

Richard's interview (p. 38-39)

FROM DWARF TO HUMAN

In addition to *Into the Storm* and *The Hobbit*, **Richard Armitage** has acted in *Captain America* and even in one of the *Star Wars* films. He is not deliberately looking for effect movies, though.

- I like to work without visual effects. I like filming where there is a feel of reality. The water and wind machines in *Into the Storm* created realism. It fascinated me that the movie dealt with something as topical but as commonplace as the weather, of which we are constantly talking about and trying to document. The news on TV about the climate are largely made up of material that people have filmed with their mobile phones.

He also wanted to distance himself from his previous project.

- I was finishing *The Hobbit* and looking for the next project. After playing a dwarf I wanted to have a normal-sized role. After a fantasy, I longed for something more realistic and closer to today. Warner Bros introduced various movies to me, and this movie was so different from *The Hobbit*. That made me decide on this movie, Armitage says.

- I flew to Detroit right away, after finishing with *The Hobbit*. I had about 12 hours to get used to being human again.

Putting one's soul into a fantasy creature or into a human demands different kind of background work.

- In fantasy movies, especially in one like *The Hobbit* where I play a character that really doesn't exist, you can only rely on your imagination. Luckily, I was an avid reader as a child and I have a very vivid imagination. In movies where I play a character in the contemporary world, like in this movie an American teacher, I look for someone real to use as a starting point. I was remembering one of my own teachers when I was young and updating the character to the situation here and now.

One of Armitage's routines is to create a backstory to his characters.

- In the case of Gary Morris, the most important thing was his family history, what had happened to his family. His wife is dead, which has its effects in the relationships between the father and the sons. It means it wasn't a heroic backstory. I made him an ordinary man with a middle-class upbringing. There really isn't anything special about him until the storm hits his hometown. He takes his responsibilities seriously, which has created distance between him and his children. When he has to step into the hero's boots, hopefully the background work makes the action seem believable.

A WET JOB

The storms in the movie were created by computer, but the actors could still experience the force of tornadoes.

- Every second of filming was wet and windy, it became a real endurance test. But it was good to do things that way because it really felt like a huge storm was just around the corner. The filming crew did their utmost to make the takes realistic. They were throwing in trees from windows and tearing down ceilings above our heads, a crane was dropping cars in front of me and items around me were yanked up in the air with cables. Steve was concentrating on real stunts at least as much as on digital effects.

Quale had computer-generated models of what storms would look like. However, he wanted the actors to think of the storms as monsters chasing them rather than as realistic

tornadoes. At times he intentionally kept the actors a bit in the dark in order for them to be realistically surprised by a new turn of events when the storm arrived.

While shooting the movie, the actors didn't get the chance to enjoy the impressiveness of the sound, though.

- We mostly heard the sound of the wind machine, but when the sirens started wailing there was something in their sound that made your heart beat and set your mood towards disaster, Armitage says.

For Armitage, the most difficult moment in the shooting wasn't about storms as such.

- Technically and emotionally, the hardest part to shoot was one and the same scene. In that scene, Gary has to dive in a water pool to save his son. First, I was upside down in a very narrow space under water. When we tried to revive the boy, we did the scene in real time. We went over what was done in reviving a person and how long each phase would take. It felt real and it was a very emotional scene.

SERIOUS BUT FUNNY

Gary Morris is practically the only adult in the movie who behaves correctly.

- I deliberately made him perhaps a little bit boring and serious, and when I was trying to find out reasons for him to smile, the storm hit. But we did have a lot of fun when we were shooting, Armitage says.

The actor is obviously not interested in comedy. Even in entertaining movies, such as *The Hobbit* and *Into the Storm*, he is playing the most serious character.

- It's more about what's being offered to me, Armitage defends himself.

I have done a couple of episodes in the famous British TV series *The Vicar of Dibley*.

That was fun and new to me. It would be nice to do something more like that.

- Often, when an actor does a role, he is being offered more of the same kind. Although I haven't done comedy, my friends tell me I'm a really funny guy. But nobody wants to film it!

The Hobbit success hasn't made it any easier.

- You always have to fight for your roles. It's a myth that you could choose your roles after you've had success. Even the biggest names have to fight for the roles they want. People are expecting to see something they've seen before, and when I go to auditions, the directors are surprised to see that I'm almost 6'3" and not 4'11". At least at the moment they are.

However he knows what he would do if he could choose any project.

- Maybe I could try to do some comedy, some romantic comedy perhaps. Something where I could, in stead of getting wet, stand on a sunny beach in shorts and t-shirt, with a drink in my hand.

For the time being, Armitage is content with acting. But he has some plans brewing up at the back of his mind that he would like to produce one day.

- Before that, however, I'll have to make sure that my acting career is going on strong enough to make it possible to produce other things. Maybe I could include that in my next Five- or Ten-Year-Plan.

Maybe you could produce your own romantic comedy?

- I'm more likely to be going on slightly gloomier paths, but you never know! Armitage laughs.