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“Pendragon” FAQs

An Interview with Aaron Burns, Lead Actor - Pendragon

By Daniel J. Mount

Daniel: How did you and your family become interested in Independent Christian Filmmaking?

Aaron: Before we'd ever heard of the 'Independent Christian Filmmaking' movement, our families' love for history and a love for doing things together got us started. Filmmaking at first was just a hobby. As we thought about it more seriously, I believe there were two main things that inspired us.

First, our prior experience told us that filmmaking – though challenging – could be quite rewarding. Secondly, we realized what an impact this kind of films can have on people! In the past decades, no one has produced a quality Christian action movie. We thought, “Hey, if we could capture this genre and use the gifts that the Lord has given us to make an action-epic film that shares a message about Christ with the audience—that would be something worth pursuing.”

It's interesting, for several years before Pendragon even got started the Lord had been building our team. Unknown to each other, all of us who later managed and produced Pendragon were doing work for hire in related fields. Chad and Nick started a small commercial film company, my sister and I were doing music gigs, and our other collaborators were honing skills in their own fields working odd jobs and interning on other projects. What none of us could ever have imagined was that we'd soon be given the opportunity to do our own project on this gigantic scale. In hindsight we realized that the Lord had been preparing this group of people - many who did know each other - for this moment.

Daniel: Some of our readers may not be familiar with the independent Christian



filmmaking movement. Could you explain the vision of the movement—where it's come from, and where you see it going?

Aaron: Through the last century, filmmaking has been dominated by secular studios. There has been almost no production of high-quality Christian films. In the last ten years, this has started to change. Advances in technology (including video editing software, digital cameras, and audio equipment) has made the field easier to enter. Nowadays, it doesn't necessarily take the backing of a huge studio to produce a decent film.

Combined with a growing understanding of the film's potential, these advances have sparked a desire to produce God honoring films. And, as Christians started producing more quality movies, there has been an increase in demand. Now more families and churches are supporting these productions, and the capability for independent Christian filmmakers to be successful continues to grow.

We were really excited to produce the first historical epic action movie in this burgeoning movement. There's no reason why Christian filmmakers need to just make one type of film. It has been exciting to see other families, churches, and producers pushing the envelope in this area. We've seen a huge increase in both the number and quality of the Christian films, and we're working to continue raising the bar in the coming years. It's a huge area for growth and ministry.



Daniel: You have now released *Pendragon*. Could you tell us about this motion picture?

Aaron: *Pendragon* is set in the Dark Ages of Britain, at the time when the Legions are leaving to defend Rome, and the Saxon barbarians are invading. The film is a human story of a young man who faces the reality of an invading army that is ravaging his homeland. As the story unfolds, Artos encounters increasingly difficult challenges – the death of his family, defeat on the battle field, betrayal by his commander, the loss of the girl he loves – and through it all he clings to one truth: Artos believes that what God calls men to do, He gives them the grace to accomplish. Even if that goal is not accomplished in one's lifetime, following God is never futile.

Daniel: I've heard that this was the first epic feature film to come out of independent Christian filmmaking. How did you pull it off?

Aaron: Really through the Lord's blessing! He built the house. Whatever there may be that is great about *Pendragon* was Him providing for us in so many different ways. He gave us the vision, and then continued to supply through the whole project—funding, resources like horses and land, people to come alongside and work with us, folks who

helped with choreography, lighting, stunts, audio, CGI—the right people with the right talents showed up at the right time, over and over again. The Lord really built a team around our families. We are thankful for so many different people whose skills and assets made this period epic adventure movie possible.

It was once said that “great art imitates life.” Interestingly enough, the Pendragon story was really our story. We set out believing that the Lord had called us to make a Christ-centered, period action film on a scale we could scarcely comprehend. At the start, we had nothing more than the idea and the willingness to try. As we struggled forward, God provided the resources and the grace to see it through to the end.

Daniel: The core cast and crew of Pendragon was extended family and members of your church. Could you tell me about your siblings and cousins and friends, and the roles they played in putting the project together?



Aaron: I played the character of Artos, the lead protagonist. I also served as the head of production design (overseeing the construction and planning of the sets), and worked on the score. My cousin Nick played Cadeyrn, the lead antagonist; he was also the art director and lead editor. My sister Marilyn played Wenneveria, daughter of the chieftain, directed costume design, and worked with me on the music. My cousin Chad was the overall director of the project; he also played the character of Lailoken, the wise man of the woods. My father played King Ambrosius, and helped with overseeing financial and safety aspects of the project. My uncle played the character of Justinian Pendragon, my father in the movie. Other cousins and siblings helped out in tons of different ways—craft service, photography, costumes, set construction, et cetera. Our mothers were in charge of PR, gathering and managing extras, finding locations to shoot at, and securing assistance at our different locations. We wrote the script as a group, discussing and debating back and forth, and doing historical research. It was quite challenging, but a lot of fun, as each person contributed ideas and perspective, to get the story to where it is today.



Daniel: Was the little girl who played your sister related?

Aaron: No, the little girl—Rebecca Wixom—was from our church

Daniel: Could you elaborate some on the historical setting of the story?

Aaron: There really is not much information available on the times. The Dark Ages are just that—very dark. History tells us very little about the character of Arturius or Artos, which was later developed into the character we know as King Arthur.

We know just a couple of facts about him—that he lived in these tumultuous times, and eventually led the Britons to victory at the Battle of Badon Hill. After this battle, there was a fifty-year peace in the land. These are the main facts that we built our story around.

The word *Pendragon* is Welsh for “Chief Head” or “Leader.” The *Pendragon* was also the symbol of a Roman Cohort, their banner, like the eagles of the legions. Artos' father,



according to some of these old stories, was a leader of the people, or a *Pendragon*. That's where we got the title.

Artos's wise councilor, (Lailoken in our story) was later developed in the legends as druid wizard Merlin. No one really knows if he was a Druid or a Christian. We chose to go with the latter.

Hengest is the real name of the Saxon leader—the one who brought troops across the channel. Ambrosius is also a character from history. He was one of the last Chieftains of civilized Britain, before the fifty years of peace and the eventual fall to the Saxons. Whether or not he had a daughter named Wenneveria (Welsh version of name Guinevere) is open to speculation!

Daniel: Could you elaborate on the status of Christianity in early Britain?

Aaron: We know that after Constantine, Christianity was carried to the farthest extent of the empire. At the time of our story, Christianity had spread to Britain by legionaries, merchants, and travelers. This was just after the time of St. Patrick; Britain had a fairly established church – already sending out missionaries to Ireland. Of course there was still the worship of Druid and Roman gods. By no means was it entirely a Christian nation, but there was a strong Christian presence by the time the Romans left.

Daniel: So the setting of the film is maybe fifty to seventy-five years post Constantine?

Aaron: Yes, probably a little over one hundred years.

Daniel: Did you intentionally avoid bringing druids into the story, or did that just happen in the flow of the storyline?

Aaron: At one point we discussed having a confrontation with a druid, but it didn't fit with the plot we were developing. We just decided not to do it for story reasons. But not that all of the characters in the story are Christians—Cadeyrn worships the Roman gods.

Daniel: Speaking of Cadeyrn, your cousin Nick delivers one of the most convincing “bad guy” performances I've seen!

Aaron: In real life, Nick is one of the quietest, friendliest guys you'd want to meet. But he was a pretty good bad guy when he put on the costume – his performance in

Pendragon has attracted more than just your notice. One time Nick was on set, standing there in costume with armor and his sword, practicing his scowl. An extra wanted to talk to him but was too scared until Nick's mother came over and assured him Nick was a nice, friendly guy in real life. It was really fun to assume these roles that were so different from real life!

Daniel: Even though it was a role you played a part in writing, you've spent three years getting into the character of Artos the Pendragon. Have you learned anything from the character, from the experience of portraying a fourth-century tribal chieftain?

Aaron: You know, I think I definitely have. One of them I mentioned earlier: As we worked on this project, we had to follow the Lord's vision to keep things going, to



motivate the people around us, to trust the Lord when things didn't seem to make sense.

As we watch Artos struggling to make the right decisions, we realized that these are the same decisions that we are faced with (on a smaller scale) every

day. We each have to keep the vision alive and strive to complete what the Lord has assigned us to do, whether it's saving a nation, being faithful to your family and church, or making an epic film. This was definitely a lesson I learned from this experience.

It was also fun to learn some skills like sword fighting or horseback riding that I had no experience in before the project. One of the things we were praying about was that the Lord would provide horses for us. The Atherton family in Indiana emailed that they had 400 acres and a couple of horses: "If you want to use them, we'd love to help out with the project." In an afternoon, the young ladies taught us how to ride horses, and we started filming. It was exciting to see how the Lord provided. It was both fun and challenging to develop in new ways as we became these characters.

Daniel: Do you have a favorite or most memorable moment on set?

Aaron: The final sword fight at the end of the film was a tremendous amount of fun. As we were working to finish the scene, we were stayed up all night almost every night for two weeks, sleeping for a couple of hours in the daytime. By the time we got to the end, it had really surpassed our expectations! With the fire effects and the action sequences, it was pretty exciting. Some of those moments—we are standing there in full armor with metal swords, the flames and burners are lit, the fog machine blows, then I hear the "Three-two-one—" and swing into action!. There's not much more exciting than that!

Daniel: What are your distribution plans for Pendragon?

Aaron: Pendragon has been released on DVD and is available in hundreds of bookstores, and at our website, www.pendragonmovie.com. We're in negotiations with several television networks as well.

Daniel: Does Burns Family Studios have any future projects in the works?

Aaron: At Burns Family Studios we are passionate about producing quality action adventure films – a genre we hope Pendragon's success will help to grow. We have some ideas in mind, but no projects we're ready to talk about yet. We are really excited about what the Lord did through us when working on Pendragon. We see a market for Christian action films that are emotionally moving, exciting, and leave you with a Christ-honoring message. We hope to raise the bar in production excellence, story quality, and acting, and would love seeing other people joining us as we work towards this goal.

Daniel: Do you have any other thoughts you wanted to share?

Aaron: I'd just like to encourage people to look for what Lord has called them to do, to look at the message of the *Pendragon* film and see how it applies to their lives. Do what the Lord has called you to and don't give up, because the One who gave the vision still calls, and what He calls you to do, He gives you the grace to accomplish.

We hope to inspire Christians to stay true to following the Lord, and we'd love to see that happen in any way possible.

Watch the exciting movie trailer at www.pendragonmovie.com

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