

# THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU: Film of a Thousand Faces!

In 1896, the process of changing the cellular structure of living beings to create entirely new species was a product of the scientifically fertile imagination of novelist H. G. Wells, which he set down for posterity in his classic, *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*.

In 1977, adapting the Wells epic for a major motion picture, American International Pictures enlarged on a subject—the sometimes frightening subject of DNA—which is very much in today's headlines and the center of much controversy (entertainment values and excitement of the film story notwithstanding).

The main point of the controversy is that none of today's scientists, no more than Dr. Moreau, know for certain what form their creations will assume. Therefore, it is not unlikely to extrapolate the bizarre semi-human, semi-animal creatures seen in the film. For the benefit of the story, the strange beings resulting from Moreau's experiments have been dubbed "humanimals," and are, in fact, actors made up to partially resemble various members of the animal kingdom.

Making any film is a group effort, and the larger in scope the film, the bigger the effort. This is the kind of endeavor that demands a top-notch team to guide the efforts of the many and varied technicians and actors who must perform their highly-specialized functions.

In populating the world of Dr. Moreau, many breeds of real animals were used. But, in order to create their counterparts—as it were—and effect the transitions of the various species into varying states of human semblance, the specific services of certain special-effects specialists were required. For this particular task, a highly demanding one, the producers drew upon the fertile imaginations of John Chambers and Dan Striepeke.

This award-winning team of make-up specialists recently made cinematic history with the creation of the mechanics and make-up for the highly successful *PLANET OF THE APES* series of films (which have also, of course, been adapted to comics by Marvel, utilizing the authorial acumen of *Devil-May-Care* Doug Moench, the selfsame scribe who translated *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*

into comic-book form).

The fine hands of Striepeke and Chambers have also been involved with many other motion picture special effects. Working sometimes as a team and sometimes separately, the two of them are responsible for changing TONY CURTIS' handsome face into *THE BOSTON STRANGLER*, fashioning new teeth and a new nose for George C. Scott as *PATTON*, transforming a young man into a cobra in *SSSSSSSI*, and putting the points on Leonard Nimoy's ears (as Mr. Spock) in *STAR TREK*, among many other feats of cinema magic. Their skills are immense and compatible and they work together as if they were one. Rouge, powder, lipstick and eye shadow are but a tiny fragment of their cosmetic bag of tricks.

Therefore, it was evident they had to be enlisted to apply their expertise to *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*, for the film obviously required formidable make-up procedures. The actors representing the half-human, half-animal unfortunates had to have the physical attributes of both, yet appear realistic, for that was the style in which the film was to be made; also, they definitely must not become the objects of audience derision. Hardly a simple assignment for the make-up experts.

Chambers and Striepeke began their chores almost a year-and-a-half before the actual filming began on the exotic isle of St. Croix, a Caribbean paradise in the American Virgin Islands. In fact, they were faced with the challenge of creating a basic concept for the appearance of the humanimals,<sup>SM</sup> one that was practical, so that the concept could be maintained under a given set of daily production circumstances. As Striepeke says, "It was a question of interpreting and keeping in mind both the practical and the functional."

But no matter how vivid or bold their imaginations, these artists were confined to the essential structure of the human anatomy. After all, the actors had to be able to breathe and move about as normally as possible, although their subjects were all top Hollywood stuntmen who practically had to live with the real animal species they represented, in order to convey realism on the screen. There were six main creatures, plus dozens of extras.



In portraying the genetically-altered beings, the actors/stuntmen actually became a new breed of screen creature, suffering, fighting, living and dying in a subhuman world of their own.

That Striepeke and Chambers succeeded in accomplishing the desired state of realism was evidenced by the fact that the actors—in make-up—had to be introduced to the real animals on the set by easy stages. The animals were accustomed to working with humans, or with other animals, but never with the strange admixture of the two as one entity.

The make-up process itself is highly technical, but suffice it to say that it took months to prepare and perfect. In addition to the customary facial impressions, ones were also taken of the teeth, hands, feet, chest and back of each of the half-dozen leads, in order to fashion the uncanny end results. "Unlike previous make-up needs of significance," according to Chambers, "major parts of the anatomy were involved this time, thereby increasing the costs, the time, the energies and, hopefully, the results."

Moreover, since the film was shot in the Davis Bay-Christiansted area of St. Croix, it was necessary to work out of a makeshift make-up trailer. Despite all that, a total of fifteen make-up artists and hairdressers (the equivalent of an entire crew for some movies) were deployed for the epic job of transforming the players. Each actor was assigned his own specialist and, for all of them, the day began at 4 o'clock in the morning. It took an average of four straight hours to apply each individual with his own very special make-up.

In spite of his star status, actor RICHARD BASEHART also had to respond to that incredibly early call, for his part was to play the leader of the humanimals, a wolf by birth, the "Savior of the Law." In the film, he attempts to maintain the human half of his fellow creatures and to void the animal instincts that smolder within. As an example of the technical care lavished on the movie, Basehart wore special contact lenses to simulate wolf eyes, since he was frequently seen in close-up shots. He also had a hump built onto his back, because he stands too erect otherwise to represent one of the man-beasts.

Another of the stars in THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU is MICHAEL YORK (Marvel movie mavens will recognize him as the main man in LOGAN'S RUN, a science-fiction film also adapted by some of our stalwarts to comic-book form). In this H. G. Wells epic, he portrays an unfortunate seaman cast ashore on the aforementioned island, only to become one of the bad doctor's experiments. Because of the many emotional, physical and demanding character alterations the script required, York had a total of eleven make-up changes during the course of the film for as many different looks—from dying to recuperating to healthy to bestial.

The other actors who are seen (or not seen, actually) as the remaining key mutated creatures all had to be expert stuntmen. The script called for a battle royale between the new species and their four-footed counterparts—a lion, a tiger, a bear, a bull and a hyena. Most stuntmen refuse to work with exotic animals, so these were selected on the basis of their association with animal behavior training by Ralph and Toni Helfer, animal experts who own and operate Enchanted Village in Buena Park, California.

Bob Ozman, who plays the half-man, half-bull creature, owns a karate school and has always worked with animals, which made him a natural for the film. However, in comparing his acting stint to his other encounters with wild animals as a trainer, he comments, "I found it more of a challenge and much scarier than any of the outrageous and so-called dangerous stunts I've ever performed before."

Both Dan Striepeke and John Chambers concur. They agree that THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU was the most complex screen project with which they've ever been involved, and claim that they cannot recall any other film which even came close.

However, there was a light side to all of this. Striepeke and Chambers pointed out that, in contrast to their incredibly inventive efforts on the humanimals, the easiest person to work on was the major star, Burt Lancaster, who played Dr. Moreau. The most outstanding challenge they faced in adapting Burt's features to the role was a simple one. Indeed. Despite his middle years, Lancaster's hair remains dark—but the beard he grew for the role came out white.

Thus, they were merely required to whiten his sideburns, as well, to make it look more realistic.

Striepeke and Chambers used their combined store of make-up expertise to create, on film for THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU, their vision of what DNA experimentation and genetic mutation could conceivably produce when twisted to the misguided purposes of the mad Dr. Moreau. While portrayed here in an exotic adventure film, the subject is a controversial and frightening topic of discussion today, for H. G. Wells' dreams may soon become our reality—as well as our screen fantasy!

