

Quest for fire

'Pretty department', dirty work

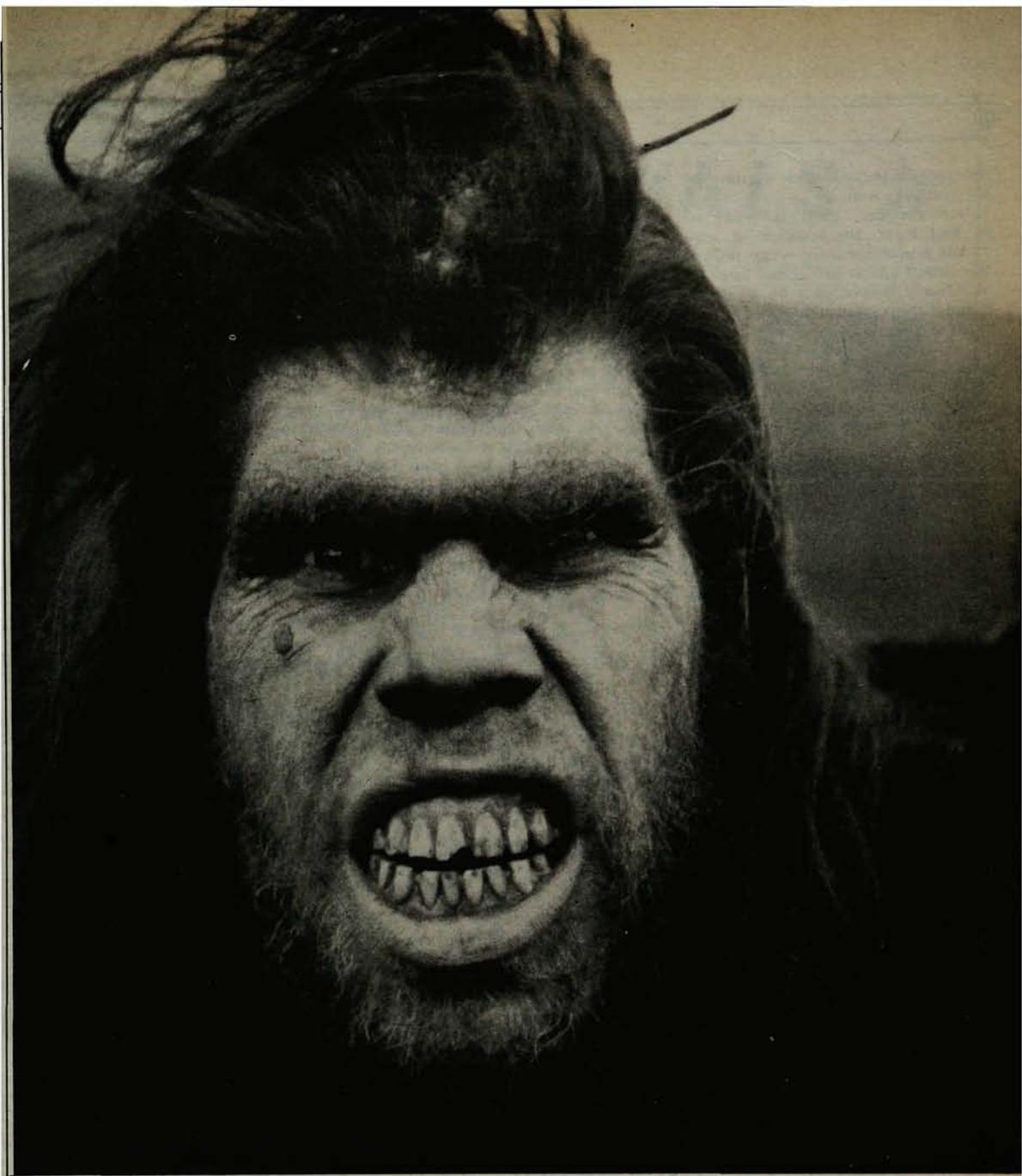
Budgeted at \$12 million, *Quest for Fire* follows everyone's favorite relative, Neanderthal Man, through an odyssey to insure his only way out of the Stone Age — possessing fire.

Attacked by the savage Wagaboo tribe, the Ulam tribe is robbed of its precious fire. Three prime Ulam warriors, Naoh (Everett McGill), Amoukar (Ron Perelman), and Gaw (Nameer El Kadi) are sent out to reclaim the flame. On the way, they rescue the beautiful Ika (Rae Dawn Chong) from the vicious cannibal Kzammms. Ika's grateful tribe, the Ivaka, teach the Ulam trio fire-making from scratch. Ika and Naoh fall in love, proving once and for all that primitive man was capable of more than just a one-night-stand.

The publicists on *Quest* produced an impressive release. We have everyone's credits: director Jean-Jacques Annaud (*Black and White in Colour*), executive producer Michael Cruskoff (*Young Frankenstein*, *Nosferatu*), screenwriter Gerard Brach (*Cul de sac*, *Knife in the Water*, *Tess*). ICC producers John Kemeny and Denis Héroux score a long paragraph. It's also full of the rich texture of human interest that journalists crave: the on-set marriage of one of the lead actors to the unit nurse; exactly where actor Ron Perelman has lived each of his 31 years; the rather confusing ethnic heritage of Rae Dawn Chong (Chinese-Irish-French-Indian-Black, and all-Canadian).

But some of us wanted more. We were getting postcards from the *Quest* crew on location. They covered three continents. We knew that elephants were getting stuck in Scottish peat bogs. We knew that Desmond (*Naked Ape*) Morris wanted to choreograph an Apache dance on the Samburu Game Preserve in the Kenyan wilderness. And we knew that a Lion's Head (Ontario) farmer was transporting the cast to location in a manure spreader. Above all, we knew that the Pretty Department wasn't making anyone pretty. Toronto-based makeup artist Suzanne Benoit told us why.

Benoit joined the production in Scotland, the first leg of the shoot. British makeup artist Sara Monzani (*Alien*, *Midnight Express*, *Bugsy Malone*, and *Edward and Mrs. Simpson*) had been overseeing the manufacture of Neanderthal prosthetics for eight months before the first shoot. Brow ridges, noses, wigs, and teeth were produced for months, crafted from positive and negative molds rivaling the lost-wax sculpting process in complexity. "When I arrived in Scotland, everything was not finished. In a little hut, 40 minutes' drive from Fort William, north of Edinburgh, five of us set to painting the latex masks of the Kzammms. We painted the veins, shaded the eyes, and plugged them with hair — in the ears and nose too — with a punching implement, like an open-ended needle. Very different than ventilating wigs. It was very interesting work." Plugging and painting and plugging continued



Man or beast? A masterful makeup job transforms Ron Perelman into Amoukar

photo: Takashi Seida.

further more when the crew moved to Avemoor.

"That was our first sight of the elephants. The art director from Montreal, Guy Comtois, did the elephant hair-pieces — it was a hell of a job to get those elephants dressed." Made up as mastadons, the elephants were also treated to enormous tusks, applied by a very well known European animal handler, Mr. Chipperfield. "They were circus elephants, and it was like a scene from Hannibal — we had to get them over a huge mountain to location." The fateful day that one of these gentle creatures became stuck in the bog, cranes were transported over the mountainous terrain to pull the elephant out. "He was a bit hysterical, poor thing," recalls Benoit.

In the shots where the three Ulam warriors and Rae Dawn are involved with these "mammoths," "mini-people" were used to make the animals look more foreboding. "They used children made up and dressed exactly like the lead characters — that was a wonderful job done by Sara."

The cold damp of a Scottish fall threatened to cause problems with the application and maintenance of the prosthetic pieces. "All three Ulams had their prosthetic foreheads on all the time." (Rae Dawn was allowed to be pretty with her very own Irish-Chinese-

French-Indian-Black-Canadian forehead). "The foam latex from which the pieces were made, would, in the rain, act like a sponge. But the pieces were very well made, well applied and well maintained. The make-up artists who were doing them were extremely conscientious and they always looked just right. The actors were kept under umbrellas always between takes."

After three weeks in Scotland, a chartered plane carried crew and equipment from Glasgow to Nairobi. "But the



The Stone Age's version of Bo Derek? Damsel in-distress, Ika (Rae Dawn Chong).

photo: Takashi Seida.

plane was about a ton overweight and we had to offload all our fullers' earth, which we needed for the body make-up of the Ivaka tribe." Fullers' earth is a clay substance, taken from the earth and refined to the consistency of talcum powder. "They had the earth in Kenya alright, but it was red. Ika (Rae Dawn) has been shot in our European fullers' earth, which was a grey-green. It was the design — and we had to stick to it for continuity." The make-up team tried everything to make the Kenyan earth do. "We mixed all manner of substances — but there's no way you can turn red into grey-green." So more was ordered from England to the tune of about eight-hundred pounds Sterling. Unidentifiable yet reliable sources report that producer John Kemeny was not pleased.

"While we were in Africa, we did a lot of research. We watched the people and rushed into the bookstores. Leni Riefenstahl's photographic study of mask people shows a similarity to what we did with the Ivaka — we fell in love with her book.

"When I was hired, I went to every library and looked in every book to find illustrations of Neanderthal Man. But anything you find, after all, is really only some artist's impression. You have a skull, and work artistically to create what is covering it. And of course, this

concept was in the head of the director, Jean-Jacques Annaud.

"Jean-Jacques' ideal is what we worked from. His concept of what makes primitivity is the wider nostrils, the strong jutting jaw, small forehead and heavy brow area, with small and deeply-set eyes. But at the same time, he wanted a semblance of 'evolution'." So, within the Wagaboo tribe, variations existed. Some had more finely chisled noses and brows, while some were more exaggerated. Some were a compromise between this "evolution" and primitivity.

Benoit has surprisingly few nasty things to say about the African heat. She was indignant at the suggestion that a make-up department, miles away from civilization and Mac's Milk stores, would so much as run out of Kleenex. "Sara Monzani thought of everything." And she had no comment on the unconfirmed report (postmarked Monbasa) that the circus elephants panicked in a rainstorm, and stampeded the two-man pup tent where the camera gear was stored, mistaking it for the Big-Top.

But she did indicate that lunch breaks were a bit of a problem. "In Scotland and in Kenya, the Kzams (remember, they're the vicious red cannibals) had masks that covered not only the face but the neck, and went down into their fur costumes. For them to be able to eat, the entire mask had to be taken off, and then carefully dried. At first this took half of lunch hour. But by the time we were really cooking, we could get them back on in minutes."

As the production moved back to Montreal, Michelle Burke took over the Canadian make-up unit, and the team moved into a lab in Montreal, which ICC had arranged. "We took over this space, and set up an entire laboratory. With ovens, scales, tables and barber chairs for our life castings, we started from scratch and created the entire laboratory from its smallest detail up. Our 'homme à tout faire' was also the production company's 'homme à tout faire'. So while he was running around for the production coordinator, we were trying to get him to also run to Pascal's and pick up our cement. There was much demand made on this poor man's time.

"From plastic bowls to egg-beaters - every chemical had to be ordered. This was a trial for a make-up artist. One would have to get on the phone and ring up a chemical company and say 'Uh, we're doing this big film, so we'd like to open an account with you.' Then the guy on the other end says, 'Well, send us three letters of reference and your credit

QUEST FOR FIRE

p.c. Cinetrail Inc. p. John Kemeny, Denis Héroux, Claude Léger co-p. Jacques Dorfmann, Vera Belmont exec. p. Michael Gruskoff assoc. p. Mickey Moore p. man. Stephan Reichel p. coord. Barbara Shrier compt. Leslie Kemeny p. acct. Micheline Bonin asst. to p. Anne Burke unit man. Peter Bray p. selc. Angela Heald sc. Gerard Brach, from the story by Rosny-Aisne d. Jean-Jacques Annaud 1st ass't d. Mathew Vibert d.o.p. Claude Agostini light John Berrie 1st cam. Al Smith 1st cam. grip Carlo Campana 2nd cam. Keith Wood focus puller George Bottos wnd cam. loader Christophe Bonnière 2nd cam. grip André Ouellette gaf. Maris Jansen elect. Frieder Hochheim sd. mix. Claude Hazanavicius boom Denis Dupont art. d. Guy Comtois props Enrico Campana, Gareth Wilson ward. master John Hay ward. mistress Renée April ward. asst. Blanche Boileau make-up Lyne Desmarais, Michele Burke, Joan Isaacson, Suzanne Benoit, Marie-Josée Lafontaine sp. efx. asst. Neil Truffonovitch const. man. Claude Simard carpenter Jos Girard, Jean-Guy Proulx, Normand Richer, Richard Boucher cast. Andrée Champagne unit pub. Quinn Donoghue/David Novek Associates stills Takashi Seida ed. Ian McBride ed. asst. Sidonie Kerr, Glenn Berman stunt coord. Jerome Tiberghien l.p. Evrett McGill, Ron Perlman, Nameer el Kadi, Rae Dawn Chong.

rating.' You want to say, 'Listen, son, I'm not a PM, I'm a make-up artist, and I need these chemicals!'"

With Benoit, Stephan Dupuis, Michelle Burke and Joan Isaacson succeeded in getting their chemicals. Joined by dental technician and make-up artist John Caglione from New York, they began the intricate molding and sculpting processes to create the prostheses for the last weeks of shooting in Ontario's Bruce Peninsula.

Benoit was thrilled with the opportunity to work with Dupuis and Caglione, who are first and foremost artist-sculptors, bringing their knowledge of anatomy and technique into the casting and molding assembly-line. "John Caglione has worked in this field since he

was about 15 years old." As assistant to the legendary Dick Smith (*Exorcist*, *Altered States*), Caglione worked on *Scanners* in Montreal with Smith, and was also involved in *Altered States*. Caglione also brought with him Smith's detailed instructions for making foam latex, which reads like a laboratory workbook.

Make-up departments are usually outnumbered by the members of any other single department on a feature. But on *Quest*, they were suddenly a committee, a force to be dealt with and a force left to deal with itself.

"The make-up artist is essentially an 'individualist'... one is an artist in one's own right, with one's own techniques. Suddenly all of us, working toward the

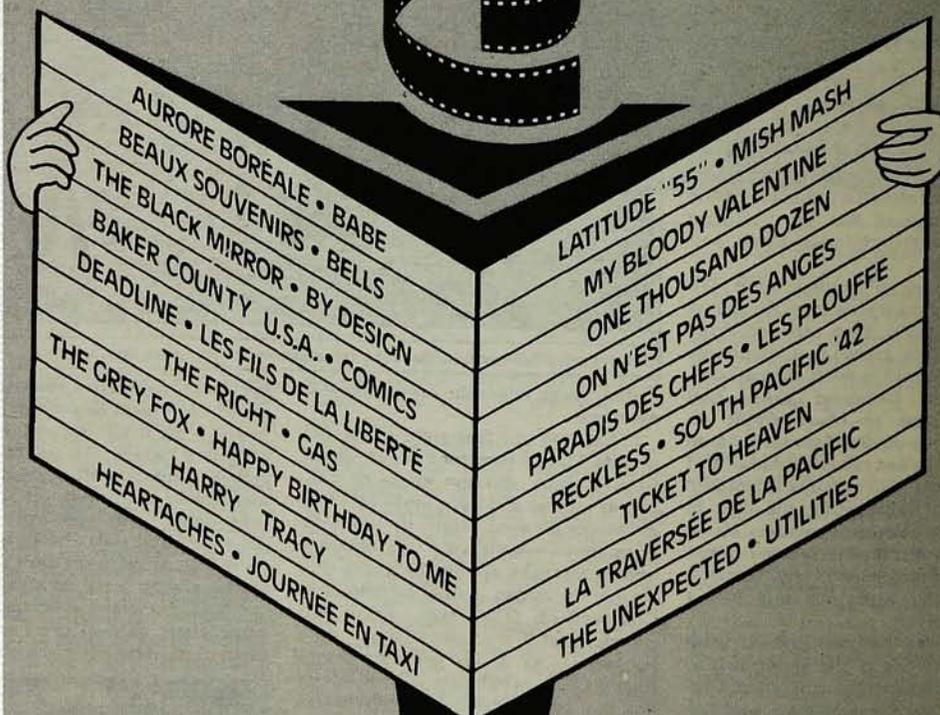
same end result, had to work in the same way, doing the same things. It took a little getting used to. But we were a very compatible group and things ran quite smoothly."

That individuality was further squashed by the laboratory attire-boiler suits (coveralls). No Gucci stripes. No little swans on the ass-pocket, no alligators over the left breast. "Stephane and I formed a club of two, the Twilight Zoners. On my suit he printed "... little did you know..." with an arrow pointing to my backside, where, underneath "the Twilight Zone" was printed the first four notes of the theme song (to that series). That was my protest - my boiler suit shall not be like everyone else's." **Suzanna Plowright** ●

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