medieval mining village lives in fear of the advancing plague. Griffin's older brother Connor returns from the outside world in a state of despair, until Griffin tells of his dream – and reveals the only hope of survival.

Make tribute to God. Place a spire on a distant cathedral. Do it before dawn or the village is lost.

Griffin sets out on a bizarre journey with Connor, Searle the pragmatist, Searle's naïve brother Ulf, Martin the philosopher and Arno the one-handed ferryman. They reach a pit, which is rumoured to be a shaft through to the far side of the earth. It's just as Griffin dreamed it, and the medieval expedition demands more detail of Griffin's prophetic dream.

They tunnel through the earth, to a new world – New Zealand, the Antipodes, 1988. Surrounded by echoes of the fear which haunted medieval England, they pursue their dogged goal, but Griffin has a chilling premonition. One of them will die at the cathedral.

VINCENT WARD

Vincent Ward's quest to make *The Navigator* began four years ago.

Born in 1956, Ward comes from a family which has been farming in New Zealand for four generations. He attended Ilam School of Art, where he intended to be a painter and sculptor but, instead, became a filmmaker.

At 21, he co-wrote and directed the short feature *A State of Siege*, an adaptation of the novel by Janet Frame, which won awards at the Chicago Film Festival (a Golden Hugo) and the Miami Film Festival (a gold medal for Special Jury Prize).

After its release Ward journeyed into the remote and mountainous bush of the Urewera region to live in an isolated Maori community to capture the relationship between an

82-year-old woman and her totally dependent 40-year-old son. The two-year struggle resulted in *In Spring One Plants Alone*. The film was the Grand Prix co-winner in the 1982 Cinema du Reel and was a Silver Hugo winner at the Chicago Film Festival.

In 1984 his film *Vigil* – the story of a solitary child on a remote hill-county farm and her growing perceptions of a threatening universe – became the first New Zealand film selected for competition at Cannes. It went on to win the Grand Prix at both the Madrid Film Festival and at the Prades Film Festival.

The Navigator is the result of four years' intensive work, which began in New York and finished in Australia.

Ward lives out of a suitcase, he likes to work while he travels, his fixed address is post office box and his longest residence in one place has been six months.

He is currently working on a small book of journeys.

THE INTERVIEW

Navigator is essentially about an act of faith – people believing they can change the course of their life.

Some historians have likened the 14th century to the 20th century. They were both calamitous ages. The 14th century had plague, war and holocausts and this century has seen wars on vast scale and the potential for further holocaust.

I liked the parallel of the little, isolated village in Cumbria being a pocket skipped over by plague, and of New Zealand, too, being a little pocket separate from the rest of the world.

In both these cases, two small and isolated places have the belief that, to some degree, they can affect their own destiny – even though the odds seem against them.

I believe faith and hope and prerequisites for action and change, regardless of the odds.

Basically, what I wanted to do was to look at the 20th century through medieval eyes.

It's as if the demons of our contemporary world – our technological monsters of destruction – could be foreseen in the nightmares of medieval men. A dream of hell coming out of a medieval life that was bleak and colourless

By contrast, the 20th century, as seen in a vision, would be richer and more vivid. For this reason, I use colour to delineate the child's vision of the 20th century, and black and white for medieval times.

To constantly remind the viewer that this is a medieval vision of the 20th century, the 20th century had to be portrayed in medieval colours. The blues used by the Linbourg brothers in the Duc de Berry's *Book of Hours* I used in the azure of roadside telephone boxes, police car lights and the moonlit grey-blue apparition of a nuclear submarine. Similar blues are those found in Chartres Cathedral (a blue it is said that glaziers have lost the art of making).

The blue is contrasted with the fiery, hellish tones of Bosch, Bruegel and Grunewald. The fires of medieval torches – the sodium of the orange lights of the motorway and burning gold of molten metal. Always, it's a world caught between two spheres of the rising and setting sun – the timeframe medieval miners would relate to, as they would work literally from dawn to dusk; 12 hours in summer, 10 in winter.

In medieval times, as always, the rich had the most powerful voice. Visionaries like Nostradamus, a doctor, well-off, elite, trained at the University of Paris, are remembered in history. But I liked the idea of giving a voice to the underprivileged – a nonentity, a mere child, from a tiny isolated pocket, unimportant in world events, but whose vision is pure and clear. No matter how valuable somebody's perception, coming from a lowly source would have ensured that it would be knowledge wasted, lost.

In my first feature *Vigil*, the central character was a 12-year-old girl who invented her own realm of reality and lived through her imagination.

As we grow older and learn to rationalise the world, we often deny the richness of dreams, the importance of emotional adventure, the thrill of risk, and the vulnerability of courage.

This new film centres around collective action, where a group of people protect something they love, where individuals fear a loss of courage in a situation where other people depend on them.

In a sense, the act of faith made by those who follow this child on his quest has a parallel in the making of the film. It was a very hard film to make a I was lucky to have a producer who made that act of faith, put himself on the line both professionally and personally and stuck to what proved to be a four-year task to make this film.

It was this belief, and that of the cast and crew, which sustained this production.

BRUCE LYONS (CONNOR)

Canadian actor Bruce Lyons has lived and worked in New York City for the past 12 years. He trained with Stella Adler and Herbert Berghof and has extensive experience in American and Canadian theatre productions. Recent work included the male lead in Bud Gardner's film *Model Behaviour* and he played Lee in the off-Broadway production of Sam Shepard's *True West*. He also played Macbeth in the American Theatre of Actors' off-Broadway production. Lyons says this of *The Navigator*: "Making *The Navigator* was one of the most important experiences I've had and certainly one of the most demanding. It required me to look at a side of myself I'd usually prefer not to see – the so-called ideal hero, seemingly incapable of doing wrong, Connor was vulnerable from start to finish.

"I don't feel quite the same person after *Navigator*. But despite having gone through all the real and imagined horrors that Connor witnessed (I found some approximation of these in the South Bronx), the experience was ultimately an uplifting one, in large part because of the extraordinary beauty of New Zealand itself.

"The film also altered my attitude towards the Middle Ages, which had been quite obscured by superstition. I found in the role a disquieting yet exciting contemporaneity of spirit. And considering that Gothic cathedrals had already been built before the arrival of the Black Death, it became clear to me that those were great and mysterious times."

HAMISH McFARLANE (GRIFFIN)

Ward visited more than a thousand classrooms in the Auckland area over a two-year period in his search for the child with the qualities he wanted.

When 11-year-old Hamish McFarlane got the note from his school asking him to go to

some acting lessons, he thought it was a joke but decided to give it a go. After months of workshopping, when he remained one of the final eight being considered, he became utterly determined to get the role.

During the long months in difficult physical conditions, that determination and resilience enabled him to weather the hardships better than most of the adults on the film.

He was always interested in everything that was going on, behind the camera as well as in front of it, and the only problem proved keeping him off the set when he needed to rest. The first thing he did with his money from the film was to buy a video camera of his own, and plan his work with cameramen over his school holidays.

NOEL APPLEBY (ULF)

Fifty-five-year-old Noel Appleby describes himself as "someone who laughs at weddings and cries at funerals". *The Navigator* was his first acting role in a feature film, although he says he has been "wallpaper" in a few others. Since 1974, Appleby has worked in the drainage department of the Auckland City Council, often digging drains or working on the sewers. Previously he had worked in the commercial fishing and earth-moving businesses.

Appleby says *Navigator* was the most difficult thing he had done in his life, but the most rewarding – "as sure as dawn's going to break tomorrow".

MARSHALL NAPIER (SEARLE)

New Zealand actor Marshall Napier has been associated with the New Zealand film industry since its inception, playing important roles in 13 films ranging from the comedies *Goodbye Pork Pie* and *Came a Hot Friday* to the dramas *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* and *Bad Blood*. He has also acted in almost every major New Zealand television series and has had a long association with the country's theatre. Ward says of Napier: "He has a remarkable ability to transform himself totally into someone else, to the point that he is difficult to recognise from one film to the next. He is one of the very few who can achieve this on film."

CHRIS HAYWOOD (ARNO)

Haywood has become a veteran of Australian films since he moved to Australia in 1970, after training with the E15 acting school in London and forming his own production company. In all, he has had roles in more than 40 Australian films including *The Cars that Ate Paris*, *Newsfront*, *Breaker Morant*, *Malcolm*, *The Coca-Cola Kid*, *Razorback* and *The Man from Snowy River*.

His roguish charm and spirited energy lent life and comedy to the part of the rather truculent Arno.

PAUL LIVINGSTON (MARTIN)

The Navigator was Livingston's first professional acting role, and his recent success as a stand-up comic placed him in good stead. Livingston is a co-founder of the Sydney multimedia performance group Even Orchestra and his quirky humour, which shines in his performances of the philosopher Martin, can be seen in his animated films. His film *Double X* won awards in Australia and at the Chicago Film Festival.

JOHN MAYNARD (THE PRODUCER)

John Maynard came to the film business ten years ago with a reputation as an innovative and uncompromising arts administrator.

He has always had a strong belief in the value of a small indigenous film industry, and has worked tirelessly in New Zealand to realise his aim. Maynard has served time as a cultural politician, including a term on the New Zealand Film Commission.

Maynard prefers to work in a supportive role with creative people. He evaluates films on a project-by-project basis, and is well-known for taking risks with new talent.

His feature films include *Skin Deep* in 1978 ("New Zealand's breakthrough film..." *Variety*), and *Strata* in 1981 ("So bizarre that it's difficult to believe that anyone else – except Werner Herzog – would ever have considered it..." *Stills Magazine*). He also produced a handful of socially and politically committed documentaries, and co-produced a series of seven half-hour dramas with new directors and writers.

Maynard has worked with Vincent Ward for seven years. He produced Ward's first feature *Vigil*, New Zealand's first film In Competition, Cannes 1984.

The Navigator is the second Maynard/Ward collaboration. Initially conceived as a New Zealand project, *The Navigator* had to be abandoned in 1988 when its financial structure collapsed six weeks before principal photography. After 20 years in New Zealand, Australian-born Maynard was forced to return to Sydney, when the project was restructured as a co-production between the two countries.

This degree of commitment has come to be expected from Maynard, a determined and stubborn man who shies away from publicity. On working with Maynard, Ward says, "He is a tremendously loyal person, with faith in other people's abilities. At heart he is a very supportive producer."

GARY HANNAM (CO-PRODUCER)

"I have had the privilege of financing the films which launched the careers of two of New Zealand's most outstanding creative talents – Vincent Ward and Roger Donaldson."

So says Gary Hannam, who began his feature film involvement with the financing of Donaldson's 1981 hit *Smash Palace*. Since then he has executive produced or co-produced five New Zealand features, including two with John Maynard, one of which was Vincent Ward's *Vigil*.

Although, says Hannam, *Vigil*'s critical acclaim outshone its financial performance, he has a total belief in Ward's potential. And he adds: "*The Navigator* had made eight years of struggling to make films in New Zealand worthwhile."

Hannam's company the Film Investment Corporation of New Zealand Ltd placed the vital risk money as a distribution guarantee which enabled production of *The Navigator* to begin. His company has since gone on to invest in North American feature productions as well as 24 hours of animated stories for children's television and video.

THE MUSIC

From its inception, Ward has been conscious that *The Navigator* would be a film in which the music would play a particularly important role.

He used researchers in Britain, Italy, New Zealand and Australia to build up a large collection of medieval, Celtic and other ethnic music to provide the composer with a base to work from.

He wanted strong, simple music with the naïve feel found, for instance, in ethnic music or in the choirs of mining villages.

It was appropriate that the music should use entirely traditional instruments, with an emphasis on percussion and pipes.

Ward needed a composer experienced in both classical and folk traditions, experienced in working with musicians from different ethnic sources, and who would be extremely flexible.

DAVOOD TABRIZI (COMPOSER)

Davood Tabrizi wrote his first film score when he was 15. At the age of 20 he graduated from the Conservatorium at Teheran University, with a degree in composition, and wrote several scores for Iranian and European films. His penchant for writing political songs had hastened his departure from Iran, where he left a home, car and a valuable collection of ancient instruments. He arrived in Australia with two instruments and two thousand dollars.

Tabrizi is a classical Iranian percussionist with experience in Western and European techniques. In the past eight years he has played with a variety of musicians who play medieval and ethnic music and written scores for *Hostage*, *The Surfer* and *Rocking the Foundation*. He is also the musical director of the Multi-Cultural Musicians Guild.

Tabrizi says *The Navigator* is the hardest film he has worked on. "Here I was an Iranian trying to look at the world through Celtic eyes. At one stage I was sitting there writing

lyrics in English for an Irish musician to translate into Gaelic." His research for the film was painstaking and involved listening to literally hundreds of tapes and musicians. He could use few modern instruments, strings or synthesisers and he had to draw together musicians from different disciplines to achieve the final result.

GEOFF SIMPSON (PHOTOGRAPHY)

Geoff Simpson graduated from the South Australian School of Art, and then spent a year at the London Film School. He started his career working on information films and documentaries for the South Australian Film Corporation before going on to make his name on documentaries like *The Migrant Experience* and *Nicaragua No Pasaran*. He was second-unit cameraman on *Mad Max 2*, moving into feature films as director of photography with *Playing Beattie Bow* and *Call Me Mr Brown* (which won the ASC Merit Award for Cinematography).

SALLY CAMPBELL (PRODUCTION DESIGNER)

Campbell has worked in the industry for 10 years, since Sydney director Jim Sharman gave her her break in *Summer of Secrets*. During that time she has worked in almost every area including wardrobe, props buying and animal handling, but most of her work has been as a set decorator. Her first major job as production designer was on *The Umbrella Woman*, followed by *High Tide*.

Campbell says *The Navigator* was a gigantic task, with long hours and intense pressure, but that the pioneer spirit and camaraderie of her New Zealand crew saw her through.

JOHN SCOTT (EDITOR)

One of Australia's leading editors, John Scott has cut more than 20 feature films, which have included *Newsfront*, *Heatwave*, *The Coca-Cola Kid*, *One Night Stand*, *The Umbrella Woman* and, most recently, Fred Schepisi's *Roxanne*.

FILMING

June 5, 1987, a pregnant woman, a four-foot person, four children and a film crew leave for a frozen volcanic lake more than a thousand metres above sea-level in New Zealand's Southern Alps.

Accessible only by helicopter, or by a three-day climb along a steep path, Lake Harris's isolated, intense cold, waist-deep snow and unpredictable weather made it seem like a dangerous location.

For some of the cast and crew it was their first film and they were apprehensive about the conditions they would face.

Eleven-year-old Hamish McFarlane, after three months of determined auditioning for the part of Griffin, was worried about the cold, and nervous that he might dry up in front of the camera.

For Noel Appleby, the 55-year-old drain digger who worked in the Auckland sewers, it was his first feature film. Short and fat, he was worried that he wouldn't be able to physically cope with the conditions. "Short legs and deep snow, thin air and a fat man don't go together," he said.

Paul Livingston, a Sydney comedian, had never left Australia, never acted professionally before, never flown in a plane and never seen snow. It was only the second job in his life.

Hyperactive with excitement, swinging his arms and raving, eight-year-old Tony Herbert from one of the poorer housing estates in South Auckland raced off the plane in Christchurch to buy something at the airport shop. Then it struck him: what if they had different money in the South Island? Reassured that they didn't he ran into the shop and bought a copy of *Playboy* magazine.

If the South Island seemed another country, Lake Harris was another world, untouched and silent. By now, normally, the lake would have been frozen over. July was the only month of the year when the *Navigator* crew could get permission to use the lake – at other times climbers would be using this part of the Alps, but at this time of year the conditions on the mountain were too harsh.

Canadian-born Bruce Lyons who plays Connor, Griffin's older brother, is a dark man with burning eyes. Physically energetic and intense, when he speaks he grips the eye like the ancient mariner. His self-analytical approach to his craft contrasted with the very matter-of-fact approach of the Australian and New Zealand crew. Lyons had a deep emotional commitment to the film having been involved with it since the beginning. His wife had co-written the script with the director Vincent Ward in New York and New Zealand in 1983.

He would later describe working with Ward as being like joining a medieval craft guild where you signed your apprenticeship in blood. Ward was the alchemist – and all the really great alchemists nearly went mad or died.

"They were injured or poisoned, shut out of the light with huge variations of temperatures and horrible stinks blowing out of their flasks and combustion chambers. They were dark and eccentric and, unless they gave up their egos, they were condemned," Lyons said.

Certainly, within the small word of New Zealand filmmaking, Ward had a name for choosing hard locations. The crew's joke went: Vincent found a location today. We are not using it. You can get to it by road.

By these standards, Lake Harris was perfect for a Vincent Ward film.

It took two hours to get the gear in and set up a base camp, with the two helicopters coming in and out constantly to bring crew and equipment. The crew were rigged out in arctic clothing but even then people worried about the possibility of frostbite, and some were nervous about the prospect of living in these conditions.

For Paul Livingston, Noel Appleby, Hamish, Marshall Napier, and Kathleen Kelly, a four-foot 59-year-old woman with curvature of the spine, it was their first time in a helicopter.

Jumping from the helicopter into three-and-a-half feet of snow was exhilarating for Paul Livingston. Not so for Kelly. Dressed in long-johns, trousers, three dresses, an army jacket, three pairs of socks, bindings, plastic bags and large boots, she was unable to keep her footing and she appeared to sink into the snow up to her head.

DOP Geoff Simpson's most lasting image was the sight of the green and red Portaloo being flown in high about the mountains – a bizarre imposition on the emptiness.

In the untouched quality of the snow, the mist and fog rising out of the lake, or creeping silently towards the lip of the mountain, the crew's flurry of activities seemed more technical confusion: tiny and insignificant. The crew waded through the waste-deep snow setting up for each shot while the actors stood on the sidelines waiting and freezing. Ward, having spent an hour and a half clearing tracks in the snow, was to get frostnip in his toes that would leave them without sensation for more than a month. Lyons, standing dressed in three wetsuits in the lake for two hours at a time, hardly felt the bitter cold because he was so moved by the landscape. Chris Haywood, in full costume with one arm bound into a stump, made himself an igloo.

The film's budget meant the crew could only have two days in the mountain. Even before he got there, Ward felt it was too little time for him to get all the shots needed, and once up there the pressure was on.

Each day started at dawn and ended at dusk when the helicopters came in to ensure everyone got out before dark. On one side of the mountain the valleys were filled with mist. If it drifted over the ridge, to where they were filming, it would be too late to get the helicopters in – or out – and they would be stranded. As well as the six-months' pregnant Sarah Pierse, there were four children, old people and other cast members barely physically fit enough to use the narrow path out.

On the last day, the film's most important climactic scene was scheduled – the highly emotional moment where Hamish and Lyons face each other after Griffin realises his betrayal.

It was after 5pm when the sun went down over the ridge, producing the right light for the shot. By the time everyone was ready for the take it was 5.30pm. Everybody knew it was the last chance to get the scene and the adrenaline was running high.

At 5.40pm the cameras rolled, and then, halfway through the take, the mountain reverberated to the sound of the helicopters coming in, the noise deafening as they slowly hovered over the lip of the ridge. Everyone shouted at each other. The director was furious, shouting on his walkie-talkie at the helicopters to go away, yelling at his first assistant, and cursing his producer on the RT that the film's most important shot was ruined.

But as he stood shaking his fist at the helicopters and shouting above the roar of the engines

for them to go back, Ward was aware of how ridiculous it was. From the air he was just an insect in the snow, angry, inconsequential and pathetic.

As the take continued despite the chaos, Dick Reade, the dryly taciturn sound engineer, remembered thinking: oh well, no use shouting, it will just have to be post-synched.

Lyons could think only in images from the Vietnam War – the helicopter blasting everything in sight.

As they hovered in, whirring on the soft snow they whipped up a wind storm on the lake, which blew the snow across Lyons' face.

Ironically, later in rushes, he saw this shot as somehow changing his character's climactic last confrontation. Instead of answering his brother's question of "Why did you do this?", it seemed to Lyon that in the vastness of this environment he was answering God.

It was obvious after the first week that it was going to be a long and physically hard shoot. Over the next nine weeks, the fatigued film crew struggled on with the wet, the cold and the long night shoots, a maverick horse in a tiny dinghy in the middle of a large harbour and a large submarine in the middle of a tiny ex-sewage pond.

By week five, the strain had started to tell. Production designer Sally Campbell, a spectacular redhead popular with everyone, and her crew had been working 14-hour and, sometimes, 24-hour days since the weeks in pre-production. Reduced pre-production and changes of locations and schedule had set them back, but in light of the difficulties they had achieved superhuman results. The village, the location for most of this week, had taken six people working fulltime for six weeks to construct. Set in a disused quarry, the artificial snow imported from Australia thinly covered the harsh scoria.

It was cold, and the crew were tired.

Costume designer Glenys Jackson, who had worked with Ward before on *Vigil*, was muttering, "Never again, I don't even like adventure films, I like intimate films where people have dinner together and discuss things." Jackson was under extreme pressure. She had had only a couple of inexperienced women to help her for several weeks. On the week's biggest day, she had to dress 56 extras in their many layer of clothes, tying the frayed bindings around every boot. An increasingly tired Sarah Pierse trudged up and down the hill on the hard scoria, and even the Scottish deerhounds were treading gingerly on grazed paws. The only people not moaning about the cold and the hard ground were the children, the youngest of which, a four-year-old with a face like a ruddy Botticelli angel, even kept his good nature when he was dragged down a steep hill on the edge of the quarry in the wake of a wayward deerhound.

But, despite all the slog, there was always a feeling amongst everyone that they were working on something special; their belief in the film was never lost. Third AD Christine Haebler remembers hardened crew members standing with tears in their eyes during the filming of one of Hamish's most moving scenes. Geoff Simpson said: "The crew was incredibly supportive. Some of them were inexperienced people, but they worked as fast as anything. In some way the morale was low, in another the madness created a spirit of its own. They wanted to work, they wanted to support Vincent, and they wanted the film to be a success."

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey was digitally restored by the New Zealand Film Commission from original film elements. The restoration was supervised and approved by Vincent Ward. The film is presented in its original theatrical aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with stereo sound.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield

Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni

Technical Producer James White

QC Manager Nora Mehenni

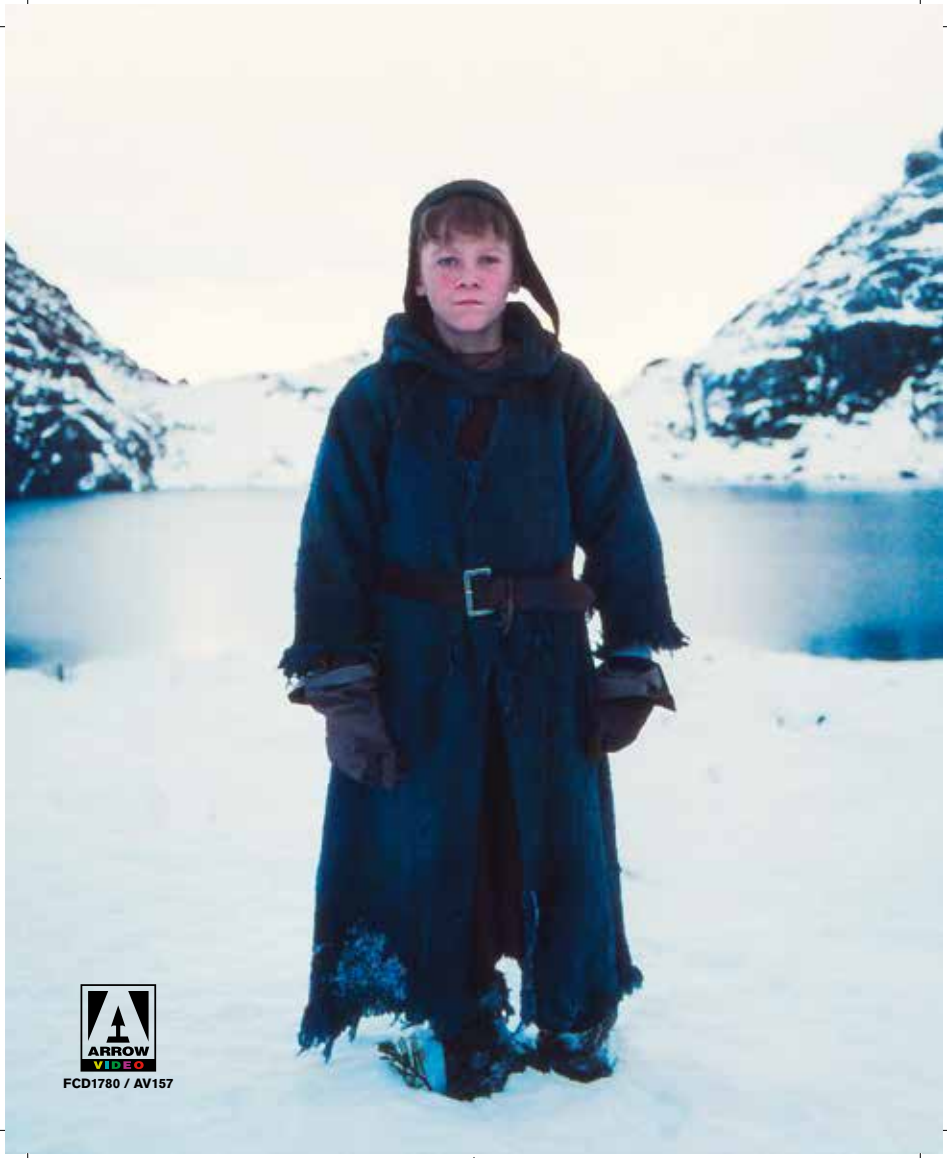
Authoring and Subtitling The Engine House Media Services

Design Oink Creative

Artwork Paul Shipper

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Liane Cunje, Ian Mantgani, Lesley Mensah, Kim Newman, Jon Robertson, Nick Roddick



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