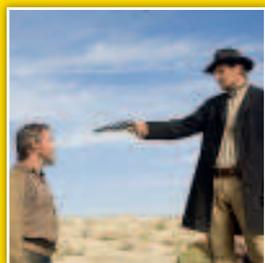


# Liam Neeson

## I touched the Bible Lincoln was sworn in on. I'm obsessed.

### HERE & NOW



From *Gawain in Excalibur* to *Godfrey in Kingdom Of Heaven*, Neeson's played plenty of "cowboys-in-armour" in his career. But *Seraphim Falls* is his first proper Western, playing a revenge-obsessed Civil War vet pursuing sworn enemy Pierce Brosnan across forbidding terrain. His next role looks set to be Abraham Lincoln in Spielberg's biopic. "I've actually fallen in love with the man," he says. Good job, too: he's spent the last two years researching the majestic US president.

**You and Pierce Brosnan couldn't possibly loathe each other more in *Seraphim Falls*. Your war veteran character, Carver, really wants Brosnan's Gideon to suffer...**

Absolutely. As he tells his posse, "Extremities only." Carver wants Gideon to suffer and of course he's suffering as well. Profoundly so – almost as much as Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, he's living with the horror of a one-track mind. Revenge is such a sickness in our society.

**Revenge is a timely theme but Westerns aren't as popular as they were even a decade ago. Apparently, it's all George Bush's fault, for presenting himself as a fake cowboy.**

That's interesting. But when it comes to my generation, we were steeped in the Western genre. Certainly as kids at the Saturday matinees, it was *always* Westerns. If it was a detective story instead we'd leave in droves. It was like we were being insulted! But guys on horseback, and especially those really bad B-movies where Audie Murphy was playing the hero, I thought they were great. They were our version of the Greek myths.

**So what was it like, getting back on the horse?**

Well, I'm lucky because I can ride. I was on a horse while filming in the former Yugoslavia in the mid '80s. I was playing this character called Grak, King of the Pitts [*in 1985 TV movie Arthur The King*] and I had to ride into Camelot and capture Guinevere. I was on this horse called Drina who was 17 years of age; she was famous because she was Kirk Douglas' horse. She would stand like Eeyore from *Winnie The Pooh* – the most unheroic horse – but once

she heard the phrase, "And we're rolling...", suddenly her neck straightened, her ears went up and from a standing start this horse would go into a gallop. Then, when the director said, "Cut!"; she would walk right back to the start mark and go like that again [*mimics Eeyore's droopy demeanour*]. It made me look good that she knew what she was doing.

**This is the first time you and Brosnan have worked together, although you were both in the running for James Bond in the early '90s...**

I've known Pierce for a bunch of years and it's just cool to work with your mates. He's such a good guy, just a total sweetheart. I was courted for the role of Bond after *Schindler's List*, along with a bunch of other actors. But I was thrilled that Pierce got it because he really wanted it.

**Originally you were working as a builder in Belfast in the '70s. How did you make the leap from that job to full time acting?**

Well, I was a late starter. I only turned professional when I was 23. I'd always been performing in plays at school and somewhere along the line I just segued into getting paid for it. It was wonderful – I'll never forget getting my first pay-cheque for being in the theatre. And those days, it was at the height of the Troubles, so Belfast was dangerous. But that theatre I worked in never closed its doors. Sometimes we'd have to stop the show because there'd be a bomb scare. Soldiers would come in and search under seats...

**What was it that drew you to acting in the first place?**

I loved the craft of pretending to be

somebody else. I have always found it very liberating. It made me feel good back then – and still does. There's something about the process that can be mystical.

**When you get offered great roles of the quality of *Oskar Schindler* or *Michael Collins*, do you tend to panic at first or do you simply think, "I deserve this"?**

There is always a wee bit of panic for a few seconds, that's for sure. Steven Spielberg called me up two years ago and said, "I want to send you a script about someone." I said, "Thanks, Steven. Can you tell me who it is?" All he said was, "No – he did live." Two days later, this script arrived and I'm just like a kid. I'd worked with Steven but the fact he'd called me up personally was special. I opened the script and there was one word on it: Lincoln. My knees shook. Literally. That had only happened to me once before: when I met Muhammad Ali in the '80s.

**Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*... That title definitely has a better ring to it than *Oliver Stone's Alexander*.**

I know. We've already done make-up tests. And I've done a lot of research. I've visited where he was born, I've touched the Bible he was sworn in on, I've held his wallet, his glasses, his penknife. I mean, I've had *carte blanche*. I'm obsessed with the man now. So... we'll see how that goes [*laughs*]. And then I think I'm going to have to retire because I don't think I'll be offered anything after that! What else can I possibly do? **TF**

***Seraphim Falls* opens on August 3 and is reviewed on page 44.**

WORDS: MATT MUELLER PICTURES: NIGEL PARRY/CFI

