

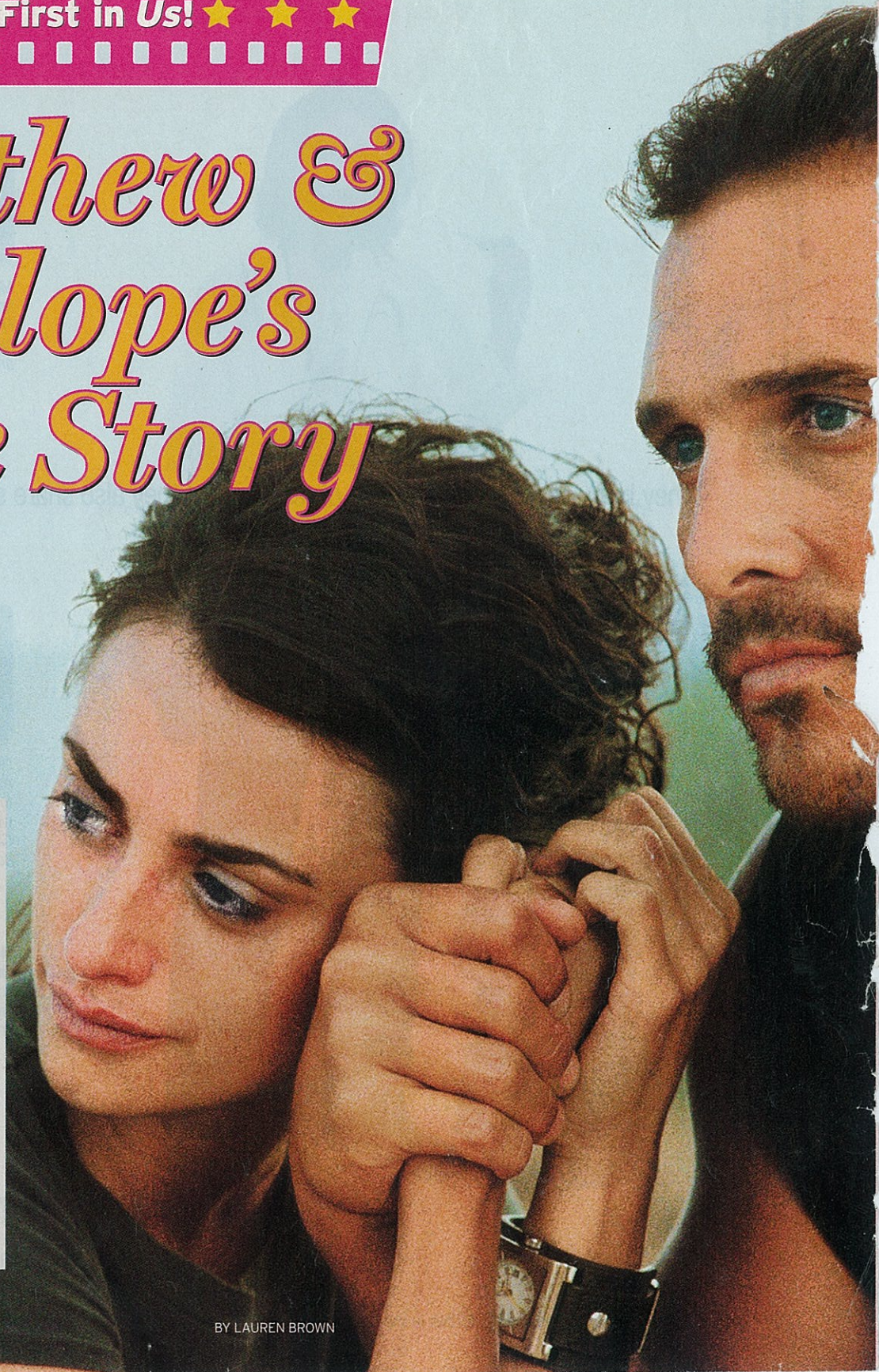
Excl*U*sive!

★ ★ ★ See It First in *Us*! ★ ★ ★

Matthew & Penelope's Love Story

McConaughey gives *Us* the scoop on sexy *Sahara* – and reports of a romance with costar **Cruz** – in an exclusive first look at the film (out April 8)

IN THE SWEEPING ACTION MOVIE *Sahara*, Matthew McConaughey and Penelope Cruz find love while on a treasure hunt in the African desert. “They have similar souls,” McConaughey tells *Us* of their characters. So did their off-screen relationship heat up while filming? “Absolutely, there was chemistry,” McConaughey says. “But other than that, there was no romance during the shoot.” Of course, in the months since filming ended, they have vacationed together, and even sat together at the recent Grammys. Cruz is “incredibly easy on the eyes,” he tells *Us*. “What’s not to like?”



McConaughey, 35, and Cruz, 30 (returning from the Caribbean on January 4, right), will costar again, in *The Loop*, a story about a loner who meets a sexy librarian that's set to shoot this fall.

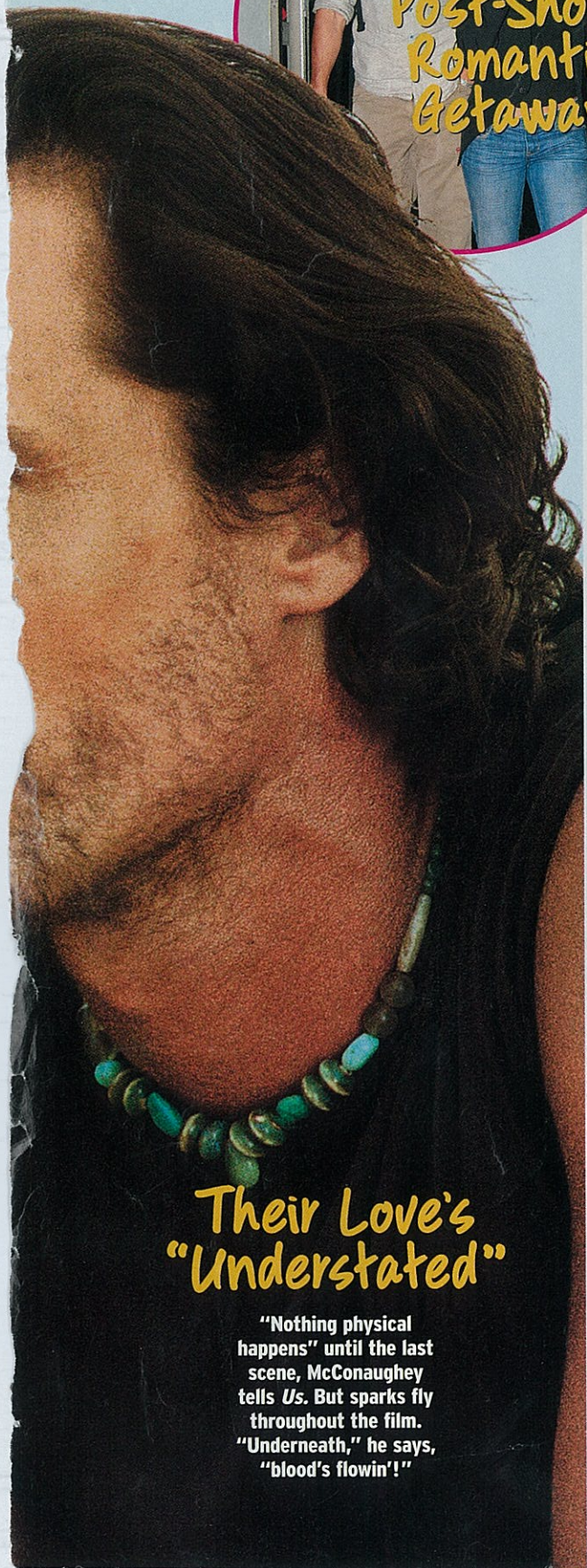


Post-Shoot Romantic Getaway!

In the film – based on Clive Cussler's book – Cruz (a doctor) and McConaughey (an explorer) realize the treasure he's fighting for connects directly to a world health crisis.

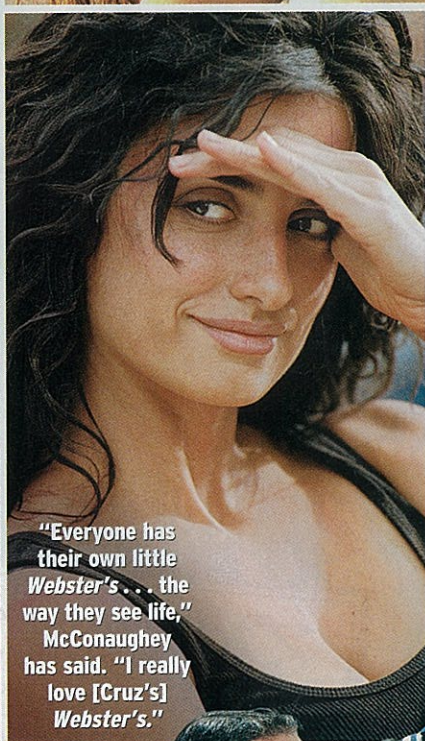


Scorchin'!

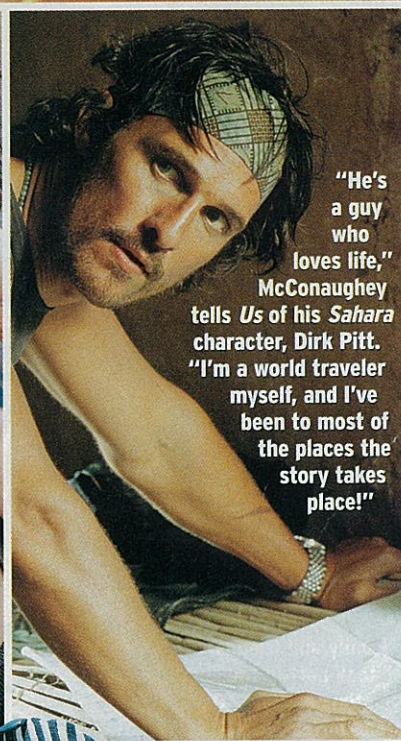


Their Love's "Understated"

"Nothing physical happens" until the last scene, McConaughey tells *Us*. But sparks fly throughout the film. "Underneath," he says, "blood's flowin'!"



"Everyone has their own little Webster's... the way they see life," McConaughey has said. "I really love [Cruz's] Webster's."



"He's a guy who loves life," McConaughey tells *Us* of his *Sahara* character, Dirk Pitt. "I'm a world traveler myself, and I've been to most of the places the story takes place!"



Sahara was shot over three months in early 2004 in Spain and Morocco. "You can tell we're not in Utah!" says the actor.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES W. HARRIS; STYLING: JESSICA GRIFFIN; HAIR: JESSICA GRIFFIN; MAKEUP: JESSICA GRIFFIN