

## Clive Standen as Rollo in "Vikings" on History

Written by Jamie Ruby  
Friday, 01 March 2013 17:18

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The new drama *Vikings*, premieres March 3rd on History. The new series follows the adventures and also day to day lives of the Vikings, including real life historical figure Rollo, played by Clive Standen, brother to Ragnar (Travis Fimmel) who has convinced his brother and the other Vikings to sail west to find untold treasure. Rollo is a great warrior, but is also jealous of his brother and his marriage. Ragnar treats Rollo as an equal, but the tension is always high when it comes to Rollo, who is often not as honorable as his brother.

In preparation for the premiere of the new series, Standen recently talked to the media about his new role and the rigors of it.

**History Conference Call**  
***Vikings***  
**Clive Standen**

**February 27, 2013**  
**5:00 pm ET**

**SCIFI VISION:** What do you find the most challenging about the role?



**CLIVE STANDEN:** The most challenging? Well what I love about Rollo is that just like any human being he's very multifaceted and what I always look for for a character is the flipside of the coin. You know, the character seems heroic on the surface, what are his fears, what are his insecurities, what are his hopes? Just as if someone's a villain the same thing applies.

And I think with Rollo I get a free reign to really play with the many layers that he has and that just comes from the great writing of Michael Hirst. He's a sociopath, but you never really know what's going on behind his mind. He's capable of great things, but is he in his brother's shadow?

And it's all of these questions that you never really quite trust Rollo, but you never really want him in the opposite corner to you. And all of these things come together and I just think it's a fantastic character to get your teeth into as an actor. It's far more fun playing a character in the gray.

**QUESTION:** So can you tell us a bit more about your character?

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**CLIVE STANDEN:** Rollo is, just as Ragnar is based on a real character in Viking sagas and historical history books, he was the Duke of Normandy; he was the great, great, great, great, great grandfather to William the Conqueror. He is a phenomenal fighter and warrior.

He is the brother of Ragnar Lothbrok. If Ragnar is the farm boy, he'd be considered the city boy. They're brothers and they're very close and they can't live without each other. But as I've got brothers myself, sometimes you don't always like your brother; sometimes you disagree with your brother; you lock horns, but at the end of the day you're brothers and you're stuck with each other.

And Rollo is very different to Ragnar, as where as Ragnar is very much a thinker, he's on a quest for knowledge and to escape and to rise in the Viking kingdom, Rollo is very different to that. He's very an old school Viking, he thinks he knows what he knows and likes the way his life - he's a hedonist, and he's a sociopath and I love him and every actor, I think, needs to love their character and I love him in his own special way.

**QUESTION:** Can you tell me a little bit about the physical training you had to go through to get in shape for the role?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** I've been sword fighting since I was 14 years old. I used to be part of a - when *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* came out at the cinemas, I grew up just up the road from Sherwood Forest, and they were looking to put on a stunt team of full experience of walking around Sherwood Forest with tour guides and live action.

And when most of my friends at that age were working in shoe shops and McDonalds and things my very first paid job, way before I was into acting, was doing stunts and jousting and jumping out of trees as Wulf, Little John's son, at Sherwood Forest.

And I did a lot of Thai boxing as well. That was a very big part of my life when I was younger. And so I've done a lot of horse riding and sword fighting and martial arts and things beforehand, but one thing I hadn't done before I got the role of *Vikings* is we did a very big boot camp before we started filming to man the boats.

History were very adamant that we, as actors, would be able to sail these boats ourselves. And so every time you see the actors on the boat we're really rowing, we're really manning the boat, we're sailing. And that was a very long process where we'd go out in the sea and many actors would get seasick and it was a grueling process.

But at the end of it we got to the stage where all of the marines that taught us would get off the boat and there was this one guy hiding under a sheet of tarpaulin with a walkie-talkie just so they could communicate with our actors and the cameramen and dry land.

But we got to a stage where we could sail our boat and we became real Vikings. So that was something that I wasn't prepared for and had to work really hard to achieve.

In terms of physical fitness we did lots of stuff. Johan Renck, the first director, who's very much

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involved in the whole look of the show, didn't want another muscle man. He didn't want lots of guys kind of doing crazy spot and training sessions and things. He wanted *Vikings* to be live and sinewy and real because these were hard guys. They lived in a harsh climate and they weren't bodybuilders. So everything we did physically with rowing and - it was all generated to try and create that [physique] that a Viking would have.

**QUESTION:** Now you've already worked with Michael Hirst on *Camelot*, so can you talk about working with him again?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** I didn't really get to work with Michael in *Camelot*. When I got the role in *Ca melot*

I was very excited. I've wanted to work with Michael for a very long time and I'm a bit of a history nut at the heart.

As a child my parents would take me to all sorts of castles and monasteries and I got my fair fill of history through my parents and I'd always play with my older brother. We'd play warrior and Vikings and knights.

I like to consider myself as a bit of a history nut and Michael, what you get with Michael is not just a scriptwriter, you get a historian as well. I mean he really is genuinely excited by getting it right and researching. And it's just really inspiring to work with someone like that.

But he wasn't really involved in *Camelot*. He'd moved on by the time it started shooting to the ((inaudible)). Chris Chibnall was the writer of *Camelot*. So even though when I auditioned I thought I was going to be working with Michael I had to wait a little bit longer to get my dream job, but it's all paid off in the end.

And, he really is an inspirational person to work with and you really feel - you have to uphold his vision and to do justice to what I think is a culture and a story that I don't think has ever really been told and never, definitely never, had justice paid to it.

Everything we think we know about the Vikings - I thought I knew loads about Vikings. Like I said, when I grew up and all of the castles and monasteries that I visited and went to ((inaudible)) farm when I was very young.

But when you start talking to Michael you start doing your own research because what Michael has done is he's really invested from the inside out and gone to Scandinavia and looked at the sagas and the history books and talked to the Vikings and Scandinavian people over there; and worked with our Historical Advisor, (Justin), and created a fact-based show that obviously is historically accurate as much as a TV show can be. You have to piece together the holes, you have to make it accessible and you have to tell an entertaining and exciting story.

But the Vikings have always been the hired help, they've always been the raping, pillaging, murdering scum that came from the sea with their horned helmets sent from the devil himself, and that's not the story we're trying to tell. And I think hopefully when people watch this show they'll have a completely different idea and perspective on an amazing culture of people,

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colonists and market traders and who lived in a really harsh climate and a miserable time.



And they did do questionable things. They did raid and they did colonize other countries, but we've never seen it from their perspective why they did it and they were living, breathing multifaceted human beings just like us.

**QUESTION:** Was there something about your character that wasn't scripted for you that you added to the role?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** Michael was very good at sitting down with you. I think when Rollo was originally written in the very first draft of the script he was written to be played by someone that was very much older than me.

But what's very good with Michael is he'd sit Travis down, he'd sit myself down, he'd sit Katheryn down, he'd sit Gustaf down, and Gabriel down and sometimes sit us all down together before we started filming and talk through our characters and how we interlinked with each other and what we wanted to do and how we interpreted them.

And it's a very good collaborative process and the crew in Ireland have been fantastic about that as well where we've been able to put our own input into the characters.

And Michael is very good at adapting and amalgamating ideas, but he's also very good at telling you to shut up when it's the right time to shut up and to tell his story.

He's got amazing vision and you don't really question Michael's vision because he's often thought about lines and what your character's done a lot more than you have. He really is that good.

But yes, there's lots of research and we'd all be coming in each day and sharing our research with each other and it was a very good collaborative process.

**QUESTION:** So you have a lot of experience working in period pieces like *Robin Hood* and *Camelot*.

Is there anything that you are using now, like experience or training, that is carrying over from that?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** Yes, I think so. You learn on every job and every time you approach any character, regardless if he's a lawyer or a geography teacher or a knight or a pirate of the sea, you always have to start with clean slate, you have to work the canvas clean and build your

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character from scratch, so every character's different.

But it's been quite handy to keep immersing yourself in that time period and the research you do becomes a little bit easier. And to try and keep that passion of keeping as accurate as possible and fighting anyone who doesn't necessarily have the same regard.

Because I think as an actor and in a period piece you have a responsibility - especially if the character you're playing and the society that you're portraying is based on fact, then you have a responsibility to those people to do the best job you possibly can. So it's given me more of a passion for doing justice to things.

And what I always like to think that when you're playing an historical person or figure that you have to imagine them either in the back row of the theater or in the studio with you or maybe on the battlefield with you and you imagine that you're playing him and you have a responsibility for doing your best job of getting it right and doing him justice and it's a nice little thought to have.

It's bit like having that angel and devil that you see in the little cartoons. You just have to imagine that the real Rollo is on your shoulder whispering into your ear and you have to do him justice.

**SCIFI VISION:** Rollo, you said, is a sociopath and he's not a very nice guy a lot of times. Is it hard to get into that mindset? How do you do that and work with that?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** It is tough. We have a lot of fun on *Vikings* as well and it sometimes can be hard to pull yourself back from that when you've got a day where you're playing Rollo and Rollo's being Rollo.

But we made a bit of a joke about it. People were very good at giving me my own space and they'd see when I was having to do something and I was having to get myself in the right mind frame for it and it became known as "Clive is giving you the deadeye." Rather than the stinkeye.

People would be talking to me and Tadhg Murphy, one of the actors, would come up and going, "Clive's giving you the deadeye. You know, I think you should just move on. He's not really listening. He's looking right through you." And they were very good at knowing - to give you that time and space to play that.

But you have to go to a very dark place to play Rollo, I think, and it sometimes is tough. And he does do some questionable things, but you do have to find a way of loving the character you're playing to be able to access him.

And I don't think he's a bad person, so to speak, I think he does very questionable things and I think many people - we do things we're embarrassed about and we also often do things that we automatically regret and would wish we could change time and change history, but we can't. And I like to think that he's capable of greatness, he's just in his brother's shadow.

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**QUESTION:** You previously described yourself as a bit of a history nut. How much research did you put into the role before you started shooting?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** Well, before I started shooting we had a good period of time after we'd met with Michael for the first time as well and he set us on the right track. Like I said earlier, there's a lot that you think you know about Vikings and everyone thinks that they've read a book on Vikings or they've seen a film on Vikings and I had to really completely, like I said, wipe the slate clean and start from scratch.

And Michael is very good at giving us a shedload of revision and books to read to set us in the right direction. And then obviously as an actor you choose to run with that and do as much research as you want, or do as little research as you want.



And all through filming, right up until the last day, I'd be annoying people on set and the crew just telling them about more stuff that I'd found out. I never stopped learning and I think that a good lesson in life is never stop learning and never stop questioning.

And yes, I'm still doing research now and I'm still finding out things. Just the other day I was finding out about how in Iceland they were - the way they used to use the moss that would collect the iron ores and they would put it in a kiln and burn the moss away and be left with raw iron so they could make weapons with it.

And I'm always, I'm always learning and I'm just obsessed with just taking in new facts, new information, reading new books, watching documentaries and the more you've got there the more of an arsenal you've got if you ever need it for a scene.

There's been some fantastic facts that we've learned through this about Vikings, for instance, would never throw their fingernails away because they believed that Ragnarok - when Floki would come back as Floki, I'm getting mixed up with character, it's Loki would come back, he would come on a boat made of human fingernails. So if you were throwing your fingernails away you were helping Loki build his boat.

So your Vikings would often, if they were to bite their fingernails or cut their fingernails, they would put them in this locket on their neck or they would throw them in the fire and make sure that they weren't flicked idly on the floor. And if you watch closely you might see Gustaf doing something with his fingernails.

But there's this plethora of stuff out there and it's just such a massive world. And I think with Series 1 we really are just hitting the the tip of the iceberg of Michael Hirst's vision for it. There's

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so many amazing characters in these sagas, (Ivan) (Larongness), who hasn't yet to make an appearance and there's (Hospan) and you can go right up to the end, especially in Britain with Alfred the Great, there's all sorts of stuff.

And Michael has a massive, massive Bible that he calls, he calls it the Bible, the Viking Bible, of the ideas and the storylines and where he wants to take the show over maybe five or six seasons, so we'll see. But all I can say is that if you like Series 1, we're just getting started.

**QUESTION:** So you said that during your training regimen you did a lot of rowing, a lot of Spartan workouts, but what was your diet like?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** No, we didn't do the Spartan workouts. That was the point. We didn't sit there throwing tires around trying to be alpha males. What's so great about our cast is we're very eclectic. I think when you're approaching a drama based on Vikings if you're taking that train of thought where you think Vikings are all just raping, pillaging, mass murderers then it would be very easy to cast very alpha male type actors that are more concerned about pumping iron than acting.

And that would be a very unhappy place on set and I think what's so great about our cast and the way we all gelled as a family is we are so eclectic and I think that shows in the characters, ranging from Floki, and Rollo, and (Dragna) and Torstein, and Leif and Arne.

They're all so different and it's exciting to be a part of that, to have living, breathing characters, three-dimensional characters, rather than just murdering barbarians that don't seem to have any backstory or any layers. [So to] answer your question, but yes I just thought I just didn't want to get misinterpreted.

**QUESTION:** No problem, no problem. I just heard that you did some condition training, but because Vikings weren't bodybuilders, so I understood that.

**CLIVE STANDEN:** Yes, exactly. I haven't been to a gym myself in two years. Anyway I strongly believe everything that comes from physicality should be something that's enjoyed and something that's - if it's cardio, for instance, you don't go running on a running machine, you get out there and you run, and you play sports and you rock climb or whatever it is you do, the diving for me.

But I do have kettle bells, and I have resistance bands, and I have a Power Plate, which I use now and again. But with Vikings it was very much that. On set we've had resistance bands and things. We'd having rowing machines. We would row, we would do handstands, or I would do handstand pushups, because it's obviously about your shoulders and the strength in your shoulders for the rowing and things.

But we didn't really have any massive chaos training regime that some shows adopt because it was about creating real people rather than bodybuilders.

**QUESTION:** Okay, so did you happen to eat like a Viking then?

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**CLIVE STANDEN:** Yes, I did eat like a Viking. It was very funny when we first arrived and Ashford Studios, it's a brand new studio, it's all solar powered and wind powered and it's all state-of-the-art and we were the first people to film there.

But the canteen, they did fill it up with lots of chips and all sorts of food that was the kind of food that was great for the crew out in the cold, but the kind of thing that would send you to sleep.

So yes, we very quickly got the menu changed a lot sooner, lots of protein and lots of chicken and things like that. So we ate a lot, but we ate very healthily because it was all about just keeping that kind of sinewy, tough, hard, weathered body.

**SCIFI VISION:** Do you have a particular favorite moment or scene that stands out in your mind?



**CLIVE STANDEN:** Many, the whole experience was - week in, week out we'd have something that was a challenge or just a joy to be a part of. A lot of the boat stuff was fantastic. We, because like I said earlier, we had to learn to do it, so you get a great sense of pride out of actually being able to feel that you can sail it yourself and we all had different jobs on the boat, manning the rigging, rowing, actually sailing the boat.

And some of those scenes, you're just going out in the open ocean and the lakes. And we had one particular scene where the mist was rising off the sea, rising off the lake, and it was like being in *Apocalypse Now* or something. You could have been sailing down Cambodia or something like that with the amount of mist so you couldn't see what was in the trees.

We also had a load of night shoots, which were a lot of fun to film, grueling and tough. Me and Travis had a really - he's a bit of a practical joker and we were always one-upping each other and it was a lot of fun filming with Travis.

And we made this stupid pact that we had a night shoot on the boat on what they call a gimbal, which is we have a real long boat that we can sail and man in the oceans and the lakes, but we also have one on a gimbal, which is a hydraulic machine that can throw the boat from left to right, backwards and forwards to simulate waves.

And they have gigantic what looked like skate ramps attached to the side of it, maybe four or five on each side, with diggers and dumper trucks full of water that which on queue would dump the water, which would cascade onto the ramps and fire onto the boat and drench you. It was at 2:00, 3:00, 4:00, 5:00, 6:00 in the morning. It was ice cold and the water was ice cold. And Travis and I made a pact that we got offered if we would wear wetsuits underneath our costumes to keep us warm and we decided that we were going to be real Vikings and we didn't

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need wetsuits.

And we thought we would get through the whole night shoot with wearing just one thin layer of leather. So that was fun and grueling and tough, but it was a big bonding time for me and Travis, I think, because we were in it together.

And after you've done take one and you can hear that click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click of the dumper truck about to dump the water on you and you know what's going to come and holding onto a rope trying to seem like you're a seafaring tough Viking and getting thrown halfway across the boat. And the gimbal itself is about 10 foot up in the air as well and outside of the boat is just concrete, so if you go overboard you're going to know about it.

But it was fun and there were days like that all of the time where you just feel like it's tough, it's grueling, but you get up at 4:00 in the morning, you get home at 9:00 at night and you've achieved something and you feel exhausted, but you wouldn't give up your place for anything in the world.

And we have that motto that if you're going to complain about something, if you're having a bad day then you signed onto the wrong job because you know what's going to come with the show and it's fun, but if you're not cut out for it then shut up.

**QUESTION:** You described Rollo as being a sociopath, but also spoke of enjoying having to play the character because he is so multifaceted. Did you draw any influence from any other television shows or movies to help you craft that character?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** Not so to speak. I had lot of conversations with Johan, the director at the beginning, about different characters that he'd seen that he, there's certain things that (Michael) ((inaudible)) does in *Shame*, which inspired me.

But no, I did a lot of research on sociopaths, and psychopaths, and behavioral things. I can't think of any character that I based it on. Are you looking for an answer which is kind of he's half Han Solo, he's half this, but no I can't think of anyone that I, I think I - just certain places. And, yes, there was conversations that we had, Johan and myself.

But there was one thing that I put on my mirror so I could see it every morning before I got into costume, which I think sums Rollo up quite well, which is everybody wants to be loved, and if they can't be loved then they want to be admired, and if they can't be admired then they're willing to be feared, and if they can't be feared then they'll be hated. And I think that's quite a prominent thing that stuck out to me that I put on my mirror to remind me of each day.

**QUESTION:** I was just wondering was there instant chemistry when you began working with the cast or did it take a bit of time for it all to gel?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** They put us all up in a hotel together, which is in the middle of nowhere. We were filming in the Wicklow mountains and Dublin is the biggest city around there, but they put us nowhere near Dublin City Center, so we were stuck for about two weeks literally living out of

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each other's rooms and having our communal space in the hotel where we'd all get to know each other.

And to be fair, we all really hit it off. We're all of a very similar age and we all come from different backgrounds and, like I said, we're all very eclectic. On paper we shouldn't all get on, but yes there is no competition, there's no bad thoughts.

And I've been really privileged to be a part of this cast with these guys because they really are a band of brothers to me now and I'm including (Alysa) and Katheryn in that as well.

It's quite special. I've done shows before where you do turn up to work and you love your job, but you don't necessarily have to get on with everybody, but it's not the case in *Vikings*. And I think hopefully that chemistry comes across onscreen because we are, Travis is a very good leading man. He's very good at playing practical jokes and if that's what needs be to lighten the atmosphere. I've got many stories, but I'll leave him to tell them to you, it's not my place.

And Gabriel as well is a very inspiring actor to work with and very easy to work with, very accommodating and very kind. And I've never really had the experience I've had on any other show. And that's to be said that this show is a show that I would be excited about watching even if I wasn't in it.

**SCIFI VISION:** I know that you filmed in Ireland and everything. Can you talk about that experience and filming on location?

**CLIVE STANDEN:** Ireland is the most amazing and incredible place to film. It really is very similar to the Norwegian fjords, the lakes that they've got there, and the vistas are just incredible.

The landscape is fantastic but what's so special about filming in Ireland is the crew. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. The crew that I worked with in Ireland, and I was very lucky enough to work with quite a lot of them on *Camelot* as well, which was also filmed in Ireland, they've done five years of *The Tudors* together; they've done a season of *Camelot* together; they've done *Vikings* together. They're like a family and they're very good at bringing the foreign actors in and making us feel a part of that family.

And they're brilliant at what they do. When you've done seven years of all working together on different period dramas, they really know what they're doing. And when you get out there in the field and are on the top of a mountain or on the front of the seafront, they're just so well gelled together that it makes your job a privilege and so easy running.

**OPERATOR:** And Mr. Standen there are no further questions in the queue. I'd like to turn it back to you for any closing remarks.

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