

"Quest For Fire" (1981)

A Compilation of Ron's Comments and Interviews

"Quest For Fire" was Ron Perlman's first foray into the world of movies. This opportunity came while Ron was performing in a theatre production of "Tiebele and her Demon," with F. Murray Abraham at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre in New York in 1979. He was approached by Director Jean-Jacques Annaud to make his motion picture debut in Annaud's stone-age drama about Neanderthal man and his quest for fire. Ron is said to have commented, "When the producer saw my forehead, he gave me the job on the spot."

At the 1988 Space Trek 5 Convention in St Louis, Ron said, "When we shot "Quest For Fire" we had to go barefoot through the snow and ice in part of the film, and in another part we went barefoot over sun baked volcanic rock. Whenever you work for this guy, whenever you do a film for him - you know you're alive. There's no question about that. Because life goes up a couple of notches in terms of excitement and stakes."

Ron's makeup, which included complicated dental prosthetics and a new nose and jaw, took from 5.30 to 9.30 each morning to apply.

"Audiences reacted to the hardship they saw on our faces," Ron recalls. "But imagine how the Ulams must have suffered 80,000 years ago. Our pain - and it was real, believe me - made the film that much more realistic."

While being interviewed by Marc Shapiro for Starlog magazine in March, 1988, Ron's memories of portraying the caveman *Amoukar* focus on battling hypothermia in the great outdoors, and going to zoos to study the movement of apes. He also remembers the day the elephants ran away.

"It was the scene in which the elephants were supposed to stampede," Ron recollects. "After the scene, they would then return to the tent, which was acting as a barn and had a bull elephant tethered as a guide. But the elephants decided they were going to run through a small two-man tent being used for looping wigs. Do you know what 40 elephants trying to get into a two-man tent looks like? Fortunately, the two men working inside had decided, moments earlier, to go out for a smoke."

In an interview for TV Guide in July, 1988, Ron expresses his heartache and disillusionment with the total lack of response to his performance in "Quest For Fire." "I got a tremendous amount of feedback during the filming from people like Sherry Lansing - then president of 20th Century Fox Productions - and the producers of the film, who said I was going to be the next big star and that everybody had faith in me because they loved my performance," Ron recalls. Apparently this is a special type of Hollywood lingo, a form of flattery that is bestowed on many unsuspecting performers, and Ron took it

seriously. *"I projected that as a successful actor I would get the amount of attention I had always wanted; all the hip people would want to have lunch with me; I would no longer have any problems."* And more importantly Ron believed that with stardom, *"I would no longer have a terrible self-image."*

But when *"Quest For Fire"* opened at the box office, Ron Perlman did not become the next Marlon Brando. *"There was no difference, no phone calls, no offers, people were not jumping through hoops to meet me. I had been set up and then none of the things they promised came true. I was destroyed."* And so, Ron withdrew from the acting world. *"I was drained,"* he says.

But thankfully, his depression lifted as quickly as it had begun. *"It was almost like an exorcism,"* Ron explains. *"I had been purged. It was like an incredible dividing line between my childhood and my adult life."*

During the time of his withdrawal from the world of film, Ron became a limo driver in New York. In an interview with *"Live with Regis and Kathie Lee"* on July 6, 1989, Ron recalls one particular experience.

"I had done "Quest For Fire" and everyone said, 'this is going to be it - easy street.' Six months later, I was driving a limousine. I picked up a Judge who was being honoured by the American Bar Association. He got in the back of the limo and he had never been in a limousine before, so it's like - first limo experience - "Take me through this - tell me all about it." He realised as I was speaking to him, that I probably didn't do this as a career. So he said, "Well now, how did you start this?" And I said, "I was in a big picture for Twentieth Century Fox last year where I got to ride in the back of the limo and I thought this was fantastic so I figured the front wouldn't be too much worse. There's only one seat separating the two." He got a big kick out of that. That's America for me - one year you're in the back - the next year you're in the front."

Several years later, through the role of *Vincent* in *"Beauty and the Beast"*, Ron Perlman began to receive the acclaim he so richly deserved.

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Compiled by Pat Paone.

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