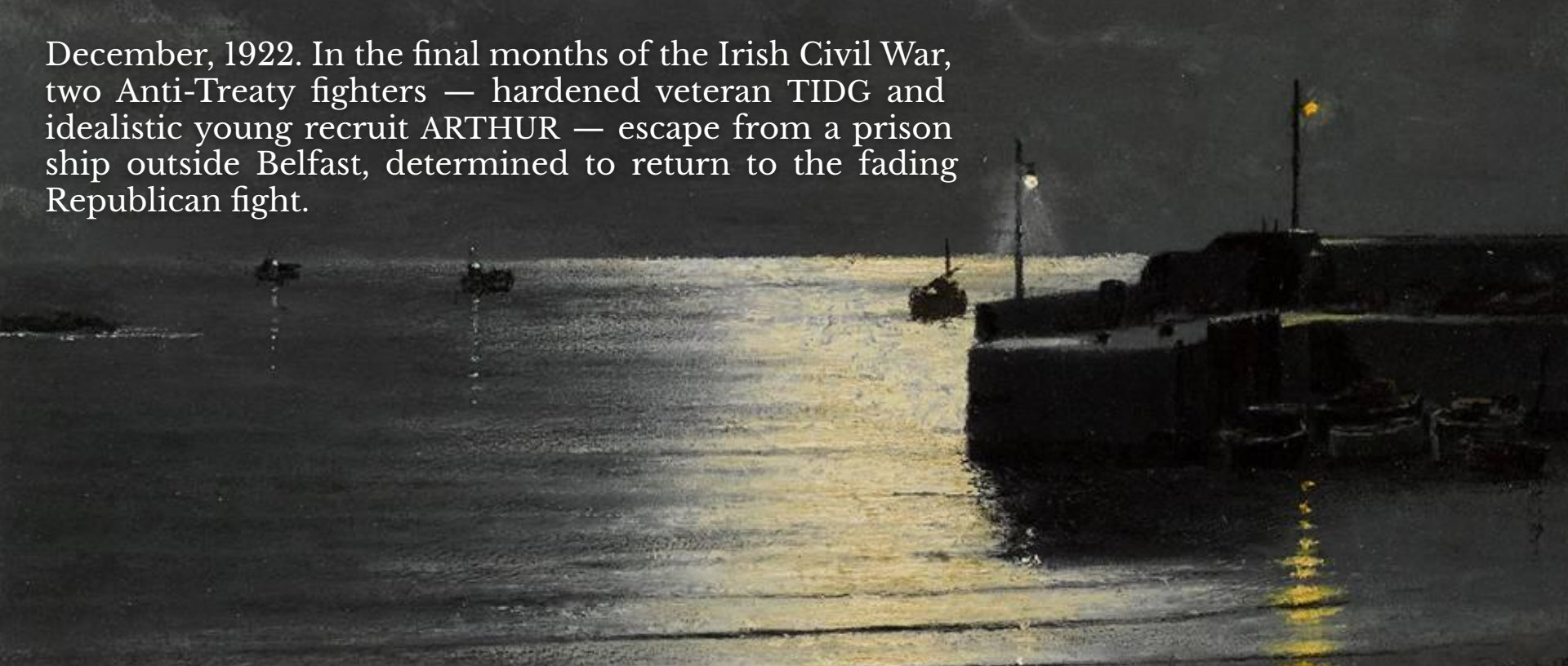


A dark, atmospheric painting of a coastal landscape. In the upper left, a thatched-roof hut sits on a rocky outcrop. A path leads from the foreground towards the sea on the right. The sky is filled with dark, swirling clouds, and the water is dark with white foam from breaking waves. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

THE ROAD
TO BALLYSHANNON

December, 1922. In the final months of the Irish Civil War, two Anti-Treaty fighters — hardened veteran TIDG and idealistic young recruit ARTHUR — escape from a prison ship outside Belfast, determined to return to the fading Republican fight.





*“Yes, they’d be hunted.
That they could be
certain of.*

*East to west, travelling
slightly south.
Roughly one hundred
miles as the crow flies.
Add on half of that
again for their
journey...”*



An aerial photograph of a vast, green rural landscape in Donegal, Ireland. The foreground shows a grassy hillside with a fence line and a small car parked on a road. The middle ground is filled with rolling green fields, scattered houses, and dense trees. In the far distance, a large body of water, likely a lake or bay, stretches across the horizon under a cloudy sky.

*“A few miles then, to Ballyshannon in
Donegal and to freedom...*

And to fight.”



TIDG (40s)

A small-holding Tyrone farmer at the foot of the Sperrin mountains, like his father and grandfather before him. Joined a local IRA brigade after 1916 and dedicated himself to years of guerilla fighting before being caught and interned during the civil war.

“A man from the mountains whose leonine energies could be sensed in the long, slightly hunched frame and hawkish face and loping gait. An old fighter, cunning and ruthless. Seamed, scarred, with narrow black eyes turned inwards. Inscrutable, aloof, alone...”

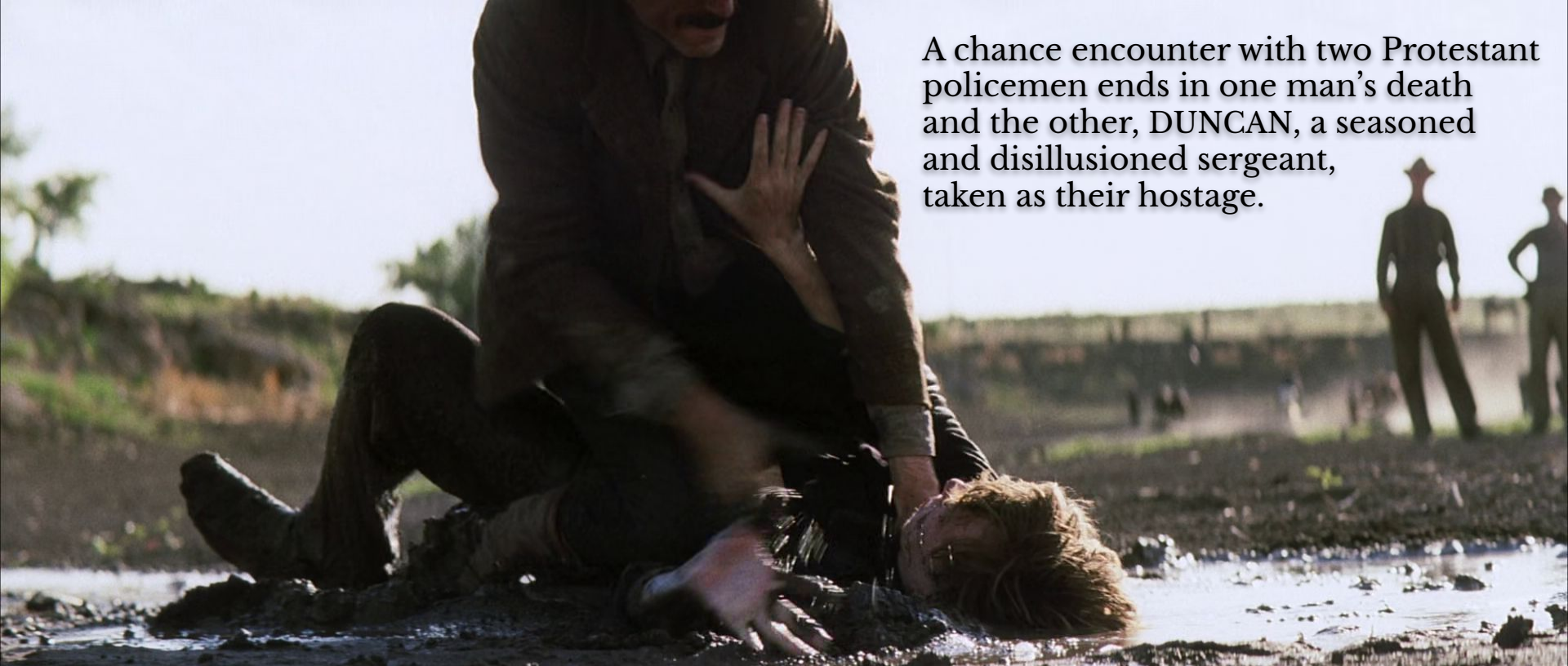
ARTHUR (late teens)

Left his Belfast tenement at 15 to work as a deckhand on cargo ships, travelling to South America and China. Came back at 18 as the civil war kicked off and helped with gun-running from local boats to gun caches in the hills. Caught when leaving a pub one night and interned without evidence.

“Fresh unmarked face flushed by the cold sea wind making him seem much less than his 19 years. The sturdy frame was strong, though not yet come into its full strength, the face clear and open.”





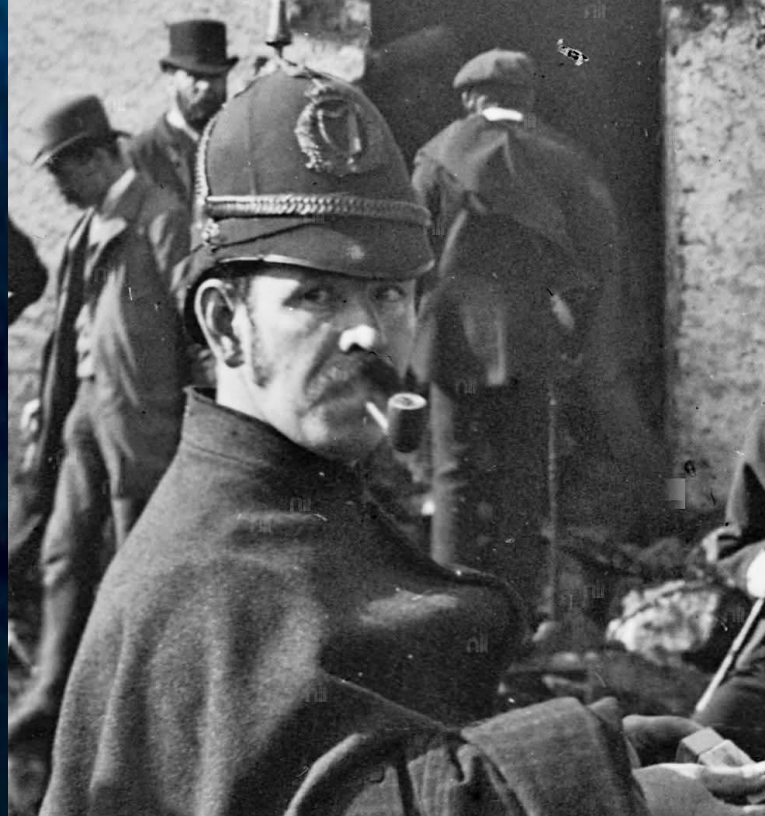


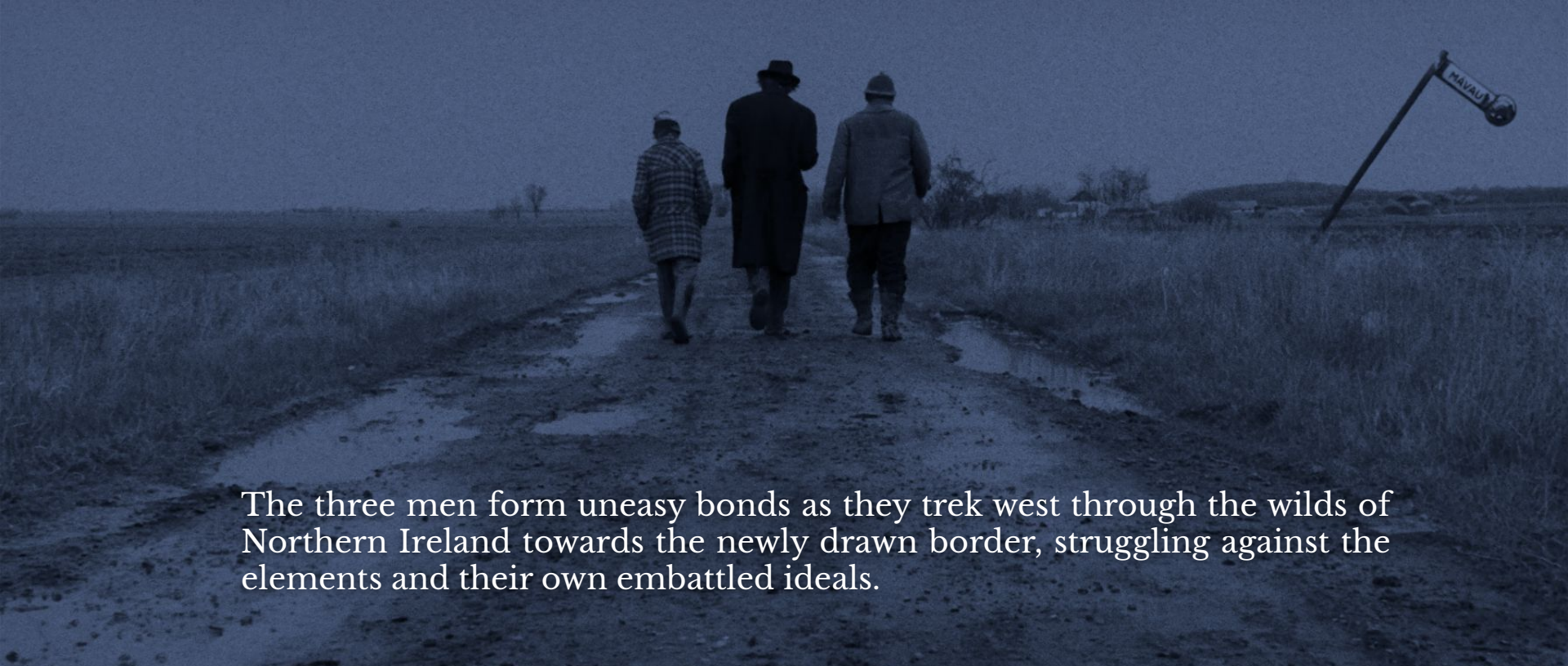
A chance encounter with two Protestant policemen ends in one man's death and the other, DUNCAN, a seasoned and disillusioned sergeant, taken as their hostage.

DUNCAN (60s)

A WWI veteran and a Protestant sergeant of the Royal Irish Constabulary in Antrim, he supports Ireland's union with Britain, but has deep misgivings about Britain's ruthless actions in the conflict.

"A sombre massive figure like the hill itself, thick grey hair and beard protruding from between cap and collar. He seemed to blot out the sky as he stools tall and bulky, his unshaven chin flecked black and white."



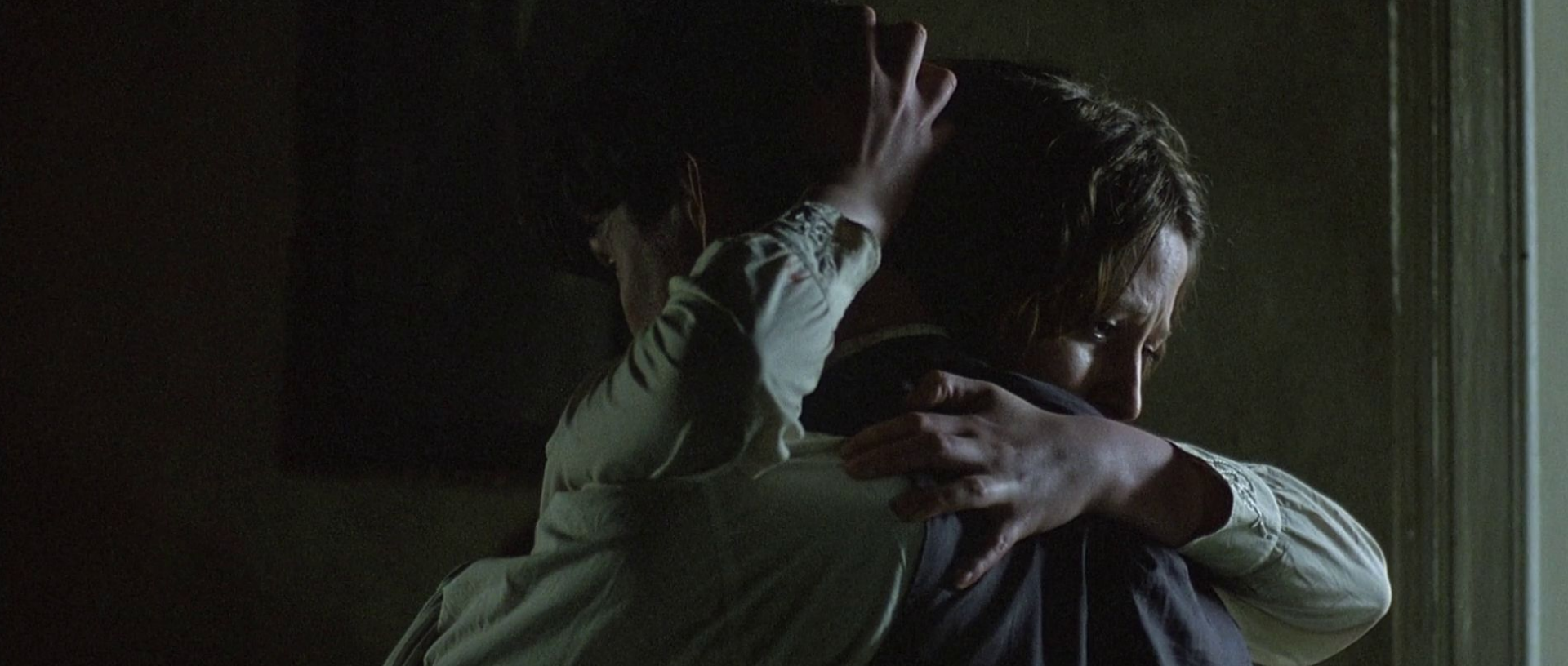


The three men form uneasy bonds as they trek west through the wilds of Northern Ireland towards the newly drawn border, struggling against the elements and their own embattled ideals.



Lines between captor and captive blur as they evade British patrols and take refuge with Tidge's activist wife, MAEVE, who challenges the men's understanding of what is truly at stake in the war.





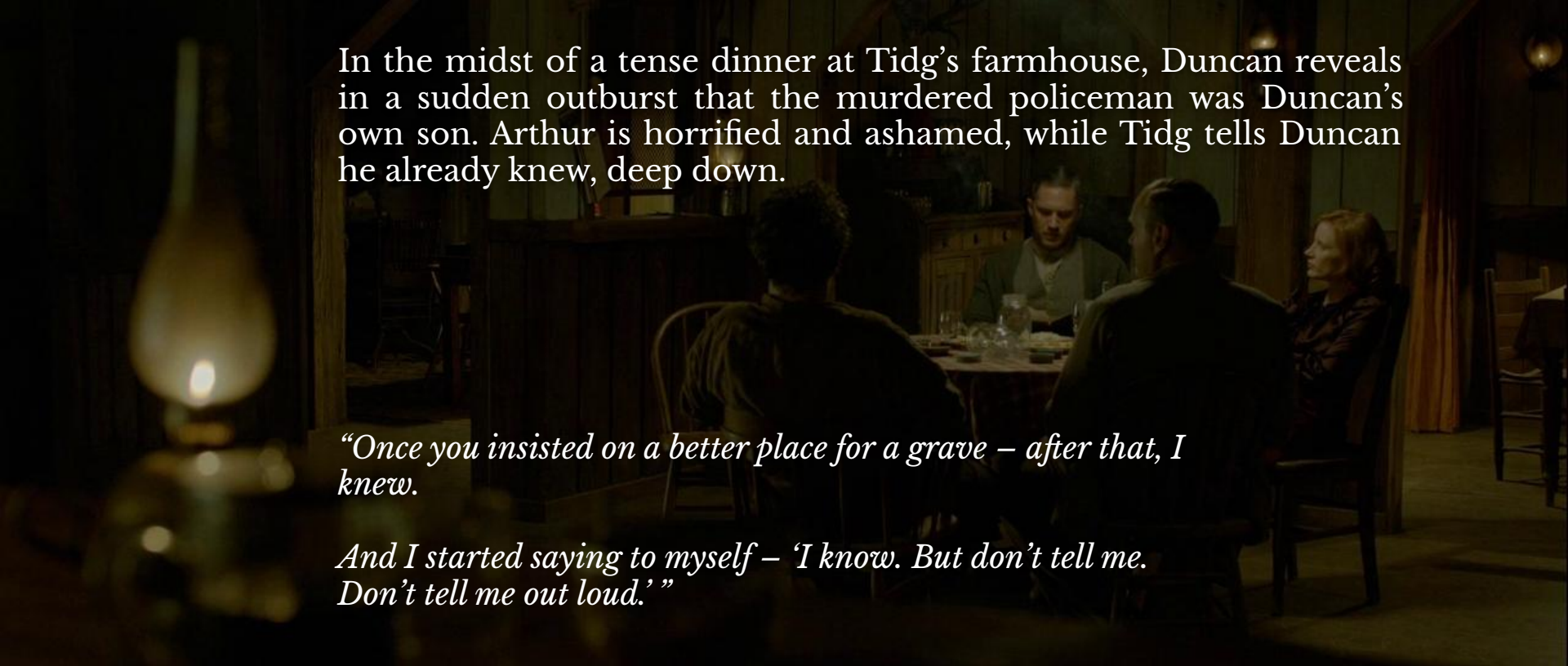
MAEVE (40s)

Coming from a respectable middle-class Catholic Derry family, she “married down” when she met Tidd through the city’s Republican and Celtic Revival circles. Educated and booksmart, she nonetheless took to rural life, becoming a central figure in organizing funds, weapons and safehouses in the region all while maintaining the farm and raising their two children.

“Her face is calm but her eyes give nothing, hiding herself within herself, behind her biting wit. She allowed him to measure out the silence, trying to feel his pain as her own. Both had known too much to find any consolation in the platitudes of war.”





A dimly lit farmhouse dining room with people at a table. The scene is dark, with a warm, low-key light source on the left. In the background, a man in a light-colored shirt is seated at a round table with other people. The room has wooden walls and a rustic feel.

In the midst of a tense dinner at Tidg's farmhouse, Duncan reveals in a sudden outburst that the murdered policeman was Duncan's own son. Arthur is horrified and ashamed, while Tidg tells Duncan he already knew, deep down.

"Once you insisted on a better place for a grave – after that, I knew.

And I started saying to myself – 'I know. But don't tell me. Don't tell me out loud.'"



Duncan threatens revenge on Tidg's son in a volatile standoff.


Maeve intervenes and convinces Duncan to let the child go. She is furious at Tidg for bringing this danger into their house, but also insists he must continue on his journey.

“None of this will be worth anything if you give up now.”

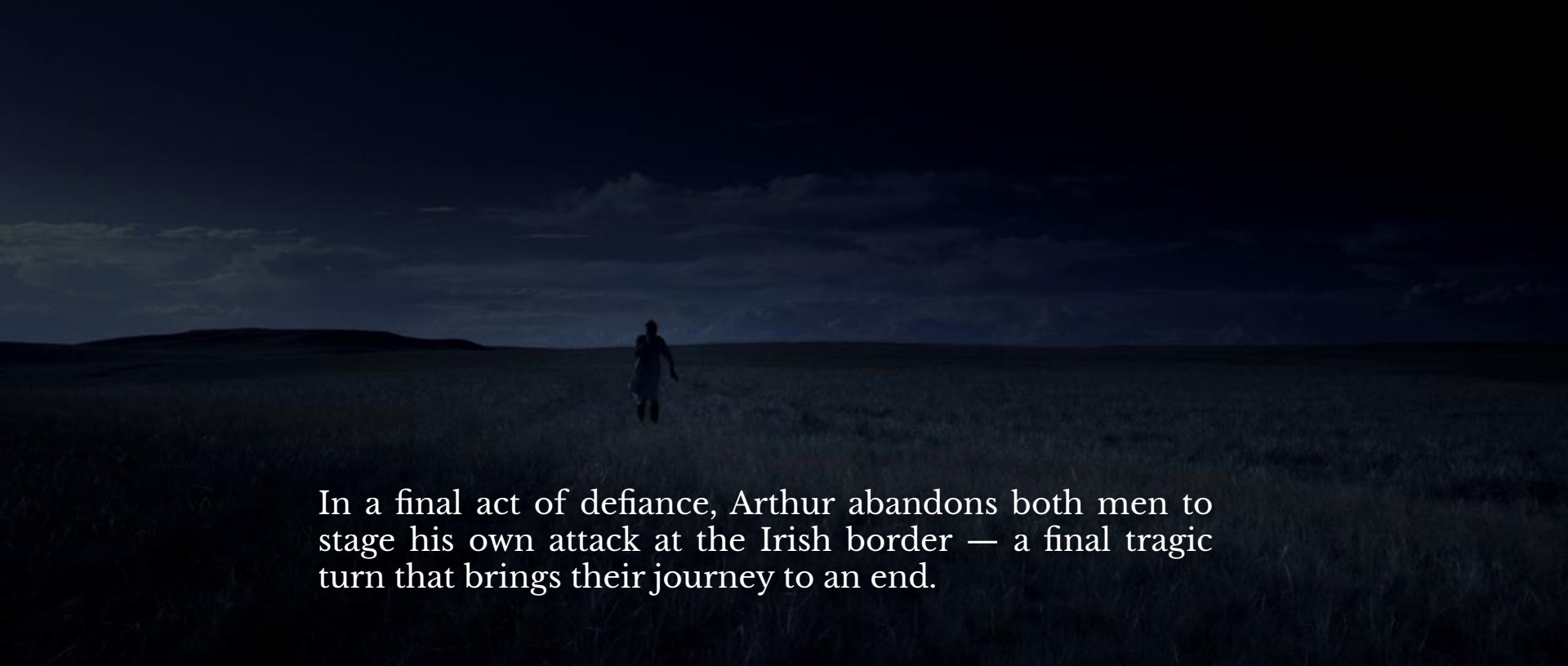
The men continue on their journey – Tidg tells Duncan he is free to go now, but Duncan refuses. Duncan feels a bond with his captors that he cannot let go of: a protective attachment to Arthur and a bitter desire to see Tidg killed “by his own kind.”

"He's hardly a hostage anymore," Tidg reflects, understanding that Duncan has chosen to remain with them, determined to witness their fate. *"I feel as if I'm now his prisoner."*





As they near their destination and the hopelessness of their cause becomes undeniable, Tidg and Duncan compete for influence over young Arthur's fate.



In a final act of defiance, Arthur abandons both men to stage his own attack at the Irish border — a final tragic turn that brings their journey to an end.





An existential parable drawing on elements of western and thriller genres, *The Road to Ballyshannon* returns to the birth of Irish partition and nationhood to explore the human costs of political conflict and the possibility of solidarity across sectarian divides.



ABACUS

THE ROAD TO BALLYSHANNON

DAVID MARTIN



'Elegantly simple but powerfully haunting...
a beautifully reverberant story.' SUNDAY EXPRESS

“Every word in this haunting, tragic story is slid glinting into place, to make one feel, under the surface of hopeless political causes, the simple instincts and energy of old legends.”

– *The London Times*

“A powerful study of personalities with an application beyond local time and circumstance”

– *The Irish Times*

“Elegantly simple but powerfully haunting ... a beautifully reverberant story”

– *Sunday Express*

“Part allegory, part political thriller... shows a good deal of insight into the ideological complexities and confusions bound up with the origins of the state of Ulster”

– *The Times Literary Supplement*

“A contemporary parable of sectarian division transposed to the Ireland of 1922 ... offer(s) a glimmer of a Utopian horizon, the possibility of an alternative to a fatally divided status quo”

— *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*

WRITER-DIRECTOR'S NOTES

My family's history has been shaped by Ireland's nationalist struggles—from 1916 to the Troubles of the '70s and '80s—but in my films I've always been less fascinated by slogans or eulogies than by private doubts and internal battles—moments where ideals begin to unravel. I'm drawn to stories where political conviction collides with the mess of lived experience.

The Road to Ballyshannon lives in that tension. Its characters navigate terrain they know intimately, even as its borders are being redrawn and its meanings rewritten. The film juxtaposes their physical needs—to escape, to survive, to sleep, to eat, to mind each other—with the abstract conflicts of nationhood, commitment and sacrifice. As the film unfolds, captor

and captive, victim and perpetrator, must collaborate or perish, while the younger generation questions inherited beliefs and the cycles of violence binding them.

The Road to Ballyshannon grapples with a foundational fracture in Irish history that still finds so many echoes in today's global conflicts. It explores this not through sweeping battles but through intimate, human gestures of endurance and care, etched out in muddy fields and icy winds; small moments through which we can glimpse the flickering possibility of solidarity in the face of difference, and forgiveness in the face of irreparable harm.

WHY NOW?

A century on from the events of *The Road to Ballyshannon*, the fault lines of the Irish Civil War reverberate in the renewed debates over Ireland's re-unification, and the anxieties they carry of a return to violence. Likewise, as sectarian and partisan tensions rise internationally, the prospect of civil war in the US and elsewhere is no longer a remote possibility. In this climate of intensifying polarization, a film confronting the dangers—and futility—of political violence feels more urgent than ever.

*A recent news
segment on PBS...*



World Aug 27

What Americans can learn from Northern Ireland's history of political violence

By Judy Woodruff, Frank Carlson



DÓNAL FOREMAN is an Irish filmmaker living between New York City and Dublin. He has written, directed, edited and co-produced three feature films and dozens of shorts which the Criterion Collection has hailed as "searching, shape-shifting explorations of place, cultural memory, and national identity."

The Irish Times has called him "one of Ireland's most imaginative cinematic talents", and his features have been praised in The New York Times, The Hollywood Reporter, Sight & Sound, The Guardian, and Film Comment. Retrospectives of his work have been presented by the Irish Film Institute, the Irish Cultural Centre in London, and the Criterion Collection.

He has been nominated twice for the Irish Film & TV Academy Awards - for the Rising Star Award in 2014 and for Best Documentary in 2020 - and presented with the Discovery Award from the Dublin Film Critics Circle in 2014. His film *The Image You Missed* premiered at Rotterdam and went on to screen at over 40 festivals across 20 countries, winning nine awards including the Grand Jury Prize at BAFICI. In 2020, The Irish Times declared it one of the 50 best Irish films ever made.





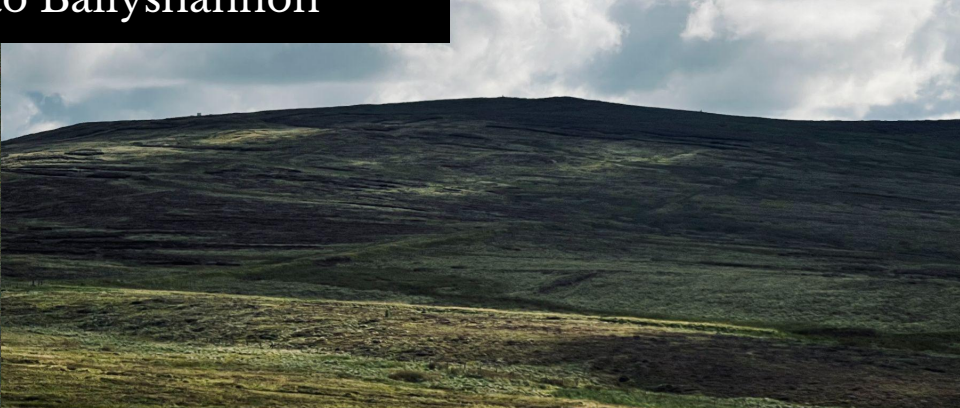
MIKE S. RYAN is an American producer who has helped realize many groundbreaking films in the last 25 years.

Junebug, starring Amy Adams, made its international premiere at Cannes in 2005 and went on to be one of the lowest-budgeted feature films ever nominated for an Oscar (Best Supporting Actress, 2005). Other credits include Todd Solondz's *Palindromes* and *Life During Wartime*; Bela Tarr's final film, *Turin Horse*; Kelly Reichardt's *Old Joy* and her *Meek's Cutoff* starring Michelle Williams; and most recently *The Ballad of Suzanne Césaire*, which screened at NYFF and TIFF, and won Best Film at the Belfast Film Festival.

His films have garnered nominations and prizes from the Academy Awards, Independent Spirit Awards, Gotham Awards and many more. He was nominated for an Independent Spirit "Producer of the Year" Award, and was one of Variety's 2007 "10 Producers to Watch."



A few locations mentioned in the novel
along “the road to Ballyshannon”





CONTACT

donalforeman@gmail.com

greystackfilms@gmail.com