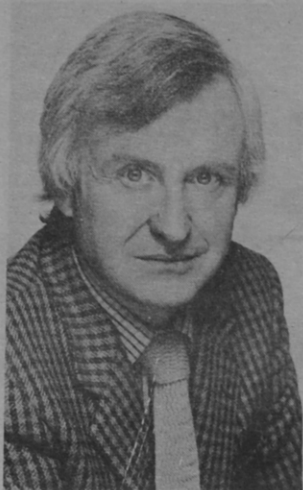


John Boorman.



Chaley Boorman and Powers Boothe in 'Emerald Forest.'



Emerald Forest

John Boorman's Third World Deliverance

Scriptwriter Rospo Pallenberg found the initial idea for *The Emerald Forest* in a short news item from the *Los Angeles Times*, which told how the seven-year-old European boy had been kidnapped by a tribe of Amazonian Indians. As Boorman says at the beginning of *Money Into Light*, the just-published diary of the film:

"I was intrigued that his father, an engineer, would spend every vacation for 10 years searching the rain forest for his abducted son. But even more extraordinary, when he found him, an integrated member of an Indian tribe, he elected to leave him there. What had each of them, father and son, become in those 10 years? Ten thousand years of human progress divided them. Does blood, kin, reach across that divide?"

Boorman was passing through Auckland earlier this month and spoke of the difficulties of making the film. It took just over three years after Pallenberg found the original newspaper clipping for Boorman to complete *The Emerald Forest*, his ninth movie and the last in a distinguished line that includes *Point Blank*, *Hell in the Pacific*, *Zardoz*, *Deliverance* and *Excalibur*. The director and his son, Charley, who plays the young boy in the new movie, spent three months living with the Xingu Indians in the remotest part of the Amazonian rain forests, an experience "so rich that it offered so many things I wanted to introduce into the story."

Boorman and Pallenberg made a number of modifications to the original newspaper story:

"The first kind of invention that we made to the story was to introduce the idea of a dam being built. The original engineer of the story was working on a mining project, but a dam, this idea of putting up this wall of concrete to stop a river was such a powerful symbol of our belief that

we can conquer Nature."

When Boorman had located his dam, at Tucurui, he found that the effects which it had had on the sur-

"These tribes do kill people. They asked me if I was a geologist and I'm relieved I wasn't because they seemed to be killing geologists."

rounding environment supplied the dramatic impetus for the film:

"Here was the fourth largest dam in the world, being built by 26,000 men. A shanty town had grown around the site to accommodate these men right in the middle of this Amazonian jungle — complete with whorehouse. Because of the clearance of the land, tribes had been

displaced and pushed into the territories of other tribes which caused a lot of friction. Then matters had been even more complicated when the Europeans had gone out to the tribes and given them guns and axes in exchange for Indian girls to serve at the whorehouse. All this we elaborated upon and put on the script."

The whorehouse scenes in *The Emerald Forest* are particularly disturbing, signifying as they do the gross inhumanities that Man is capable of, yet parallel to this is the same ecological theme that lies behind Boorman's 1972 film *Deliverance*. How did Boorman himself view the similarities between the two films?

"I'm interested in the relationship between Man and Nature, or, more particularly, Urban Man and Nature. We've somehow lost this connection with Nature, this harmony that earlier people had. In a sense, *Deliverance* showed the malevolent forces of Nature taking revenge on the urban men who had somehow sinned against the laws of Nature: in *The Emerald Forest* this is even more underlined because Malcolm, the father, is actually the builder of the dam which is destroying part of the river. His actions are the direct cause of the problems which affect the Invisible People. The Invisible People represent the benign spirit of the forest, the Fierce People the malevolent one, and the conflict is played out through these forces."

The Emerald Forest is an exquisitely crafted movie, from the evocative camerawork of Philippe Rousselot to the atmospheric soundtrack by Junior Homrich and Brian Gascoigne. Yet this ecological allegory is played out in dramatic human terms. Leading the cast, as the young boy Tommy, is Charley Boorman. At first the director did not want to use his own son:

"I auditioned widely but no one jumped out of the pack. I wanted the actor to be 17 — I didn't want to cheat on the age. There should still be something of the child about him, otherwise the poignancy of the father's dilemma would lose its impact. Charley had done a number of

roles, including one in *Excalibur*, but I felt that it would be too much pressure on both of us: not only making a difficult film, but also having the whole film standing or falling on the performance of my son."

"When the financiers all wanted Charley, I felt this was the confirmation. I'd always taken Charley and my other children on various wilderness trips, including ones into the African bush, and I felt he had the character and resilience to go through with this thing. It was certainly rigorous — three months training with the tribes in the jungle, the heat and humidity — but it was a great experience for both of us as father and son. What happened to Tommy in the film, having to grow up and take responsibility as a man, happened to Charley in the making of it."

Apart from Powers Boothe and Meg Foster who play Tommy's parents and Eduardo Conde who plays Werner, who is slaughtered by the fierce people, the cast are all

was a kind of mathematical genius — brilliant at computers. Her charm is amazing."

Boorman obviously identifies strongly with both the people and the environment. He speaks of the extraordinary power of the Amazon with almost a sense of reverence — "a vast forest almost half the size of Australia and almost like stepping into another time."

Had he himself experienced any threatening situations or hostilities during the filming of *The Emerald Forest*?

"Certainly during research time before the actual shooting. These tribes do kill people. They asked me if I was a geologist and I'm relieved I wasn't because they seemed to be killing geologists. They worked out that if the geologists find minerals, then the bulldozers soon follow. And it's had a salutary effect — geologists don't go there any more!"

For all its exotic setting, *The Emerald Forest* is a film that unflinchingly addresses itself to the contemporary Western world — and time is running short:

"Levi Strauss described the way in which the Europeans so carefully nurture the soil of their own land, and then went to America and raped and pillaged it. This notion seems to be enshrined in the American way of life, a bulldozer mentality just ravishing everything that stands in its way. And it's spread across the world like a plague. We obviously have to find a better relationship with the planet than we have at the moment. I don't think it's just a matter of limiting the amount of concrete, it's much more to do with an attitude."

Boorman has just quoted to me: "In this century alone, 90 tribes are reported to have become extinct and 24 more are in jeopardy. Where once between five and six million Indians lived in the Amazon basin, today there are as few as 200,000."

For a disturbing commentary on what the great processing machine of Western Civilisation has achieved, *The Emerald Forest* is not to be missed.

William Dart

"Where once between 5 million and 6 million Indians lived in the Amazon basin, today there are as few as 200,000."

Brazilian Indians, including Rui Polonah, who plays the noble chief Wanadi. Polonah was the only Indian with previous acting experience — he's played in Werner Herzog's *Aguirre — Wrath Of God* and *Fitzcarraldo*. Yet Dira Paes, as Tommy's young wife, Kachiri, gives a perceptive performance of great wit and charm. Boorman was particularly enthusiastic about Paes's talents:

"She's 15 years old and had never acted before. She's half-Indian and had just turned up to one of the workout sessions. She spoke very fluent English as well as French and

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