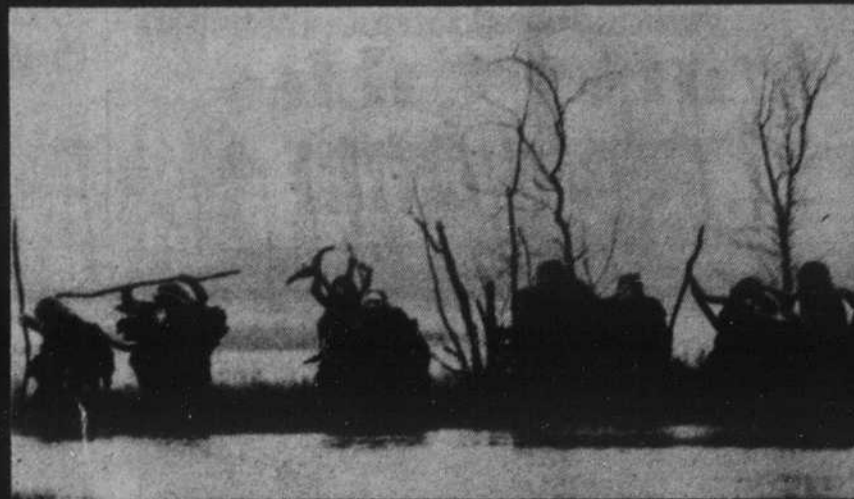


# distractions

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## Distractions looks at the new movies



### 'Quest' OK, but no masterpiece

"Quest for Fire"  
Everett McGill, Rae Dawn Chong  
B CinemaWorld

"Quest for Fire" tries to pass itself off as a cross between "2001" and "Star Wars." Well, yeah, it is, sort of.

Its similarity to "2001" is that they both use primeval man to tell about man's quest for knowledge. The link to "Star Wars" is less direct: neither has a vast, important message, but rely on sci-fi detail and action for their success.

But that's where the similarities end. "Quest" lacks the metaphysical feel and the space grace of "2001," and the compelling adventure and humor of "Star Wars." Instead, it depends on technical details to make up for what it lacks in suspense, comedy and insight.

The plot of "Quest for Fire" is simple. The Ulam tribe is a primitive one that knows how to use fire, but not how to make it. One day the nasty Wagabou tribe comes along and attacks them, sending them in flight to a marsh, where their fire dies. Our hero, Naoh (Everett

McGill), and two comrades go in search of fire, carrying the embers in a weird contraption made of animal hide that seemingly keeps the coals going without burning a whole through the bottom. Pretty nifty, no?

On their quest, they encounter a number of obstacles, including cannibalistic tribes, saber-toothed tigers, woolly mammoths, quicksand and lack of women. They also discover slapstick comedy, the missionary position, leafy vegetables, love and, most importantly, the Campfire Girl method of fire starting. All in all, it's a pretty beneficial journey.

Some scenes are ponderous, predictable or fail to draw the audience into the action. Others are very good, with fresh humor and believable action. For instance, when our heroes are stuck under a small overhang on a stormy day, Naoh and his mate (Rae Dawn Chong), well, mate. The other two men are understandably a bit envious, and must sit a short distance away and wait for the weather to clear. When one of the two touches the other softly, the latter lets out a howl of warning. (Evidently the writers felt that homosexuality didn't

come around until later.)

Director Jean-Jacques Annaud concentrates on technical elements to make the film work. The makeup, for instance, is magnificent. Utilizing latex masks and body suits of hand-sewed hair, the makeup crew created a believable array of features for individual members of different tribes.

Other technical elements weren't so great. The animals used in the film were laughable. The saber-toothed tigers resembled lionesses with drinking straws stuck in their teeth. The woolly mammoths looked like great piles of decaying carpet.

And then there's the music. Granted it's hard to go wrong with six-channel Dolby, but at times Phillippe Sarde's score was overbearing, with angelic voices soaring as sparks ignite a wisp of grass.

Two fine Canadian producers, John Kemeny and Denis Heroux, and cinematographer Claude Agostini went to great lengths to find just the right locations, filming in remote areas of Canada, Scotland and Kenya. Although there are

some nice shots in the film, the settings are too varied: it almost seems like our heroes have traversed the entire continent in their search, jumping from climate to climate.

As a result, the film is a good diversion, but hardly on the scale of "2001" or "Star Wars." It offers a few nice shots, some amusing moments and some downright clever scenes. But director Jean-Jacques Annaud relies too much on technical miracles which don't quite materialize, and the film comes out uneven and less than perfect.

One note of caution: for some reason parents may think "Quest for Fire" is an excellent educational film for their kiddies. But it's rated "R" for a reason: there's a lot of violence and enough rear-approach sex in the film to turn children off of sex forever. If you have the misfortune to sit near a clan of youngsters — move. Or be prepared to hear a lot of distracting questions ("Is he trying to eat her, Mommy? Well, what's he doing? etc.") that may spoil the film for you.

by matt meyer

# Reviews:

'Victor/Victoria,'  
'Missing,' 'Porky's,'  
'White Hotel,'  
Jools Holland, Dan  
Siegel, Karla Bonoff