



cover story

A striking drama telling the unusual life story of an adventurous Eskimo, Avik, played by Jason Lee Scott, the film *Map of the Human Heart* spans a period of over 30 years and a distance of more than half the world: from the Arctic to Montreal and from Dresden to London and back again. With an international cast including Patrick Bergin, Anne Parillaud, Jeanne Moreau and John Cusack, this memorable move opens this Friday, June 4 at the Lumiere Cinema, St Martin's Lane. Jeremy Clarke talks to director Vincent Ward on page 13.

Amazing stories

His new film spans decades, cultures and continents, but Vincent Ward's compelling work remains as at odds with mainstream as ever.

Jeremy Clarke talked to him



In the notoriously safe and conservative world of the movies, Vincent Ward is a radically dangerous character. His previous film *The Navigator* started in the plague-ridden 13th century where its protagonists tunneled through the middle of the world and came out in the present day in their quest to put a cross on a church spire. This time round, *Map of the Human Heart* covers Arctic and urban Canada, Wartime London and surrounding countryside and Dresden during the notorious Allied bombing atrocities.

Not surprisingly, given he was one of *Alien 3*'s many casualties (he was slated to direct and did considerable preproduction work before being elbowed), Ward is none too complimentary about the homogeneity of the Hollywood mainstream, light years from his own concerns. "Spielberg's films take someone who generally comes from suburban America – but there's a whole range of truly amazing stories out there. Avik [*Map of the Human Heart*'s lead character] is an old guy who tells this story, he's lived an extraordinary life and has this wonderful story to tell. A lot of the elements in there are factual, they're based on real people and their stories. That quite special affair he has that goes on for so long – well, that sort of character doesn't often get a chance to open his mouth and tell his story in most movies."

If *Map of the Human Heart* sounds like a panoramic epic, it is in fact acutely intrapersonal, dealing as it does with the relationship of Brit explorer Walter (Patrick Bergin) to Inuit Eskimo Avik, and both of them to Avik's childhood friend and later lover (and simultaneously Walter's mistress) Albertine. The boy/girl relationship in childhood is cemented by illicit sunlight signals by mirror across convent school dormitories and stolen chest X-ray photographs; in adulthood, their more carnal consummation is presaged by Avik's Lancaster bomber photos of London landmarks destined as rendezvous venues with Albertine, now employed at Bomber Command.

The director has two different takes on mapping with regard to his two male characters. "Avik has this instinctive thing to do with survival and trying to negotiate parts of your life, trying to understand them. Walter uses maps in a colonial way – mathematical, scientific, European; finally, most European mapmaking is almost a sexual thing to do with territory and

possession. That's why maps inevitably improve at times of war when people are trying to negotiate or defend territory. Here, the territory that they're most concerned with, the map that they're most interested in, the area that they share, is to do with Albertine, who they both love."

Alongside Anne Parillaud, unforgettable as the adult Albertine, the film casts the hitherto unknown Jason Scott Lee as the mature (and also the ageing) Avik. "At his screen test – in LA of all places – Jason was terrific. He could be someone and you totally believed it because you could see him thinking exactly what the character was thinking. He didn't even appear to be acting. He's going to be a huge star after *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* comes out."

These two totally different films demonstrate the newcomer's extraordinary range as an actor. "In *Map* he has to play an 18-year-old and then a ruined 40-year-old – and he managed a prematurely ageing Eskimo who's led a really hard life. Jason gradually adopted the mannerisms of Robert's father. Robert being the Inuit boy who plays young Avik. It was remarkable. I put Robert with Jason. Jason would copy Robert. I'd get them to play a lot of mirror games and such like where they'd try to copy each other's movements."

"I got the whole cast to hang out together a lot so that the two actors playing Avik – the Hawaiian Chinese Jason and the Inuit Robert – would constantly mirror each other's movements and joke and adopt each other's mannerisms. What was interesting was that Jason would actually adopt those of the young boy's father who was about forty and had also lived quite a tough life. So between the boy and the

boy's father, Jason found the character."

The London end of Ward's research for *Map* unearthed much relevant war footage. "The Imperial War Museum was really good – we had a great tape of material, some of which is quite beautiful in an awesome kind of way. I deliberately went for that feel. Unlike *Memphis Belle*, which is about American bomber crews who bombed during the day, *Map* was about English bombers who bombed during the night, so we could actually be a lot more impressionistic about it."

Hence the unsettlingly real feeling evoked by the stroboscopic sequences during the Dresden bombing raid. "This footage isn't exactly shooting the explosions or the most dramatic event nice and neatly, as in you pan to it and it happens once you've got there. The things that you half catch or glimpse are more like authentic war footage where you're always one step behind what's actually happening."

This visual mayhem is reminiscent of that intriguing story credit on *Alien 3*, which he doesn't talk about much for reasons of contractual obligation. Still, "the prison planet wasn't really me – I had more a complete world than that. What I'd first pitched them on was, yes, I'll scare the pants off people and yes, I can terrify them and there'll be aliens and yes, I can do all that stuff but I really want to create a world that's quite special and different – and what they ended up doing was creating this convict world with guys with prickly scalps who couldn't say more than "der." I thought that was really boring – and so badly written. The characters... aaargghh!!!"

Map of the Human Heart opens on June 4 at the Lumiere Cinema. See Cinema section for details.