

## Passage: The Story Behind the Creation a Student Film

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Derek Patterson, an aspiring director and screenwriter, and his film crew, set off south for Cumberland, Virginia. Their goal? To film an ambitious student short film, *Passage*, for Patterson's final capstone project at George Mason University. The week that followed would end up becoming a test of the entire crew's, and cast's, diligence toward making this film.

They had to work long days and nights, with a task to take the storyline and put it into reality in the span of only five days. However, the production stage of *Passage* was only one chapter, albeit an incredibly important one, in its creation.

*Passage* is a thriller film, with a touch of horror. It's set in medieval Ireland, with two men who witness their home being burned down from a battle. They need to warn a nearby village before it's too late. One of them is a post messenger, and the other is an elder knight. They travel through a forest on the way, which is the only form of passage to get to this village. While they travel together, they are tested mentally and learn a lot about themselves in the process.

Patterson has been fascinated by movies as far back as he can remember. Growing up in Virginia Beach, he got help from his dad, who had a camcorder. "For me, it all started with making lightsaber videos and such. My friends and I then started to make short films in middle school," he said.

When Patterson got into GMU as a film and video studies major, he met his girlfriend, Julia Adonay. Adonay, a nursing major, ended up becoming interested in movies through their relationship. Eventually, she became the producer and social media manager for *Passage*. Together, they would work hard to make this movie happen.

However, it wouldn't be long before complications started to arise with Patterson's writing process for *Passage*. GMU wasn't thrilled with some of the thematic material.

Eventually, he decided to make separate cuts of the film, one for the Mason film festival, and the other, a more passion driven cut, for himself. "It's art. It's up for interpretation and it's supposed to challenge audiences. If we had a world of art that didn't challenge people, it would be a boring place," Patterson explained.

*Passage* ended up having a budget of around \$16,000, with a crew of over thirty people. Adonay and Patterson did whatever they could to save up this money. Even though Patterson flew out most weekends to film weddings across the country and raise money, it wasn't enough.

Adonay had to set up two fundraisers in hopes to reach the budget. Even though they only had a few weeks to raise the money needed, it all worked out. “We had some very generous people who donated, and we’re super thankful for that. One of our lead actors, Matthew Gray, decided to become an executive producer, and donated some of his own money too,” said Patterson.

Meanwhile, the couple worked on assembling the production team and actors. Most of the people involved in *Passage* were from GMU, including Cory Mason, the assistant director. He is a friend of Patterson’s and graduated from the university recently.

Mason had great credentials, work ethic, and on-set experience, so Patterson knew that he had to be in this film. “He was a production assistant in *The Walking Dead* TV show!” said Patterson, excitedly.

Finally, spring break came. The entire crew hit the road on a day with unexpected snow, and the first assistant camera got in an accident on the way. “Thank God that he was ok after that. He was still dedicated to come out, and it was very cool to see him there on the set considering what happened,” explained Patterson.

It was stressful on the set for the first few days. “We were on set from early in the morning to late at night,” said Adonay. Both Patterson and Adonay were very proud of the student crew for pulling through though. “I truly wish that I had been able to pay every single person there, just because they deserve it,” said Patterson.

During the last few days on set, things got more relaxed for everyone. “On our night shoot, we had a big campfire, and it was fun setting things up and hanging out. Everyone’s mood was in a good spot that night,” explained Liam Tipler, who recorded sound on set and did post-production sound design.



*Actor Matthew Gray focusing on getting into character as the crew avoid eye contact.*



*Shawn Malangyaon, part of the crew and behind the scenes photography, helping to set up a mannequin for a hanging while the director, Derek Patterson, watches in the background with a noose.*

However, one of the actors accidentally injured his hand when he hit a tree. He was playing a furious character and was deeply into it. “At the time, we thought his hand was fractured, but in the end, it was just a big bruise. He’s doing fine now,” explained Patterson.

Due to the actor’s injury and time running out, Patterson realized that he would have to reshoot the final scene in the future. “When you have somebody with a messed-up hand, it turns that sword fight into the actors waving those swords around like children,” he said. Still, he understood the situation and was thankful that they were able to make a GMU cut with the existing footage.

On the final night, a party was held at the Airbnb to celebrate the end of filming. The on-site editor worked while production was underway, and that last night, he surprised everyone with a rough trailer of Passage. When everyone saw it, the entire building shook from the jubilant cheering and celebration.

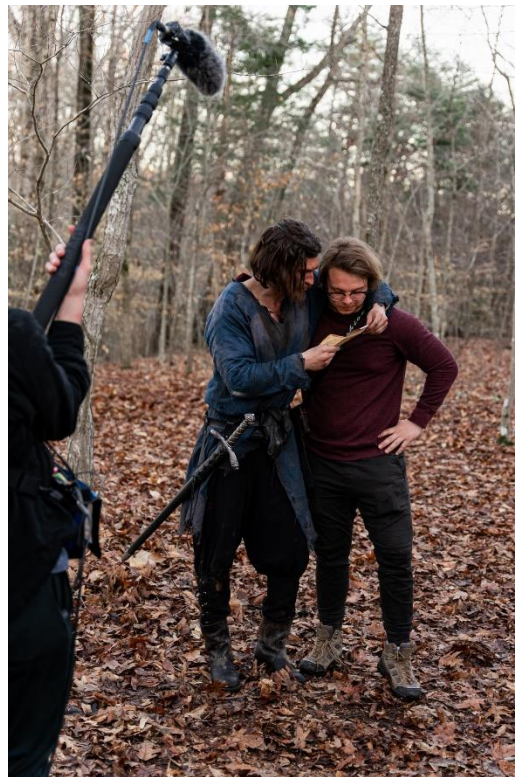
Ian Leach, who was filming his own behind the scenes documentary on the creation of this film, was present. “That was awesome! Seeing everyone erupt was like the loudest thing I had ever heard, everyone screamed from the top of their lungs. That’s my favorite memory from the film shoot, and I’m certain it is for many others too,” he said.

Due to the approaching Mason festival, Patterson and his crew had to get straight to editing. For a few weeks, Patterson, Leach, and Tipler got busy and worked on post-production, spending many all-nighters to meet deadlines. “We got a 20-minute cut done pretty quickly,” said Patterson.

Even though they will have to reshoot the last scene for the final cut, the GMU version is finished. Patterson’s goal is to have the final film released by September. Meanwhile, Adonay has been promoting Passage on the film’s Instagram account.



*Actor Seaghan Rafter taking a smoke break while listening to adventurous music to keep himself in character.*



*Gray and Patterson reading off a letter with kind words to the crew, as the set wrapped up on the final day.*

“We want to give a big thank you to everyone involved, both on and off set. We couldn’t have done any of it without literally every single person involved!” said Adonay, cheerfully. Even though it’s been a rollercoaster of emotions for everyone involved in the creation of Passage, they are all excited to see the fruits of their labor with that final cut, which will be released soon.



*The entire cast and crew after a week’s worth of filming. Crew Photo Credit: Shawn Malangyaon*