

GORILLAS IN THE MIST



THE TRUE STORY OF DIAN FOSSEY

Since *Out of Africa*, moviegoers have been very much inside Africa with the rush of films made to capitalize on the new found interest in "the dark continent." In the cinema, for a great many years, Africa always meant Tarzan and his relatives, with the occasional explorer against exotic background of beasts, birds and warlike inhabitants.

Between the depiction of hard-working and compassionate district commissioners of the *Sanders of the River* school and the dissolute aristocrats of *White Mischief* lies another world in Africa, little seen in the movies but now coming to the screen under the poetic title **Gorillas in the Mist**.

This ambitious production, filmed almost entirely on location in Rwanda, is the story of Dian Fossey, an American naturalist who joined Dr. Louis Leakey in Africa in the study of the giant mountain-dwelling gorillas of the eastern regions. She was murdered by unknown assailants in East Africa in December 1985.

The role of Dr. Leakey is played by Ian Cuthbertson and the talented Sigourney Weaver, who battled the mother of the awful creature in *Aliens*, portrays Dian Fossey. She much prefers gorillas to sci-fi monsters and spent months with the animals on location.

"Sometimes," she recalled, "the younger ones would let one know they wanted to play and the next day they would ignore me. It was a great discipline to realize that you're not important to them." Some of the gorillas studied by the real-life Fossey seem to be still alive. When the tall and statuesque Sigourney Weaver appeared in her African safari dress, she looked so much like Miss Fossey that several of the animals, always suspicious of the human kind, came to her without hesitation — wondering perhaps where she had been these many months.

The director of **Gorillas in the Mist** is Michael Apted, who has come a long way in a short space of time with a variety of remarkable films. "There have been three strokes of luck in my professional life" he willingly admits. "The first was the chance to work at Manchester's Granada Television, the second was the decision to move with my family to London to pursue my career and the third was the

opportunity to go to Hollywood to direct *Coal Miner's Daughter*."

His most unusual project is the acclaimed documentary *28 Up*, his fourth in a series beginning in 1963 to portray the same group of fourteen people from childhood to the present. Apted originally studied law and history at Cambridge University. It was in 1963 that he began working at Granada as a researcher and within three years he became a director.

He worked his way through comedy series, children's films, documentaries, straight dramas and the world-famous *Coronation Street*. In 1972 he made his first cinema film *Triple Echo* with Glenda Jackson and Oliver Reed.

This was followed in quick suc-

cession by *Stardust* with David Essex, *The Squeeze* with Stacy Keach, the stylish thriller, *Agatha*, with Dustin Hoffman and Vanessa Redgrave, and then to Los Angeles to film *Coal Miner's Daughter* with Sissy Spacek. He returned to England to make the charming *Kipperbang*, and then moved with his family to Pacific Palisades.

He has directed such films as *Continental Divide*, with John Belushi; *Gorky Park*, with William Hurt; *Firstborn*, with Terri Garr; *Critical Condition*, with Richard Pryor and the concert film *Bring on the Night* with Sting.

Directors, like actors, are frequently type-cast in Hollywood. This seldom happens to such British directors as John Schle-

singer, John Boorman, Ridley Scott, Adrian Lyne and notably, Michael Apted. The director, in Toronto to film the opening sequence of **Gorillas in the Mist** explained why British filmmakers seem able to resist this tendency so successfully.

"It is difficult to say this without seeming superior, and I assure you that I don't intend this to sound so. But there is a much better film-training system in England than in America. We come from television and commercials" he continued "and all of us have done years and years of that kind of work. In Los Angeles or New York, you can get a break and start directing a feature at 23, or have a piece of material, or be a writer who has never directed before and get thrown into it without being ready.

"The fact that few directors of features in America have come from television says more about American television than about my theory. I tend to blame the movie studios' patronizing attitude toward television. Where sitcoms and police stories dominate the medium here, there is tremendous diversity in British television. I regard myself as a television man, television trained, and I'm proud of it. But when I make films, they are cinema films."

Certainly, one of Michael Apted's strengths is his ability to move about, in place and in subject matter. He has a great love of shooting films on location and **Gorillas in the Mist** is the latest of his many films to illustrate this.

"Like David Lean, I've always loved editing and I've always felt that for the director this is the crucial part of filmmaking. It's where the film is, in a sense, rewritten or gets its final draft. How often have you heard 'the dailies are great? When have the dailies not been great? You never know until you've put the film together whether the film has any life, energy or spine to it. I can't conceive how anybody can direct a film without being in the editing room hour after hour.

"After the nightmare of shooting, the early starts, the overtime, the looks at watches, the hundreds of people — just being there with the material, it's a heavenly change of pace.

"I always look for films like **Gorillas** to be an adventure. The message for me is in the material. One must get as much out of the material as possible. Let the style serve the substance."

—Gerald Pratley

