

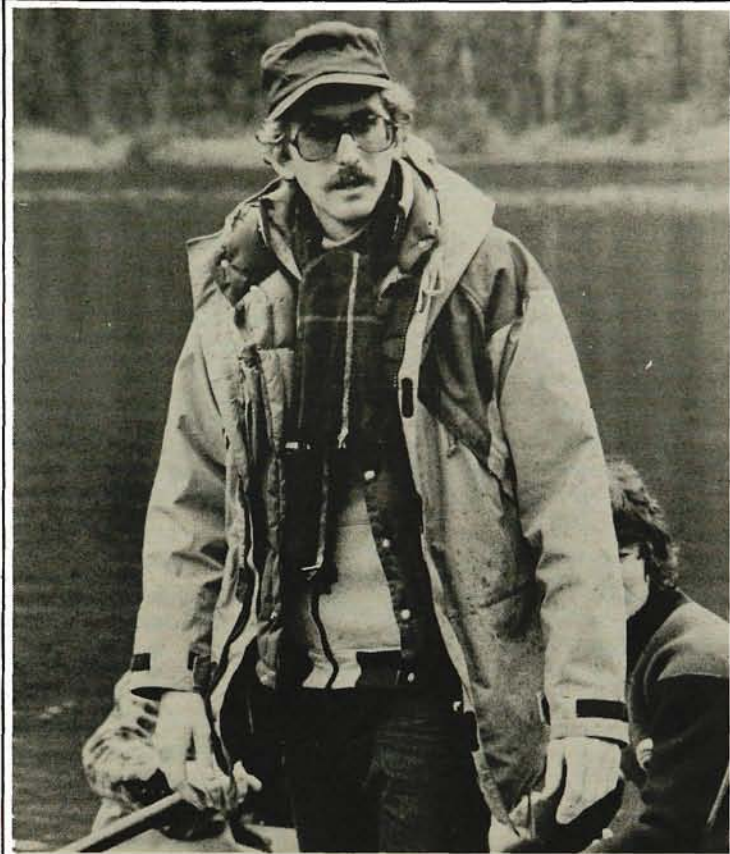
Mother Lode

All in the family

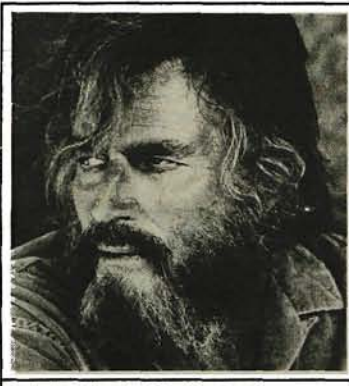
On our November visit on the set of *Mother Lode* in British Columbia, the crew is in its fifth week of shooting, and their last location, an enormous unheated warehouse on the outskirts of Vancouver. At first sight the set seems to be nothing but a confusing forest of lumber draped in black plastic, spread out over an acre of concrete floor. But it reveals itself to be a remarkable reconstruction of a mine, designed by production designer Doug Higgins, and executed by art directors Mike Bolton and Jimmy Chow and their crew. Standing in one of the tunnels, you are surrounded by what you swear is solid rock, rough hewn and covered in dust and cobwebs or dripping with water. But hit it with your fist and it echoes hollow, nothing but styrofoam blown and shaped and painted to look amazingly like the real thing. There are yards and yards of it, narrow twisting tunnels, big excavated areas full of rusting mine equipment, deep pits and a mysterious nest of dark underground caves called the Labyrinth where one of the climaxes of the movie takes place.

The shooting crew is gathered around a narrow opening in the "rock" where Jean Dupré (Canadian actor Nick Mancuso) and Andrea Spaulding (American Kim Basinger) are crawling on their stomachs through a narrow pitch-black tunnel lit only by their lamps and hard-hat lights. A voice familiar to all movie fans calls "cut". Director Charlton Heston is an imposing figure on the set, not only because of his 6'3" height and Ben-Hur-Moses aura, but also because of his shoulder-length gray hair, long matted beard, filthy old sweater and miner's boots. Not that he looks like this regularly... here he is performing the dual role of director/actor and is garbed as Silas McGee, the grim old Scotsman who is the only other major character in the movie. It is no easy task, directing and playing a major role, but with 55 movies and a 25-year career on stage and in films behind him, Heston handles it admirably.

There is another Heston on the set playing a dual role, son Fraser who is both the writer and the producer of *Mother Lode*, at 26 one of the youngest producers in the industry. Tall like his father, and slim, he seems a powerhouse of energy, keeping an eye on the second-unit shooting around the corner, discussing line changes with the actors, conferring with the production designer on the new sets, and helping out when his father becomes actor and steps in front of the camera. Fraser is a landed-immigrant, married to Vancouverite Marilyn Heston (the unit publicist) and living in West Vancouver. He is full of enthusiasm for his adopted British Columbia and it is reflected in the script, a story about a Vancouver bush pilot who flies up into the mountainous inner regions of B.C. with an ex-girl friend, in search of a missing co-pilot and the mother lode, the fabulous source of all the gold that has been washing down the streams of the Cassiar region for



● Producer, screenwriter Fraser Heston keeps shoot on an even keel



● Actor, director Charlton Heston

centuries. They find more than they bargained for, and therein lies the plot. The only other actors in the movie are John Marley who plays an old Indian (what will they do about his New York accent?) and Vancouver actor Dale Wilson.

Executive producer Peter Snell is a soft-spoken Albertan now living mainly in England. He was exec. producer on the Anglo-Canadian film *Bear Island* shot in northern B.C. and Alaska in 1979-80, and has a long list of credits to his name, including the Nicholas Roeg success *Don't Look Now*. He took on the movie at the request of the Hestons when another Western project of his temporarily fell through. He and Heston had worked together 10 years ago on the movie *Anthony and Cleopatra*, which Heston both directed and starred in, so the two have had a long working relationship. The crew is mainly from Vancouver with a few exceptions: director of photography Richard Leiterman,

camera operator Bob Saad, and script supervisor Penny Hynam from Toronto, and sound mixer Bill Nelson from Los Angeles (plus stuntmen and a special-effects man working with Vancouver's John Thomas). The out-of-towners are impressed with the expertise, efficiency and good-naturedness of the Vancouver crew. Both Hestons have gone on record in various press interviews as saying that the crew is one of the best and most committed they have ever worked with. All of which adds up to another pat on the collective back for Canadian film workers.

And it hasn't been an easy shoot. It rained non-stop in the first two weeks of exteriors in the magnificent scenery around Squamish and Whistler mountain, and they filmed on regardless. "We had mushrooms growing on our heads" one crew member grins. Mancuso and Basinger even had to do a long love scene in the rain, although apparently the endless water doesn't show on film. The crew has been shooting 12 to 14 hour days, 6 days a week, mostly in the wet or the cold. Kim Basinger, a fragile blonde who manages to look good even in wet hair and hip-waders, turns out to be a real trouper during filming, despite being immersed in freezing November lake water, dragged through the dust and dirt of endless mine tunnels, and chased around by a maniac with an axe. Nick Mancuso, fresh from his critical success in *Ticket to Heaven* survives his own trials during the filming. He is magnetic on film, but intense and withdrawn on set and, like Basinger, does very little mixing with the crew.

There is a genuine affection on set for Charlton Heston, whom everyone calls "Chuck" and sometimes (not to his face)

"the Big Fella". "He never raises his voice or has a mean word for anyone," says first assistant director Don Granbery, who is himself an actor. The respect evident in the crew is demonstrated in the willingness and speed with which they execute his shots. And when Heston steps in front of the camera there isn't an eye in the place that is not on him.

DOP Richard Leiterman, who has put his inimitable images on the screen in such films as *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *Silence of the North* and *Surfacing*, has faced one of the most challenging photographic tasks of his career with this one. With the exception of some reportedly superb aerial sequences over B.C. coastal and mountain scenery, the exteriors were mostly in rain, and more than 70% of the picture takes place either in a dim lamp-lit cabin or in a pitch-black mine. Fraser Heston points out that it is one of the first movies to shoot so much footage underground, and that Leiterman's rushes have been fantastic, with just the right mysterious quality needed for the mine sequences.

Despite the long hours and severe conditions there is a great deal of camaraderie among the crew. When we left, in between takes, they were all chipping in (including both Hestons) on a lottery that was predicting the time and date when camera assistant Bruce Ingram's new baby would be born. The picture wrapped on time and on budget on November 21. And the baby was an 8 lb. boy.

Elizabeth Emtage ●

MOTHER LODE d. Charlton Heston 2nd unit d. Joe Canutt 1st, 2nd, 3rd a.d. Don Granbery, Jacques Hubert, Matthew O'Connor exec. p. Peter Snell p./sc. Fraser C. Heston p. man. Les Kimber loc. man. Gordon Mark scr. superv. Penelope Hynam p. co-ord. Catherine Howard asst to p. Marilyn Heston asst to d. Carol Lanning p. compt. James Westwell asst compt. Lisa Richardson d.o.p. (main unit) Richard Leiterman oper. Robert Saad 1st, 2nd asst. cam. Sandy McCallum, Bruce Ingram d.o.p.'s (2nd unit) Peter McLennan, Tony Westman oper. David Butler asst's Tom Fillingham, Tim Sale stills Chris Helcermanas-Benge p. des. Douglas Higgins st. art d. Michael Bolton loc. art d. James H. Chow apprentice Lynn Trout prop. master Grant Swain prop. asst. Gail Irvine head set dec. Jim Erickson asst. set dec. Della Johnston scenic painter Guenther Bartlik greensman Paddy Holleywell key grip John Dillard Brinson 2nd grip James Hurford dolly grip David Gordon grip Arthur Collier gaffer David Anderson best boy Leonard Wolfe 1st, 2nd lamp John Scott, Duncan McGregor gen. oper. Barry Reid sd. mix. William Nelson boom Ralph Parker make-up Jamie Brown ward. head Maureen Hiscox ward. asst Linda Langdon ed. Eric Boyd-Perkins 1st, 2nd, asst ed. Jack Hilton, Michael Robison head op. efx Joe Day asst sp. efx John Thomas efx man Lee Routly, Michael Clifford stunt pilots Harry Hauss, Joe Hughes, Art Scholl pilot Malcolm Falconer transp. co-ord. Jake Callihoo driver capt. Brian Boyer, Ian (Moss) Urganart drivers Bill Bowe, Allen Brown, Dominique Fauguet-LeMaitre, Mark Gould, Ken J. Johnson, Ken Johnson, Ron Maleschuk, Michael Murphy, Terry Newton, Alois Stranan, Rocky Zantolas caterers Shelley Hetherington, Tana Tocher, Kim Armstrong craft serv. Joanne Ryan const. superv. Ken Chang const. buyer Sharon Low carp. lead Don Gervais carp.'s Barry Brolly, Richard Falhman, John Kalman, Charles Leitrants, Thomas Wells, Arthur Wills, James Armstrong carp. help. Brian Collins, Robert Nicholson carp. apprentice Christopher Wills painter-lead Myles Quinn painters Susan E. High, Phillip Morgan, Robert Sowden occasional crew 2nd a.d. Doug White labourer Michael O'Connor dolly grip John Brown make-up Phyllis Newman prop. asst. Rose-Marie McSherry process spec. co-ord. Donald Ray Hansard, Sr. proj. Donald Ray Hansard, Jr. canad. pub. Holly Levine amer. pub. Murray Weissman unit pub. Marilyn Heston pub. journalist Orin Borsten Lp. Charlton Heston, Kim Basinger, Nick Mancuso, John Marley, Dale Wilson.

photo: Chris Helcermanas-Benge