

Feature Film Treatment

CARPINI

A faction based on the documented journey of Franciscan Giovanni di Carpini to the Court of the Mongol Khan in the mid 13th Century.

By Stewart McKie

Sometimes the longest journey is finding yourself

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A lone monk stands with his back to us and hurls a stick through the air. The stick lands in the ground, a wind blows up and we see the name CARPINI carved in the stick.

In the Mongol empire, the death of the Mongol Khan has caused a succession problem. His regent queen TORGINA is threatened by the usurper BATU and his brothers BALA and KETE who are taking advantage of the fact that her son and heir GUYUK was lost when the Mongol horde retreated from their recent invasion of Europe.

Batu is a killer who wastes no time in trying to dispose of Torgina and anyone else he thinks might threaten his bid for the throne. But Torgina retains the right to rule, keeps the upper hand and is protected by her Shaman, TEB.

Back in the west, POPE INNOCENT IV, has his own problems struggling with his political rival FREDERICK, the Holy Roman Emperor. He decides to take direct action, sending an assassin to kill Frederick and recalling a former warrior monk CARPINI, currently "retired" in a remote monastery. The Pope wants Carpini to stop the flow of information from the Mongols to Frederick via another monk ODERIC, who is already at the Mongol court but has switched his allegiance from the Pope to Frederick.

In the Mongol court, Torgina worries that Guyuk is dead and will never return, while Batu reveals that he betrayed Guyuk in the field and left him for dead back in Europe.

Carpini is dispatched to meet the Pope with a young companion, the unworldly STEPHEN. On the way, Carpini pays a visit to his old friend and warrior buddy JOSEPH, now living as a hermit. Carpini is reluctant to go back to work for the Pope, who offers him a Bishopric, but he is finally persuaded to accept the mission by the Pope offering Carpini the opportunity to settle scores with Oderic, who has betrayed Carpini in the past.

Batu continues to exert his power by trying to eliminate a hostage prisoner, Russian Prince Vladimir, but again is foiled by Teb. Batu succeeds in eliminating his aunt, who poisoned the former Khan, and he expels the monk Oderic from the court for spying. To give them all something else to think about, Torgina takes action and orders

the horde to move west.

In the west Carpini and Stephen have no sooner begun their journey eastwards when they are captured, imprisoned and threatened by Frederick. Carpini engineers their release by agreeing to work on Frederick's behalf, so they are able to continue their journey by sea from Bari (in Italy) to Constantinople (Istanbul).

In Constantinople, Carpini meets KING BALDWIN who recommends the local Polo family to help them with the logistics of their journey. Carpini entrusts Stephen with his first big task, to make the arrangements for their overland journey with Polo. Unfortunately, Stephen does not meet Polo and instead is seduced by a pair of opportunistic but loveable rogues – good time girl PASHMINA and her "uncle" VOLTAN – who are clearly after the monk's money.

The party of four are already sailing across the Black Sea before Carpini discovers what Stephen has really done. So when they make landfall, the four end up travelling together towards Kiev on the first main leg of their journey.

The Mongol horde is also moving west and when it stops to do some military exercises Torgina again wrong-foots Batu and also takes Vladimir under her wing to continue her education about the west. But Batu is not taking this lying down and sends out his own men to search for Guyuk just in case. Meanwhile Oderic has been escorted to the borders of the empire and is left by his escorts to continue his journey back to the west alone.

On the way to Kiev, Pashmina continues her seduction of Stephen to find out where the money is. When they reach the outskirts of Kiev, the sight of the remains of the Mongols massacre of the population of Kiev on the plain outside the ruined city, causes Stephen to break down. At Kiev the party meets KING ALEXANDER and Carpini promises to try to return Alexander's son Vladimir from the Mongols. When Pashmina fails in her attempt to steal the monk's funds from Carpini, Voltan decides he's had enough of this venture and stays in Kiev to try his luck there.

Pashmina decides to keep travelling, after all she was originally the illegitimate child of a Mongol camp follower, so she knows something of their language. She, Carpini and Stephen leave Kiev for the east and soon make their first contact with the Mongols, a couple of Batu's bandits. They are saved from any difficulties by the appearance of a lone horseman, who turns out to be GUYUK. He has been making his way back east after escaping from imprisonment in the west.

Guyuk joins the party as guide and interpreter. Carpini's party have no idea who Guyuk really is. But one of the bandits has caught a glimpse of a talisman around Guyuk's neck, significant because this is a unique identifier of Guyuk's royalty.

The party reach what appears to be a Christian cemetery out in the

steppe and unbeknown to the others, Carpini discovers Oderic breaking his journey, asleep in a nearby hut. A flashback explains how Carpini was betrayed and Carpini ruthlessly dispatches Oderic, strangling him with his trusty stick, his weapon of choice, and removing a finger from Oderic's hand that wears the Pope's signet ring.

The others do not suspect Carpini but when Guyuk returns from a hunting trip he is suspicious, after he examines the body before Carpini buries it. But later, when the party crosses the Volga river, Carpini saves Guyuk from drowning. In return Guyuk gives Carpini his talisman as a gift.

Guyuk is again off hunting when the bandits return and capture the party. That night, carousing around the campfire, the bandits threaten a gang rape of Pashmina. But Guyuk returns and in the darkness manages to kill all the bandits except one who escapes into the night. The corpses are thrown on a fire.

The escaped bandit informs Batu that the party is nearby and could include Guyuk. Batu has the bandit disposed of by Kete and heads off to find the Carpini party. Before he reaches them, Guyuk and Pashmina have gone off together to visit a nearby lake known to Guyuk.

When Batu catches up with the party, Carpini tries to persuade Batu that the man he thinks is Guyuk was killed in the bandit ambush and claims he retrieved the talisman in his possession from the dead man's body, cremated in the fire. This is what Batu wants to hear – Guyuk is dead and now he has the proof. He announces to his men that Carpini has murdered Guyuk and has the monks taken back to the Mongol camp for execution.

Guyuk and Pashmina enjoy the lake together but return to find Carpini and Stephen gone. Guyuk realizes they have been taken and they begin to follow their trail to the Mongol camp. Carpini and Stephen are now staked out at the centre of the camp awaiting execution. Batu announces to the Horde that Guyuk is dead – he has the talisman as proof and the murderers. Torgina is finished.

To celebrate Batu orders a massive all-night banquet during which he arranges for a bunch of hostages to be gruesomely killed and for an assassin to dispatch Torgina while the celebrations are going on. The hostages die but Torgina evades the assassin because he finds Vladimir in her bed instead of her and in the ensuing struggle, Teb kills the assassin.

The following dawn sees Torgina, Vladimir and Teb leaving the camp to evade Batu who lies in a drunken stupor with all the others. But when Torgina talks to the staked-out Carpini it becomes clear that Guyuk is not dead, so they release Carpini and Stephen and take the pair with them to Teb's Shaman tent. While Carpini, Stephen and Vladimir hide in the tent, Torgina goes to a nearby waterfall to wash and prepare to leave to find Guyuk.

When Batu and his brothers wake they realize that the assassin has failed and the prisoners are gone, so Batu and Bala go to find them and leave Kete behind in the camp. Bala goes to Teb's tent and kills him. But when he enters the tent, expecting Torgina to be inside, he is killed by Carpini who strangles him with his stick.

Batu goes to the waterfall and finds Torgina there. Her nakedness seduces him long enough from his intention to kill her to enable her to fatally stab him. Then when Guyuk and Pashmina appear from the trees around the lake, Guyuk finishes Batu off and decapitates him. Torgina and Guyuk are reunited.

The three return to Teb's tent, who is mourned by Torgina. Guyuk reveals his true identity to Carpini and Torgina and Guyuk return to the Mongol camp. Batu's brother Kete escapes on horseback when he realizes that Guyuk has returned. Guyuk explains the true events to the Horde and he is welcomed back as the heir apparent.

Guyuk is elected Khan and wastes no time in telling Carpini that no deal will be done with either the Pope or Frederick, as he is now the most powerful man in the world. He gifts Vladimir's freedom to Carpini, and meanwhile Carpini has begun to bond with Torgina.

Carpini decides he will not return to the west with Stephen and Pashmina, but will continue east. He gives Stephen some packages to take back to Frederick, the Pope and Joseph. He also gives him the Pope's signet ring and tells Stephen that he will know what to do with it when the time comes.

Stephen and Pashmina pass through to Kiev to drop off Vladimir and Pashmina returns to Constantinople to become the pampered Mrs. Polo. Stephen drops off the package to Frederick who has killed the assassin sent to kill him by the Pope but is enraged when he realizes from the contents of the package that Carpini has got the better of him.

The Pope has also been bested by Carpini and Stephen ends up leveraging his possession of the signet ring to get the Bishopric in Dalmatia originally promised to Carpini. But Joseph appreciates the significance of his package – one of Pashmina's scented scarves.

Back at the Mongol court, Torgina and Carpini have decided to travel east together. On their way they stop at an oasis and Carpini climbs to the top of a hill where he is faced with the stunning view of a tranquil Buddhist monastery. Suddenly Kete appears on horseback intent on killing Carpini but before he can do so, he is spotted and killed by Torgina.

With the deep, resonating sound of a Buddhist bell, Carpini has his moment of Zen and the story ends as it began with Carpini hurling his stick into the air, finally rejecting his past and moving on.

