

# NEVER CRY WOLF

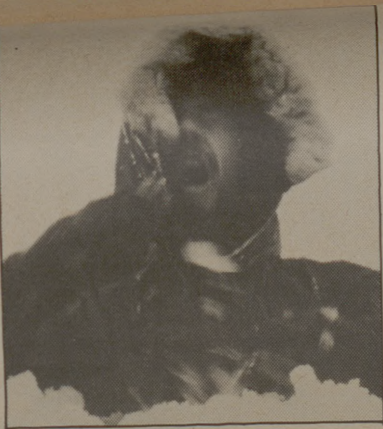
BY JIM SEALE

Pity the poor press agent for Carroll Ballard. Any other Hollywood director with a big studio film coming out would extol the movie's virtues, point out its Significance for Our Times, and call it the cleverest thing since striped toothpaste.

Ballard's *Never Cry Wolf* was released in October from Disney after three years of production in the Arctic that saw its budget double. It is one of Disney's biggest releases of 1983, and Ballard's crucial second feature film. So what does he say?

"This is about a guy going out to the wilds to watch wolves. It's not a picture people want to see." And, "I'm very appreciative of Disney. They've spent a lot more on this film than the subject matter really warrants." Another quote designed to delight the studio: "Younger kids probably won't enjoy the film very much. Kids raised in the country might, but television kids won't because it doesn't have the pace they're used to."

This laconic, soft-spoken 44-year-old is actually praising with faint damns, since he's his most scathing critic. Four years ago his first feature film, *The Black Stallion*, went on to good box office, critical raves, and three Oscar nominations. Ballard became a new superstar, but he stunned reporters by saying



Charles Martin Smith howls in the wilderness.

the movie didn't have anything to say."

He's much more generous to *Never Cry Wolf*, calling it superior to *Stallion*. It's true that *Wolf* concerns a young scientist (played by Charles Martin Smith) sent to Canada's Northern wilderness to observe wolves. But simple watching becomes an unsettling voyage of discovery into Arctic native myth, Inuit Indians who aren't always what they seem to be, and wolves which confound all of man's stereotypes about them.

Ballard's eye for landscapes and heroic archetypal imagery dominate *Wolf* in a way that recalls *Stallion*, whether in the pristine ivory of the snowcapped mountains, the majestic pose of the Arctic wolves staring into the camera, or the mossy hillsides of the northern summers. (In fact, *Wolf* is not a particularly "snowy" movie, with most of it set during the surprisingly lush Arctic summers.)

Though it is a film about nature, there are

ambiguities between it and the award-winning Disney documentaries of the past. Not only is there a plot, but Ballard has bypassed *White Wilderness* and let *Charlie the Lonesome Cougar* out of his cage to explore the amoral violence of nature, as well as its beauty. Ballard acknowledged that some at Disney found the film's unwhimsical view of the wild "not to their liking," but said that for the most part studio executives had not interfered.

"This is a movie about wildness," Ballard said in his barely audible voice between puffs on an ever-present pipe. "Maybe wildness isn't a good word, and I don't mean the wildness of the wolves. It's about a loss of wildness in our lives, the wildness inside ourselves."

Wildness is precisely what cast and crew found near the Arctic Circle during filming. Smith, the 29-year-old actor in his first big role since "Terry the Toad" in *American Graffiti* and *More American Graffiti*, remembers the first thing he saw when he got off the plane was a grizzly bear.

"I've never done anything so grueling in my life, and don't think I ever will again," Smith said. "We all felt like we were on a mountain-climbing expedition. We lived in tents most of the time. We'd eat salmon the locals would catch. They just slap it on a rock and cut it up and eat it raw, like sushi."

Ballard found that capturing the wildness on film was easier said than done. First, there was the problem of casting the two speaking roles for Inuits (don't say Eskimo, which they regard as derogatory). "I had these old photographs of majestic-looking Inuits, and I couldn't find them. They didn't seem to be around anymore. They've changed a lot in the past 20 years. They eat different things now, they live in a different way and they've gotten overweight."

Unable to find two male Inuits in good shape near the population centers, Ballard dispatched a friend with a video camera to remote villages as far north as the Pole area to tape prospective actors. Radio stations advertised the two parts for \$25,000 each.

"Out of hundreds videotaped, about four looked the part, and from them I chose the two we used. They were very good. One spoke English and translated for the other." They were Zachary Ittimangnaq, who played the old shaman type, and Samson Jorah as his young companion.

Once cast, the Inuits were a quick study compared to the half dozen or so trained Arctic wolves. Ballard needed one to raise its leg and pee in front of the camera, but the wolf obliged by squatting. "That just didn't look right for a big honcho wolf," Ballard said. It took two months to teach the confused creature a new way of relieving itself, one of many problems that pushed the budget to \$10 million from its original \$5 million.

Another curious manmade problem delayed production a whole year. While the crew readied to shoot a caribou stampede, the herd's owner had their antlers cut off for Korean businessmen who grind them up and sell them as aphrodisiacs in the Orient. "We didn't know it, but they do that every year," Ballard said. Since a clipped caribou herd is an unphotogenic caribou herd, it was back to Los Angeles for a year's hiatus.

Ballard had similar problems with snakes and horses on *Black Stallion*. Despite being typed as Hollywood's animal/nature director, he's sure of one thing: "I don't want to make any more animal movies. You have to work so hard not to get upset at taking three days to do something that would normally take you 15 minutes. I hate taking three years to do a film. It wears you out. I'm just totally exhausted."

## DENNIS QUAID

CONT'D. FROM PAGE 10

early space pioneers. "It's the best script I think I've ever read. Phil Kaufman, who wrote and directed it, really got to the underlying drama beneath all the public spectacle. I mean, these were real men right in the middle of the American spectacle."

Quaid plays astronaut Gordon "Gordo" Cooper, the youngest of the original "We Seven," called by the actor who portrays him, "the rock & roll astronaut. As soon as I heard that they were making this film I wanted to play Cooper in the worst way. I didn't think I had a chance — he was 32 at the time of the Mercury launch and I'd be playing him at 28. But I tried out for the part and three months later they gave it to me."

The part could not have come at a better time for Quaid, following, as it did, on the tail of his lead performance in the abysmal *Jaws 3-D*. "I took that role because I thought I should do a commercial movie," he admits. "I thought it was a good idea at the time. I won't say it's a mistake, because I learn from everything I do, but I was very unhappy with the way it came out."

When Kaufman offered Quaid the Cooper role, it was "the best thing that's happened to me so far. After all, I've wanted to be an astronaut all my life. I was able to go to NASA, talk to Cooper and his friends, really live, breathe and eat the whole era. These are very special men. They were jocks, sure, and they loved to party, but they were also astrophysicists, doctors, astronauts — brilliant men. I think that during that time we needed a special kind of hero and that's what they represented. But in the process we lost a lot of their humanity."

Does the role of Gordo Cooper fulfill



Quaid with Kate Capshaw in the soon-to-be-released *Dreamscape*, a psychological thriller about a man who can live in other people's dreams.

Quaid's requirements for challenging character leads? "I think so," is his response. "At least for me, it was a tremendously satisfying part. It's really helped me to jump into a whole new kind of acting. I had to completely remake myself from the inside out. I also played someone older than I am, which is a very lucky break. I've been able to make that jump from adolescent to adult roles very quickly. I'm not stuck in the muddy, mid-twenties area where you're too old for teenage and too young for grown-up roles."

"I think an actor should periodically tear himself down and start all over again," concludes Quaid, who is relocating to New York for a shot at the stage. "At this point in my career, I'm very optimistic. I think I can rise to just about any challenge, and that's exactly what I'm looking for. There are no limitations." He smiles, leaving one to wonder how that boyish grin would look on Hamlet.

MEW COMPANY, INC., NORTHVALE, N.J. 07047 © 1983



# MAJOR IN CURRENT AFFAIRS.

## English Leather.

After shave, cologne and toiletries for men. Make them part of your day, every day.

English Leather Drives Women Crazy.

A M P E R S A N D

November 83, page 13