

# FEATURES



**Elliott Lefko**

There's an old blues song that explains how "California is a garden of Eden, if you have the 'do, re, mi.'" Well, California can also be quite enjoyable when you are the beneficiary of an all-expense paid trip, courtesy of Twentieth Century-Fox.

On the weekend of January 27, 70 college film critics were invited to Hollywood by 'Fox', to sample three of their upcoming films, and interview their participants. The three included a

painstakingly authentic re-creation of a primitive struggle, aptly titled *Quest for Fire*; the unfunny and offensive *Porky's*; and *Making Love*, an innovative, serious film dealing with a love triangle.

The gamble taken by Fox paid off in a weekend that unreeled as smoothly as its sleekest film. The presentation began on the Fox lot with a 70mm screening of *Quest for Fire*, in the plush Daryl Zanuck Theatre.

As immense and cumbersome as it is

## La, la, reporter goes to L.A.....

now, *Quest for Fire* began life as a "little thin thing they called a script, that contained this strange language," recalls producer John Kemeny.

That 'strange language' was the specially-engineered code created by author Anthony Burgess. "After all we couldn't have them speaking English," says Executive-producer Michael Gruskoff.

Based on a French novel, *Quest* suggests that the use of fire was paramount in the development of human culture. Director Jean-Jaques Annaud, had read the book four years ago and was convinced that it should be filmed. Ten million dollars later, Annaud, soft-spoken but affable, says he had to "fight like mad" to make the film. But the long wait to see his vision on screen was worth it. "You can't do film simply because you have money," he rationalizes.

Producer Kemeny, who along with co-producer Denis Heroux work out of Montreal, says he reads the film on two levels. "It's intelligent enough for people who want to work with the film, and it's a basic story, that will satisfy the regular elements of more conventional films." Or as Annaud points out, "at its deep end, it's a love story."

The film's love interest involves Ika (Rae Dawn Chong) from the cannibalistic Kzamm tribe (one of four tribes shown), and Naoh (Everett McGill) of the primitive Ulam congregation.

Throughout the film Naoh and two cohorts from the Ulam clan, Amoukar (Ron Pearlman) and Gaw (Nameer El-Kadi) attempt to re-capture the fire they lost when they were attacked by a rival tribe. Pearlman's character is not that far removed from a large chimp, and the comedic actor admits that he didn't have to go farther than the local zoo for research.

Female lead Rae Dawn Chong is a small dark-eyed, Aztec beauty. Born in Edmonton, she is the daughter of comedian and filmmaker Tommy Chong (Cheech and Chong). At 18 Chong still wears her youthful enthusiasm, but also carries a gracefulness that allows her to bring off the intimate lovemaking scenes she has in the film.

Following *Quest*, Chong is not anxious to begin working again. "The question is whether I'd want to do a film with less substance," she suggests.

preparation is everything. "I shot the film in my mind," says McGill.

Never in his own personal vision did he foresee himself merely playing the role of lead chimpanzee. "I saw a certain seriousness in the role. I tend to be a purposeful actor and I concentrate very hard. I think they needed someone who could execute that role."

★★★★

The second twenty-four hours in Hollywood was designated as good 'ole America Day. We were driven to a commerial theatre, to mix with the tanned masses, munch on buttered popcorn and cokes, and watch the slovenly *Porky's*.

*Porky's* chooses as its logo, a tongue sticking through a faucet-sized hole. If it were not for censorship, the tongue however would be a penis. In the movie, as well as on the t-shirt, the director's elongated joke was emasculated. During the press conference that followed the marginally-successful preview of *Porky's*, director Bob Clarke spoke about his frustration in filming the full length of his joke—a voyeuristic teenager getting his member stuck in a hole in the wall of the women's shower room.

Discussing the curious sexual censorship, which makes it okay to show female sexual organs, but not males', Clarke asks, "what in the name of god is obscene about a penis hanging out of a wall? America is still 1954. It hasn't changed."

Not surprisingly, Clarke's press conference, almost immediately, fell into a director versus the media confrontation. The critics were plainly disturbed by the stereotyping in the film. Clarke, however, was non-plussed.

"I grew up in the Southern U.S., and it was," he argued, "sexist, and racist, and that's what I reflected; a problem of culture."

During the last decade, Clarke has been busy with, among other films, the horrific *Black Christmas*, *Murder By Decree*, and *Tribute*. The New Orleans born director claims that he's had the idea for *Porky's* for a couple of decades, finishing the first script in 1968. "It's about 1954," he claims, "the year rock 'n roll began."

Clarke says *Porky's* focusses on sexual mores. He also maintains that it's a film about young Reagans. "The people in the film will grow up and run the country. They weren't served beer in one scene, so they blow up a guy's livelihood. Similarly if a country does something you don't like, you send a bomb over," rationalizes an ideologically-determined Clarke.

★★★★

The weekend wrapped up on a very high note with the screening, and subsequent interview session, of *Making Love*. A first class production, it combines energetic, daring producers with a talented and committed director, screenwriter and actors. The emotionally stirring film casts Kate Jackson and Michael Ontkean as a couple whose eight-year marriage is threatened when Ontkean falls for Bart, played by Harry Hamlin. The film is innovative both for its screenplay which attempts to understand homosexuality through the eyes of the middle class rather than the fringe, and for its presentation which is threaded through characters speaking directly into the camera without any artifice.

Producer Daniel Melnick was the driving force behind the film's production. A former head of production and president of Columbia Pictures, Melnick has produced three of the biggest pictures in the eighties, *All That Jazz*, *Kramer vs. Kramer*, and *Altered States*. According to Melnick, the success of a picture depends, sometimes, on pure luck.



Robert Redford on a weekend job.

Representative of the film's cool confidence is leading man Everett McGill. Born in Florida, he spend his childhood in Kansas, where he held a number of jobs including leader of a rock band.

To date he's been in two other movies, *Brubaker*, and *Union City* (playing Deborah Harry's lover), and a number of plays. The roughly-carved, stoic-faced actor, says of his unique approach that

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