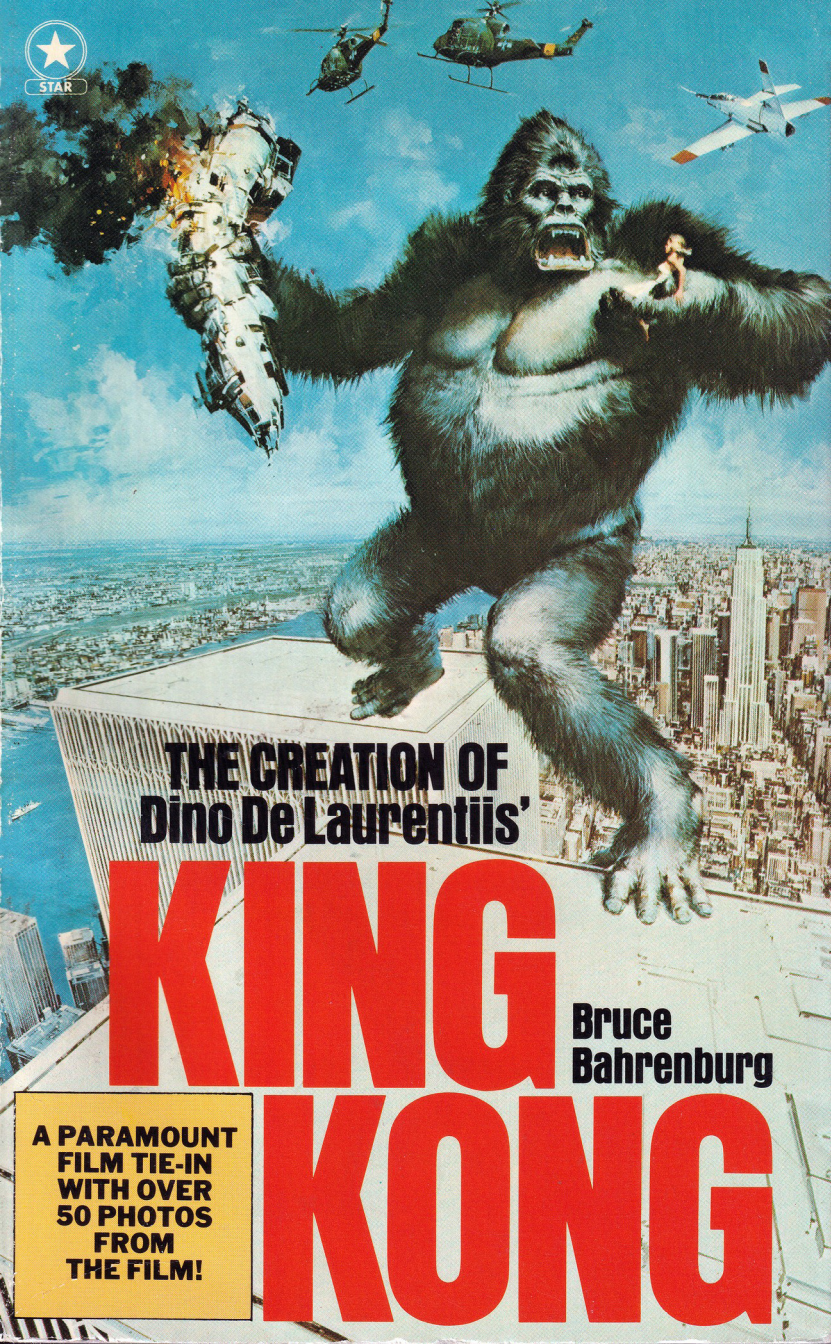

STAR
THE CREATION OF
Dino De Laurentiis'
KING KONG
Bruce Bahrenburg
A PARAMOUNT FILM TIE-IN WITH OVER 50 PHOTOS FROM THE FILM!

IT'S ALL HERE . . .
(AND ONLY HERE)

THE EPIC DRAMA SURPASSING ANY IN MOVIEMAKING HISTORY!

This is how—plagued by danger and disaster —Dino De Laurentiis and his harried director and staff created the world's most stupendous mechanical monster. They animated their gigantic ape so that his eyes glare, his chest heaves, his jaw lowers ominously, and his huge toes even wiggle—all with horrifying realism . . . they survived the terror of vicious bomb scares and sniper threats . . . they used revolutionary new photographic techniques, some never before employed on the screen . . . and they kept watch over their inexperienced young heroine as she lay in a lifeboat in the Pacific with sharks circling around her!

King Kong—
the Screen Adventure of a Lifetime!



THE CREATION OF
Dino De Laurentiis'
KING KONG

by
Bruce Bahrenburg



A STAR BOOK
published by
the Paperback Division of
W. H. ALLEN & CO. LTD.

A Star Book
Published in 1976 by
the Paperback Division of
W. H. Allen & Co Ltd
a Howard & Wyndham Company
123 King Street London W6 9JG

Copyright © 1976 by Dino De Laurentiis Corporation
The name and character "King Kong" used with the
permission of RKO General, Inc.

Cover illustration copyright © 1976 by
Dino De Laurentiis Corporation
Interior design by Sofia Grunfeld

Made and printed in Great Britain
by The Anchor Press Ltd
Tiptree, Essex

ISBN 0 352 30006 x

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The producer wishes to acknowledge that Kong has been designed and engineered by Carlo Rambaldi and constructed by Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson with special contributions by Rick Baker.

THE CAST

Jack Prescott ..... JEFF BRIDGES
Fred Wilson ..... CHARLES GRODIN
Dwan ..... JESSICA LANGE

Co-Starring

Captain Ross ..... JOHN RANDOLPH
Bagley ..... RENE AUBERJONOIS
Boan ..... JULIUS HARRIS
Joe Perko ..... JACK O'HALLORAN
Sunfish ..... DENNIS FIMPLE
and
Carnahan ..... ED LAUTER

Featuring

Garcia ..... JORGE MORENO
Timmons ..... MARIO GALLO
Chinese Cook ..... JOHN LONE
Army General ..... GARRY WALBERG

With

City Official	JOHN AGAR
Ape Masked Man	KENY LONG
Petrox Chairman	SID CONRAD
Army Helicopter Pilot	GEORGE WHITEMAN
Air Force Colonel	WAYNE HEFFLEY

Assistant to the Producer	FREDERIC M. SIDEWATER
Casting by	JOYCE SELZNICK AND ASSOCIATES

Director	JOHN GUILLERMIN
Producer	DINO DE LAURENTIIS
Screenplay by	LORENZO SEMPLE, JR.
Based on the Screenplay by	JAMES CREELMAN AND RUTH ROSE
From an Idea Conceived by	MERIAN C. COOPER AND EDGAR WALLACE
Executive Producers	FEDERICO DE LAURENTIIS CHRISTIAN FERRY
Director of Photography	RICHARD H. KLINE, A.S.C.
In Charge of Production	JACK GROSSBERG
Music Composed and Conducted by	JOHN BARRY
Film Editor	RALPH E. WINTERS, A.C.E.
Production Designed by	MARIO CHIARI AND DALE HENNESY

Second Unit Director	WILLIAM KRONICK
Production Manager	TERRY CARR
Unit Production Manager (Hawaii)	BRIAN FRANKISH
Unit Production Manager (New York)	GEORGE GOODMAN
Assistant Directors	DAVID McGIFFERT KURT NEUMANN
Second Assistant Director	PAT KEHOE
Second Unit Assistant Director	NATE HAGGARD
Production Coordinator	LORI IMBLER
Production Secretary	CHARLOTTE DREIMAN
Set Decorator	JOHN FRANCO, JR.

Script Supervisor	DORIS GRAU
Camera Operator	AL BETTCHER
Assistant Cameraman	ROBERT EDESA
Additional Photographic Effects	HAROLD WELLMAN, A.S.C.
Still Photographer	ELLIOTT MARKS
Art Directors	ARCHIE J. BACON
	DAVID A. CONSTABLE
	ROBERT GUNDLACH
Illustrators	MENTOR HUEBNER
	DAVID NEGRON
Sound Mixer	JACK SOLOMON
Re-Recording Mixers	HARRY W. TETRICK
	WILLIAM McCAUGHEY
Key Grip	ROBERT SORDAL
Gaffer	ED CARLIN
Property Master	JACK MARINO
Makeup Artist	DEL ACEVEDO
Hair Stylist	JO McCARTHY
Wardrobe	ARNY LIPIN
	FERN WEBER
Special Effects	GLEN ROBINSON
	JOE DAY
Set Painters	ROBERT CLARK
	CURTIS "RED" HOLLINGSWORTH
Greensman	KEN RICHEY
Hair Design for Kong	MICHAEL DINO
Sculptor of Kong	DON CHANDLER
Kong Mechanical Coordinator	EDDIE SURKIAN
Construction Coordinator	GARY MARTIN
Miniature Coordinator	ALDO PUCCINI
Transportation Coordinator	JOE SAWYERS
Stunt Coordinator	BILL COUCH
Costume Designer	MOSS MABRY
Gowns and Native Costumes by	ANTHEA SYLBERT
Post-Production Supervisor	PHIL TUCKER
Supervisor of Photographic Effects	FRANK VAN DER VEER
Photographic Effects Assistant	BARRY NOLAN

Matt Artist	LOU LICHTENFIELD
Sound Effects by	JAMES J. KLINGER
Music Editor	KENNETH J. HALL
Music Recording	DAN WALLIN
Music Re-recording	AARON ROCHIN
Assistant Film Editors	ROBERT PERGAMENT
	MARGO ANDERSON
Publicity Coordinator	GORDON ARMSTRONG
Unit Publicist	BRUCE BAHRENBURG
Production Auditor	ROBERT F. KOCOUREK
Production Accounting	MERYLE SELINGER
Messengers	SCOTT THAYLER
	JEFFREY CHERNOV
	MICHAEL WINTER
Native Dance Choreography by	CLAUDE THOMPSON
Extra Casting by	SALLY PERLE AND ASSOCIATES
Titles by	PACIFIC TITLE AND ART STUDIO

Still cameras provided by Nikon.

Miss Lange's jewelry by Bulgari.

CONTENTS

The Press Conference	1
Flashback	13
The Shooting Begins	33
Water, Water Everywhere	42
The Solution	52
Slowdown, Then Shutdown	62
Hawaii, Aloha	73
The Supertanker	100
A Layoff, the Shaping of Kong, and the Raising of the Wall	105
To the Wall	119
The Girl in the Hand	151
The Man in the Monkey Suit	172
Kong Meets New York	189
The Dog Days of Summer	233
The Big Night	258

To
Battle Davis

THE PRESS CONFERENCE

January 14, 1976

"Can you get him to stop wavering?" shouts F. D. Orlando to the projectionist. Orlando, wearing leis of cameras around his neck, is the photographer hired to shoot the publicity stills of the film's stars. Behind him, on a floor-to-ceiling screen, is a bold black-and-green drawing of King Kong. The projectionist, on scaffolding at the other end of the stage, is having difficulty steadying the image; Kong wavers as if stricken with palsy.

"He'll stop moving when I do," the projectionist shouts back to Orlando. "They don't give me much room to work up here." He stands still for a minute to show Orlando what he means, and the mammoth picture of Kong stops shaking.

There is concern among the sponsors of the press conference that the reporters will not be satisfied with this meager showing of Kong—they've only got a thirty-five-millimeter slide of the gigantic ape and a plaster mold of his hand. The news people will want the real Kong—that is, the huge mechanical model—which is not yet completed. Someone suggests spiking the fruit juice to soothe any disappointments.

A more immediate worry is the lack of press coverage. At 9:50 A.M., only a few seats are taken. The huge door to Stage 30 has been rolled up, and the caterers have prepared a table laden with trays of Dan-

ish pastry, coffee in a silver urn, and a variety of fruit juices. Even with the inducement of a free, though modest, breakfast, the press corps is slow to arrive. After late nights of parties and movie screenings, 10 A.M. is still the witching hour for the working press. They come straggling through the dead brownish cloud of smog that has settled permanently over Los Angeles, down streets where the grand old movie palaces have become the porno showcases, past the massage parlors and bus-stop benches advertising the latest and best cemeteries where Tinsel Town dreams are permanently put to rest.

Dino De Laurentiis, *King Kong's* producer, sits by himself in the last row of empty chairs, dressed in a tailored blazer and dark pants, the picture of a well-heeled yachtsman going to sea. He does not speak to many people, and few take the liberty of talking to him, knowing his reputation for being uncommunicative with people he doesn't know well. As time passes and the sound stage remains nearly empty, the publicists get nervous, anxiously looking for the first telltale signs of his displeasure. When De Laurentiis is displeased, it is obvious; furrows appear in his brow and anger in his eyes.

Then, as if central casting has been alerted, people resembling real journalists begin rushing through the entrance, carrying notepads and cameras. There are the wisecracks and the bloodshot eyes, the tight pants emphasizing too-thick female thighs, and the self-consciously unbuttoned shirts that reveal expanses of white-haired male chests and rows of beads, chains, and medals. The Hollywood press corps includes a curious mixture of people—first-rate journalists; "stringers," self-appointed reporters who have probably never even seen a newspaper city room but who are paid by newspapers around the world because they happen to be where the action is; television people with cumbersome cameras slung over their shoulders; and free-lance photographers calling themselves "photo-journalists," as if anything less would demean their dubious skills. Not

strangers to a free meal, they all swoop down on the pastry, leaving only sugar-coated crumbs on the silver serving trays.

"Where's the eggs Benedict?" someone grumbles.

"There's got to be *something* to put in this juice."

"No way King Kong's behind that screen."

Paramount's Sound Stage 30 has undergone a miraculous transformation for the press conference. Working overtime, the designers and crew have turned the rear of the studio into a realistic jungle from which the female star of *King Kong* will make her appearance. A large plaster model of Kong's hand—rushed into production the previous week, and now hidden behind a bamboo curtain—will serve as her seat during the conference.

In these last hours the workers have thickened the foliage with additional plastic leaves, installed a smoke-making machine to approximate an early morning mist, and hung huge black-and-white drawings of proposed movie scenes on the red curtain that covers the front and side walls.

Since his arrival in America three years ago, Dino De Laurentiis has not held a large-scale press conference, perhaps because of his uncertainty about being understood in English. "The more I'm in America, the worse my English gets," he has said. But because of his artistic and financial commitment to this multi-million-dollar production, De Laurentiis has agreed to be the master of ceremonies.

According to protocol worked out by the corporate giants—Paramount Pictures and Dino De Laurentiis Corporation—De Laurentiis will be introduced to the press by Richard Sylbert, vice-president in charge of worldwide production at Paramount. Also in attendance from the studio will be people who have been instrumental in setting up the conference—Charles Glenn, vice-president–production marketing; Robert Goodfried, vice-president in charge of West Coast publicity; and William O'Hare, executive director of publicity. O'Hare is stationed in New York but is a frequent com-

muter to the West Coast, and has been sent out for the press conference by Gordon Weaver, Paramount's vice-president in charge of worldwide marketing.

After brief opening remarks, De Laurentiis will introduce his male stars, Jeff Bridges and Charles Grodin; the director, John Guillermin; and the screenwriter, Lorenzo Semple, Jr. These men will be seated in folding chairs in the first row in front of the plastic jungle. Then, almost as an afterthought, De Laurentiis will introduce Jessica Lange, whose name has been deliberately withheld from the news media to arouse curiosity and create suspense. Jessica is living proof that the great Hollywood dream can still come true, that a pretty girl can magically be discovered and made a star overnight.

Landing her first job in the movies seemed incredibly easy to Jessica. A request had come to the Wilhelmina Agency for names of girls who might play Dwan, the role created so memorably in the original *King Kong* by Fay Wray. Within two hours Jessica had been chosen and was being flown to Hollywood for a screen test. An assistant to director Guillermin shot the test. When he saw what she could do before the camera he called Guillermin, who was having lunch in his studio office, and said he thought they'd found Dwan.

Jessica was not the first choice. The part in the original screenplay, obviously campy, was supposed to go to Barbra Streisand, but she would not be available until spring. Valerie Perrine was another choice, but she was under contract to Universal, which had announced its own remake of the King Kong story. Next Bette Midler was proposed, and then Cher Bono Allman.

But it is Jessica Lange, in a black cocktail dress, a white jacket around her shoulders, who stands in the back of the artificial jungle waiting to be introduced. She is in Hollywood and has the lead in the biggest production to hit the town in years.

Bridges and Grodin take their seats in the front row with De Laurentiis, Guillermin, and Semple. Many

of the press don't even recognize Bridges, who is half-disguised by the shaggy beard and very long hair he has grown for his role in the film. The Princeton anthropologist he plays is a rebellious, hip youth, though possibly from another generation, since long hair is not currently in fashion.

"You've got to be kidding! Lloyd's son!" a woman journalist exclaims in an attempt to appear familiar with the unfamiliar. Lloyd Bridges, Jeff's father, has for decades been a substantial actor; his movies include *High Noon* and *Home of the Brave,* and he has starred in the television series "Sea Hunt" and "Joe Forrester."

Grodin is clean-shaven except for a mustache that makes him appear much older than he did only a few years ago in *The Heartbreak Kid,* and is even less recognizable to the press.

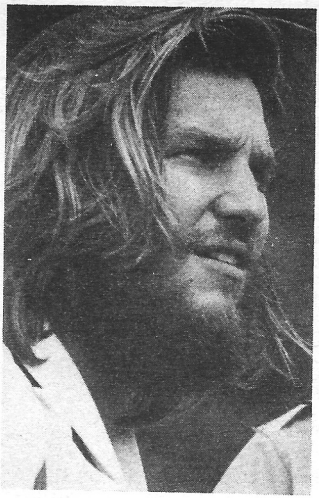
Numbers are important in a press conference. A body count is made. There are three hundred people in the sound stage, and at 10:10 A.M. Richard Sylbert taps the microphone authoritatively to get attention. The conference begins.

Sylbert praises De Laurentiis for rejuvenating the American film industry in the three years since his arrival from Italy. Everyone is aware how well his American-made films—including *Serpico, Death Wish,* and *Three Days of the Condor*—have done. "You have given the industry tremendous life," Sylbert states, going on to say that De Laurentiis' success in Hollywood has made him "bigger than King Kong."

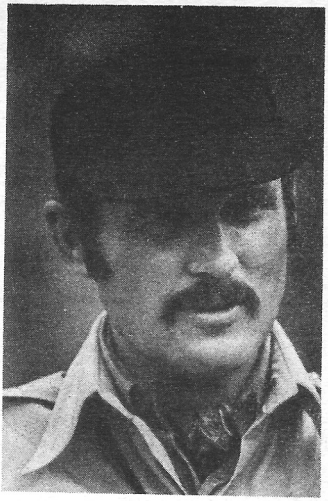
De Laurentiis walks to the microphone, accompanied by polite applause from the reporters. After his first few sentences, it is clear that his English will be understandable. He calls off the names of the talent he has assembled for his film, making the roster sound very impressive. "Bridges . . . Grodin . . . Guillermin . . . Semple." They stand and face the reporters for their round of applause, like fighters taking the center of the ring to be identified before the main bout. Then, with a sly smile, as if it were something he had almost for-



Jessica Lange



Jeff Bridges



Charles Grodin



King Kong

gotten, De Laurentiis adds, "Oh, yes . . . and Jessica Lange."

From the plastic leaves, Jessica appears. Behind her the drawing of Kong is projected onto the screen. As if their seats have been wired for shock, the photographers leap up and push to the front, jostling Jessica to get a favored position. Some of the press camera equipment looks a bit dusty.

The exploding flash bulbs form a white arc over her, and everyone is shouting directions.

"Get in Kong's hand."

"Get out of the hand."

"Over here."

"Sit down."

"Stand up."

Dino gives them enough time to take their pictures and then formally opens the conference to questions. The first one concerns what everyone in the film industry is gossiping about: the legal fight between Dino and Universal Pictures over who owns the right to make *King Kong*. Financially, it is a most destructive competition. If both companies rush their versions into production, the market will certainly be glutted.

Turning to the reporter, pausing, then smiling, Dino says, "I will give you the address of my lawyer."

Next question: "Is Fay Wray going to be in the picture?"

"I never talked to her about it," he answers. There had, in fact, been some attempts to get Miss Wray to make an appearance at the press conference. A script of De Laurentiis' version had been sent to her apartment in Century City, but she had not had time to read it, so conditions for her appearance could not be worked out.

Someone asks Lorenzo Semple about the film's ending: Would Kong scale the Empire State Building or the World Trade Center?

"Kong is going to hang around the World Trade Center," the screenwriter quips. "There is a rumor he may become mayor."

Guillermin is asked his opinion of the story.

"It will be entirely contemporary, modern, and new." He acts as if he finds the press conference a minor but persistent irritant and would prefer being back on the set.

The questions keep returning to De Laurentiis, who is fielding them adroitly.

"Is the film going to be a satire?"

"There will be some humor," Dino says. "But it is a modern romance-adventure."

Inevitably the questions turn to the missing guest of honor. A mold of his hand has hardly satisfied the jaded Hollywood press corps.

"He will be forty feet tall and moved electronically. He will be the most expensive actor in the world. It will cost a million to build him."

A cinematic purist among the reporters stands self-righteously before the aisle microphone and asks De Laurentiis to comment on the remark, attributed to a famous science-fiction writer, that the remake of *King Kong* would be a disaster.

"We're spending sixteen, seventeen million on it," Dino says, tossing out budget figures that have not been used since Twentieth Century-Fox made *Cleopatra.*

Another stimulating question: "Is there going to be nudity, and will the picture get an X rating?"

De Laurentiis is now working full tilt with the press. Knowing he is in control of the conference, he is relaxed, answering everything in conversational English that is downright lucid. "King Kong does a striptease with the girl in the film, but he'll do it some way to get a PG rating."

"Every project I do is important," De Laurentiis responds to another question. "The only boss I have is the audience, and the audience wants to see *King Kong* and see it done the right way."

A reporter wants to know if King Kong will stay the same size in proportion to humans and buildings, unlike the monsters in cheaply made films.

"I guarantee it one hundred percent," De Laurentiis says.

Throughout the conference the smoke-making machine has been wafting wispy clouds of mist over the plastic leaves. The dry-ice machine responsible for this effect goes on the blink, sending the smoke toward the reporters in the front rows. They begin coughing and rubbing their eyes. The machine is shut off, and the cloud lifts.

"The old *King Kong* would have been X-rated," a reporter persists, "if the public had been shown the uncut version."

"My picture is PG—for children," De Laurentiis answers, equally insistent.

One of the reporters dutifully turns a question to Jessica, for whom the conference has really been called.

"Are you scared about being in the film?"

"It's an incredible way to start," she says: the understatement of the week in Hollywood. Guilelessly, leaving herself vulnerable to critics at a later date, she admits that she has no film-acting experience, but says she is working out daily with a coach.

Someone asks her to scream. Jessica instantly shows signs of becoming a pro with the press. Rather than do what she does not want to do—or even acknowledge the silly question—she just smiles enigmatically.

Bridges and Grodin, who have not yet been singled out for questions, repress visible signs of boredom. Their expressions—frozen somewhere between smiling and blankness—have not varied much during the last half hour. At last another reporter with a sense of duty turns a question to Bridges: "Jeff, why are you doing *King Kong?*"

Before answering, Jeff does everything but shuffle his feet to appear reticent, almost shy. "Money, challenge, the role," he says.

The same question is asked of Grodin.

"Money, challenge, the role," he mimics Bridges. This gets a good laugh from the reporters. Then, with

the same kind of cinematic sincerity that sustained James Stewart throughout his career, Grodin adds, "It is one of my favorite pictures. I hope we do justice to it."

The conference is obviously winding down, even if the sponsors don't want it to end. Dino De Laurentiis, who survives a work schedule that would land most normal men in the hospital, indicates with a nod of his head that the conference is officially over. He asks his stars to remain for a few minutes to deal with the photographic requests.

Jessica climbs back into Kong's hand for several more shots. Bridges and Grodin are maneuvered to De Laurentiis' side for a photo. Someone wants to talk to the director, but he has gone back to Culver City, where most of the film will be shot in rented sound stages on the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot. With *The Last Tycoon* and *Marathon Man* shooting on its own lot, Paramount is too crowded.

As quickly as the press have assembled, they drift off into the smog. On the way out they receive white envelopes stamped "King Kong," and inside are photos and biographies of the stars and the principal creators. Within minutes the parking lot beneath the water tower is empty. To the relief of the Paramount publicists who have worked overtime to complete the press kits, none are thrown into the trash cans.

Two of the free-lance photographers who have stayed behind are battling over who gets to take the last shot of Bridges and Jessica. The media have already established them as the romantic interest in the film; the real bonus would be if the romance carried over into their private lives. A middle-aged woman with an accent wants the two actors to stand away from the photographers. A young photographer complains that the woman is monopolizing their time. He wants a few minutes alone with them, too. A fistfight would relieve the tension, but the stars negotiate a truce, giving equal time to both photographers, enduring the silliest pose of the day: Jeff lifting Jessica in his arms, manfully holding her safe

from the terrors of the jungle—a new Tarzan with his new Jane.

Inside the empty sound stage, the publicists rate the conference, giving De Laurentiis highest marks. His performance all but made the reporters forget that Kong was absent. Everyone is relieved that no one asked what could have been the most embarrassing question: does a mechanical forty-foot Kong exist? Also, everyone is pleased by Jessica's performance. She came over with sweet sincerity, which—next to big breasts and firm buttocks—is what the press likes best in its leading ladies.

So the conference is rated a triumph by both Paramount and De Laurentiis. *King Kong* has officially been launched. As one journalist later put it, this press conference was "the biggest one since Sonny got back with Cher on their TV show." Jessica's photograph appears in newspapers and magazines around the world.

FLASHBACK

Most of 1975

Hollywood is famous for its behind-the-scenes gossip. Yet the long, involved process by which a movie is successfully launched remains an enigma to all but an initiated few. Too many of the films that make it to the box office are critical and financial failures, a fact that only serves to heighten the mystery. But somehow—with the help of dreams, hard work, and endless lunch conferences, and through the energetic and often conflicting services of agents, writers, more agents, actors, bankers, tax experts, and studio bosses—*somehow,* motion pictures do come into being. Equally mystifying is the selection of film material from the plethora of best sellers, hit plays, cycles of musicals and westerns, and yesterday's box-office successes.

Judging by the length of time it takes most films to get off the ground—frequently a number of years—the launching of the *King Kong* remake seems rather simple. No doubt a new *King Kong* was seen as a "natural" at least in part because of the success of the original film, a pioneer in special effects and now a cult picture shown repeatedly on television and in revival movie theaters.

Take this classic film and add an important studio. In the 1970s, Paramount, aided by its extraordinary

know-how in advertising and publicity, has had more big hits than any other major studio. Now, under the direction of Barry Diller (its new chairman and chief executive officer), Paramount is looking for another "big" picture in the same league as their recent blockbusters, *The Godfather* and *The Great Gatsby*.

And then there is producer Dino De Laurentiis, associated more closely with Paramount than with any other studio, though still remaining independent. (Paramount was the domestic distributor of De Laurentiis' *Death Wish, Mandingo, Serpico,* and *Three Days of the Condor.*)

At this time—early in 1975—Paramount and De Laurentiis have come together to discuss future film projects. As De Laurentiis recalls it, conversation during a meeting with Diller turned to the possibility of making a monster movie. Diller did not have a specific project in mind; he simply expressed an interest in the concept. De Laurentiis said that he knew the monster movie he wanted to do. He proceeded to tell Diller about a poster his teenage daughter, Francesca, had hanging on her bedroom wall in their New York apartment. Each morning Dino would stop in to see her before she left for school, and staring down on them was that hairy figure hugging the top of the Empire State Building. King Kong!

The idea grabbed Diller and De Laurentiis. Green light.

Legal acquisition entanglements aside, most of De Laurentiis' efforts during the spring and early summer of 1975 were centered on getting a shooting script and a director.

Lorenzo Semple, Jr., had worked for De Laurentiis before, receiving credit as coauthor on *Condor.* And Semple had credentials as a member of the film intelligentsia. Several years before he had been cited by the New York Film Critics for his screenplay of *Pretty Poison.* Given the assignment, he sat down and within a month prepared a treatment—a narrative presentation

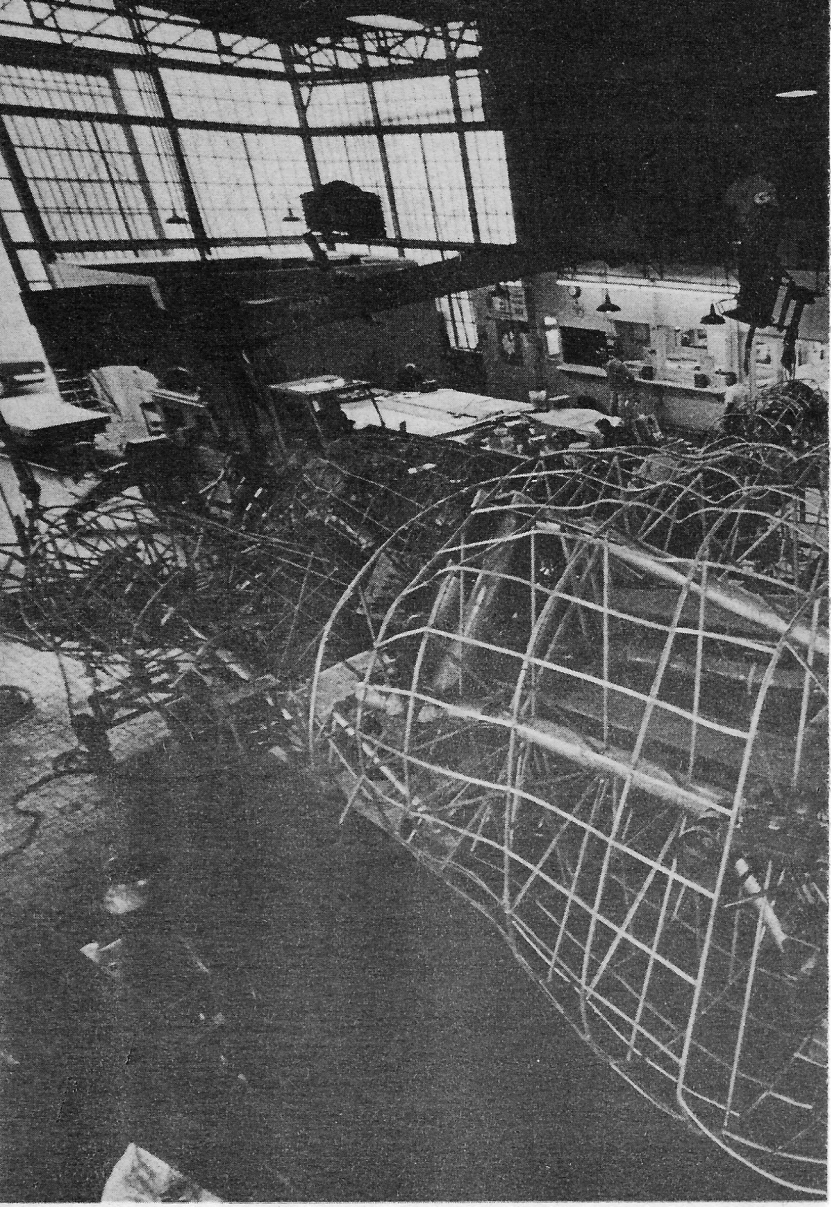
of the story, sometimes containing brief examples of dialogue.

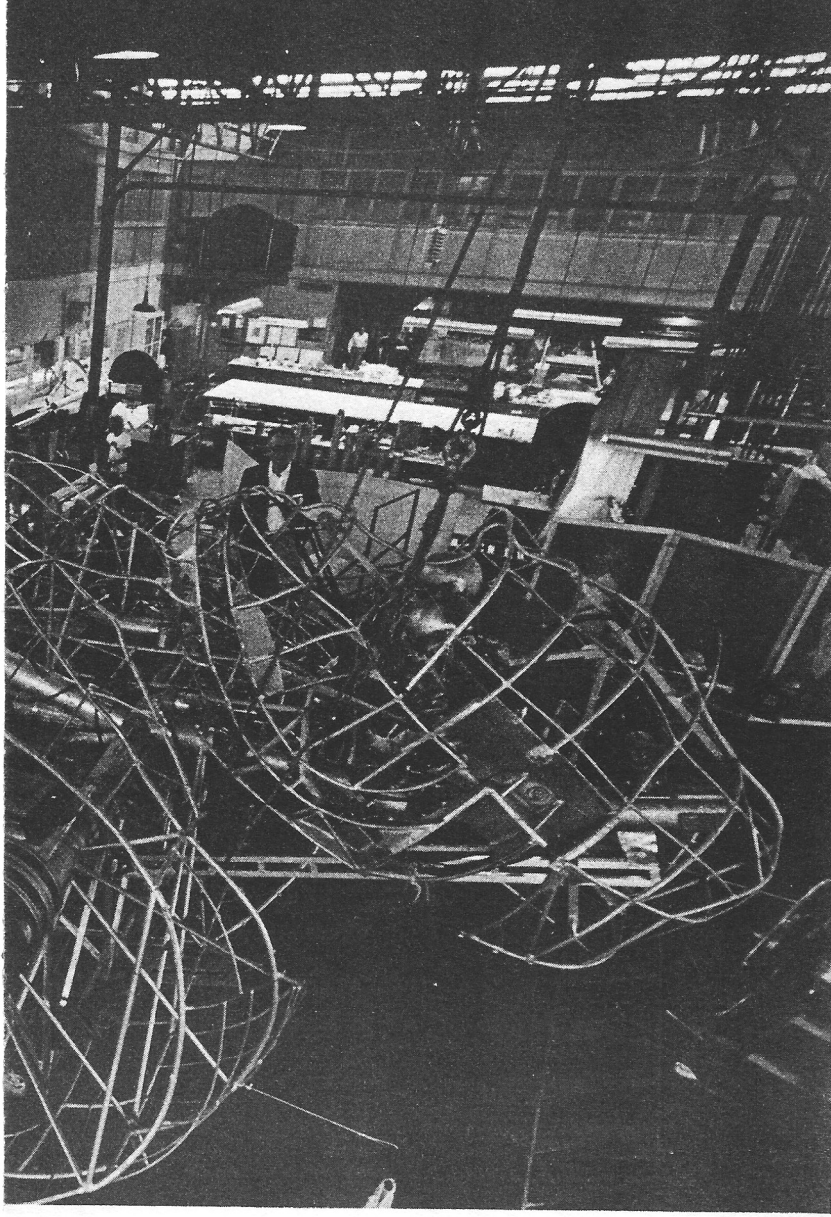
A treatment can run anywhere from a few pages to a hundred in length. Semple's was over a hundred pages long and fairly detailed. At De Laurentiis' request, he made the story contemporary, presenting the men on the jungle island as oil explorers, which gave him a chance to develop a sub-theme: the rape of the environment by greedy men.

This treatment and the first screenplay—which everyone agreed had made the story cinematic and modern without destroying the basic beauty-and-the-beast tale—contained a good deal of camp humor, reflecting the original hope of delivering Barbra Streisand into Kong's hands. The leading role was tailored for someone with the comic talent of a Marilyn Monroe—Dwan is a simple, innocent blonde who speaks what she thinks is the truth without worrying too much about the consequences. She is sexually honest, uninhibited. In the 1933 film, the heroine is a movie star going on location to be nabbed by Kong. In this version, Dwan—she has reversed the letters in her real name to give it more sparkle and individuality—is a would-be actress floating to Hong Kong on a shady producer's yacht. He's in the cabin watching *Deep Throat* and she's dozing on deck when the boat blows up. The cabin and its porno-movie audience are totally destroyed. The sole survivor, Dwan is pulled from the sea by the crew of the *Petrox Explorer.*

As she's pulled from the drink, she breathlessly asks her rescuers, "Ever met anyone before whose life was saved by *Deep Throat?*"

Of the two male roles, that of Prescott (Bridges) is probably the less challenging because it is the more familiar; created in the tradition of the dashing, romantic heroes of the 1930s, it is a very uncomplicated, energetic part, well suited to the talents of someone like Errol Flynn. The role of Wilson (Grodin), the oil-company executive, is the more interesting, since it is broad-





De Laurentiis inspects Kong's "skeleton."



Kong's left hand takes shape.

ly written, less defined, and can be played as anything from a clown to an insufferable bore.

The new Kong is a less violent monster than the old one. When he kills humans, it doesn't seem quite so senseless; he is taking revenge on those who have taunted him and made off with his true love. No longer does he snack indiscriminately on the natives. He is now a more romantic lover, tender with his girl friend instead of downright lustful. Dwan reaches his sentimental heart, and she can tease him about his infatuation without having to recoil in terror from his wrath. Because of this relationship, the new ending is far more touching than the original one.

But as in the original, from the moment of Kong's capture everything points to the final rampage in New York.

As the screenplay was being finished, De Laurentiis was busy looking for a director. He had approached Roman Polanski, a hot property again after his success with Paramount's *Chinatown,* but the Polish director had reportedly said he wasn't crazy about doing a film with a huge monkey as the star. In August, De Laurentiis turned to Guillermin, who was already working for him, preparing a remake of John Ford's classic *The Hurricane.* But the film had been having script problems from the start, and the project was temporarily abandoned when Guillermin moved over to *King Kong.*

After *The Towering Inferno* Guillermin should have been as much in demand as any director in Hollywood. But the stories circulating in the industry—taken as truth despite the facts known by those who worked on it—unjustly gave all the credit for the spectacular special effects to producer Irwin Allen, making Guillermin seem little more than the traffic manager for the actors. Even so, the director was not immediately sold on the Kong project. He wanted to be sure about what De Laurentiis had in mind—specifically about what type of picture the producer intended to make; Guillermin had some definite ideas of his own, and didn't care to settle for anything less. He is invariably associated with

violent, heavy-action pictures, but ironically enough he has always wanted to direct a larger-than-life romance dealing with the issues of good and evil. He saw in the *King Kong* screenplay the opportunity to realize that dream. "Most pictures today are in very minor keys," Guillermin has said. "But *King Kong* is an unabashed fairy tale with epic proportions to it."

In the early sessions with De Laurentiis, Guillermin learned that the producer liked to keep discussions brief, perhaps because of those doubts about being understood in English. But De Laurentiis can be very persuasive, and one day Guillermin realized that he had committed himself to the project without really having spoken with the producer about the picture's basic concept. He had insisted on only two things: a full-sized ape's head and a mechanical hand to pick the girl up with, both of which had been lacking in the original. De Laurentiis had granted these requests. But further demands were probably unnecessary; a working rapport had been established between the two men in their prior artistic dealings, and each respected what the other would bring to the picture: Guillermin, an experience with action films, and De Laurentiis, the ability to get a picture made, despite great obstacles.

"I felt we had agreed about the concept without really talking it over," the director said later. "It was something understood between us." *King Kong* would be a romantic picture about beauty and the beast.

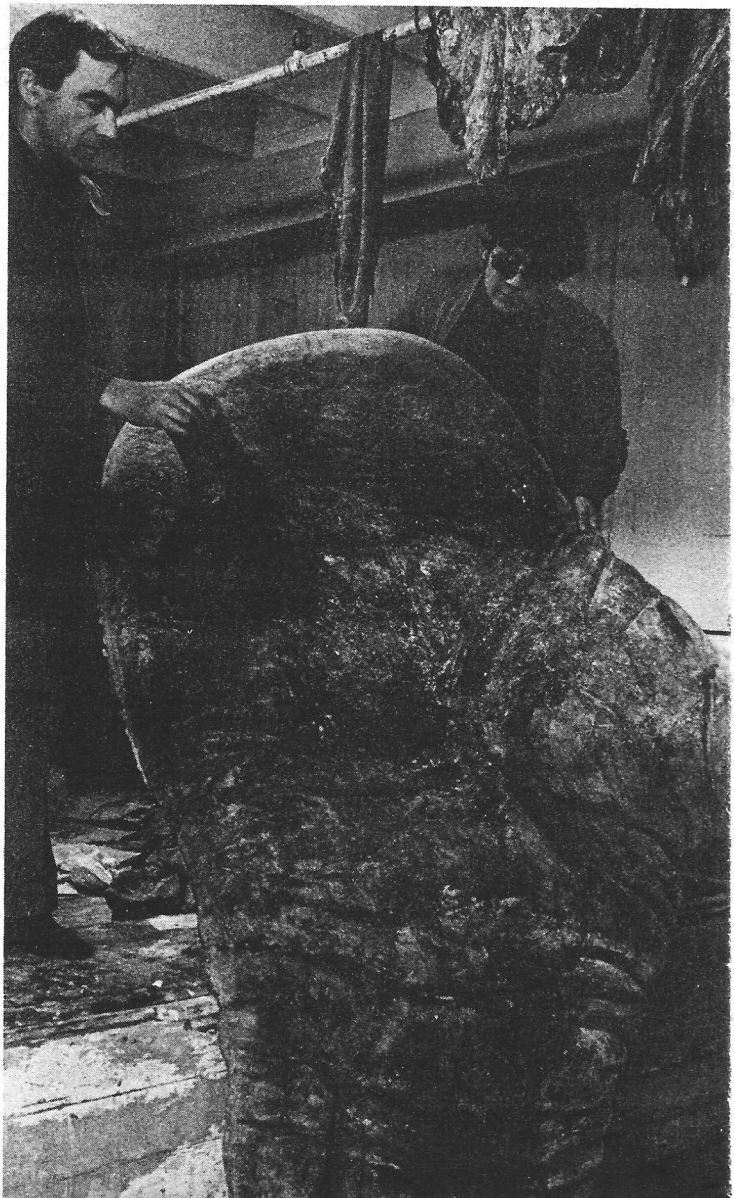
Time was not yet critical. But in retrospect, the assembling of the key production people seems to have gone on at a most leisurely pace. De Laurentiis—always loyal to men he had dealt with in the Italian film industry—decided to bring over Carlo Rambaldi and Mario Chiari, two men who had worked on many of his films, most notably on *The Bible.* As special-effects designer, handsome, lean Rambaldi would create the mechanical Kong. White-haired, aristocratic-looking Chiari was to design the production. In addition, half a dozen key Italian film workers came with Rambaldi to assist in designing Kong. Of all these men, only

Chiari spoke enough English to be understood. Throughout production the small, out-of-the-way construction shop near the rear of Metro's main lot was a sort of "Little Italy," with English spoken only when the Americans had to communicate with Rambaldi—and then only through an interpreter.

During the next year of production it became clear that the most crucial relationship on the set was one between two men who did not even speak each other's language but who could and did communicate through the international language of engineering designs and blueprints. Such was the relationship between Rambaldi and Glen Robinson. A two-time Academy Award winner (for *Earthquake* and *The Hindenburg*), Robinson is acknowledged in the film industry as a leading craftsman in special effects, and is particularly known for his ability at designing and building mechanical objects. A veteran of decades in the business, Robinson rarely finds anything impossible. When he was selected to share the duty of coming up with a huge, realistic Kong, Robinson sounded out an aircraft company for the actual construction. The company said it would take up to three years to build and perfect the mechanical monster. But De Laurentiis wanted the job done in less than a year. Robinson, who is known for his optimism about figuring out a way to build anything, sat down in a construction shop at the opposite end of the lot from Rambaldi's to come up with a separate design for Kong.

What Robinson and Rambaldi would create was determined in part by De Laurentiis' instructions. The mechanical monster had to be *big*. Animation had been used for the legendary special effects in the first *King Kong;* the illusion of movement had been created by a stop-motion photographic process in which a small ape model was manipulated, one body motion for each frame of film. But De Laurentiis felt that the original ape's movements had been too jerky, and he intended to keep his Kong's motion fluid. For this reason, he made what was probably the most important decision on the film: he decided to use a man in an ape suit, as well as a

Carlo Rambaldi, special-effects designer (left), and one of his crew examine Kong's left hand, comparing it with a piece of the man-sized ape suit.



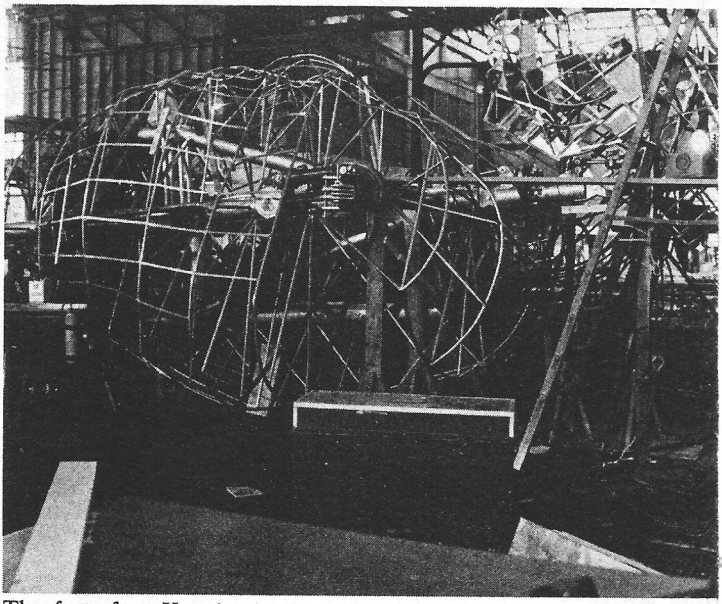
mechanical monster. He assigned Rambaldi to the construction of the suit and various face masks.

Another problem was scale. De Laurentiis had promised reporters that everything would be in perfect proportion—a definite improvement over the first *King Kong,* where the ape's relative size often varied from scene to scene. De Laurentiis' goal was to produce *the* definitive monster movie. This would make his *King Kong* one of the most expensive films—if not *the* most expensive—ever to be shot in Hollywood.

There would have to be three separate ape images: a huge mechanical arm that could pick up the heroine, a full-sized mechanical monster, and a man in an ape suit. But to maintain a constant scale, there would have to be two versions—a full-sized one and a miniature—of every set in which the mechanical and human Kongs would appear at one time or another. Eventually, one hundred seven full-sized and miniature sets had to be built; they occupied most of the sound stages at Metro and across town at the Culver City studio. The cost of these sets and of the labor hired to build them—hundreds of men and women during many weeks of production—became the single biggest expense of the film.

The sets and the various Kongs would be worthless if they looked phony to the public. To prevent such a disaster, De Laurentiis employed the latest in photographic techniques in a unique combination: blue screen, matte, rear- and front-view projection, split screen. Finally, in the optical-effects department, under supervisor Frank Van Der Veer, the film negatives would be merged to create cinematic magic.

Budgeted in the beginning at close to fifteen million dollars, the film rose daily in cost as the dimensions of the production took shape. Even from the start, twenty million had seemed a more realistic figure. If this much money was going to be spent, shooting would have to go out of the studio, and New York was the most obvious location. The Big Apple was essential to the ending of the picture, and it would be impossible to re-create the huge city on the back lot. Production would have to go



The forty-foot Kong's aluminum skeleton at an early stage of construction does not look particularly ape-shaped.

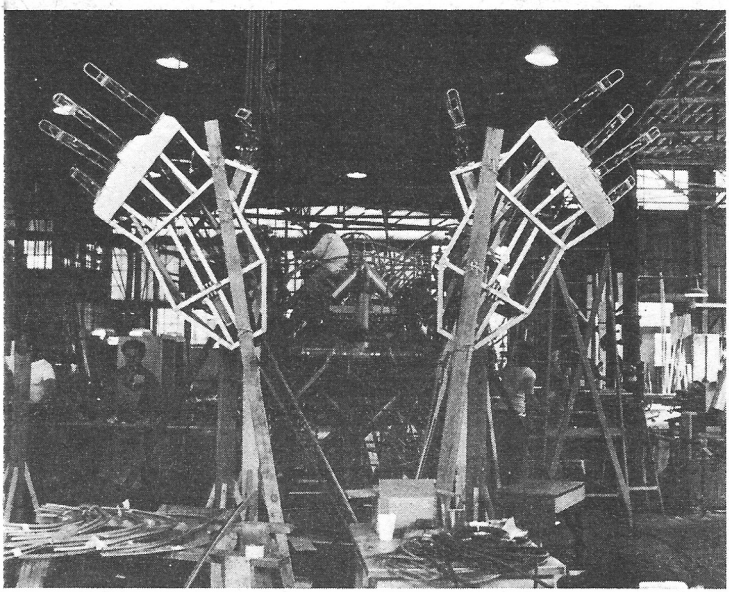
there for at least a few weeks, probably in the early summer of 1976, and George Goodman was selected to be the unit production manager there and to begin scouting the locations besides the World Trade Center that they'd need.

Another principal unit would also have to go to an island location. Some thought was given to Catalina, the resort off Los Angeles, but its terrain was hardly that of a mountainous Pacific island. Finally Hawaii was decided upon; the availability of skilled film labor and movie equipment made it an obvious choice. Guillermin spent five days visiting the islands in the Hawaiian chain and quickly determined that the only suitable one was Kauai—the northernmost and least populated island. The exact time when the company would work there would have to be decided later, after the script was broken down into specific scenes and a tentative shoot-

ing schedule worked out. Frenetic young Brian Frankish remained on Kauai as unit manager; it was his job to find locations for beach landings and long mountain hikes.

So much of the filming posed horrendous technical problems. Many had already been noticed in the pre-production meetings; yet few had been solved. For this reason, it was decided that every scene in which Kong appeared would require a storyboard—a panel of sketches showing major action and set changes.

Guillermin, meticulous in advance planning of his camera shots, was to work on the storyboards with Chiari and the four illustrators who would do the actual drawings. But Chiari had already started sketching the Wall, a huge structure in the film built by the Skull Island natives to protect themselves from their biggest tourist attraction. To appease Kong, the natives have



Construction crew work on the "bones" of the forty-foot Kong's hands.

constructed an altar on the jungle side of the Wall, and there they leave beautiful girls as sacrifices to him.

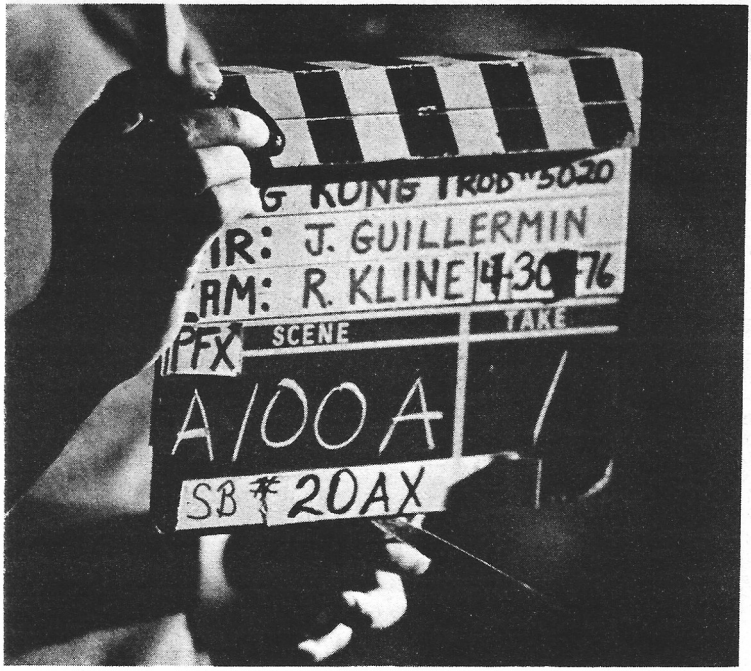
Guillermin soon took over composing the storyboards, which, when strung on the wall of the art department, resembled a big comic strip. He is not a draftsman, but he learned to make crude preliminary sketches for the illustrators, who then turned them into completed drawings. It is tedious work, a fact Guillermin was already well aware of, since he had done some storyboarding on *The Towering Inferno*. But even if he had been able to devote all his time to the Kong storyboards, it would have been impossible to complete them, simply because the picture did not yet have an ending. Though the script was finished, it had not yet been decided where Kong would be presented to the New York public.

In the 1933 film, the ape is chained to a theater stage for his introduction. In Semple's screenplay, the event takes place at Shea Stadium. But, on investigation, the production staff discovered that the stadium's rental cost and labor demands were prohibitive. And it would hardly be practical to have Kong in center field when the Mets were playing there.

The presentation site had still not been selected when filming began. Anaheim Stadium, home of the Los Angeles Angels, was being seriously considered because there was a period in the spring when the baseball team would not be there.

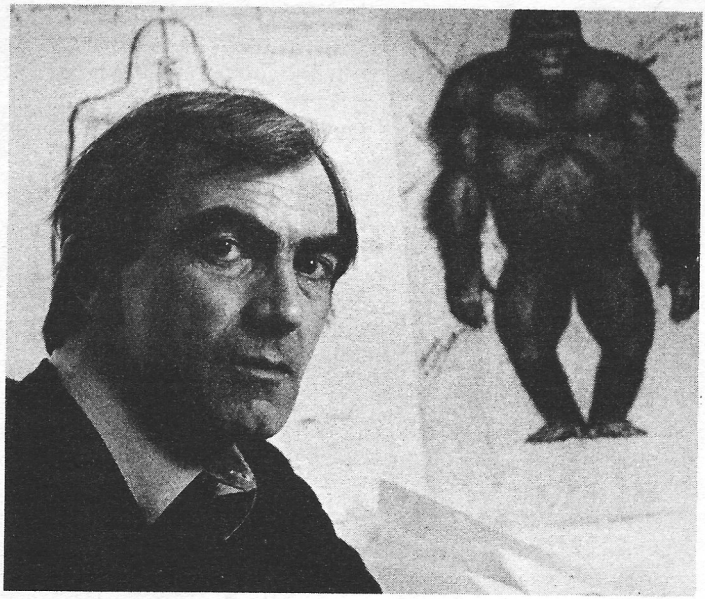
When it became apparent how difficult it would be to photograph some of Guillermin's storyboards, scenes were changed daily, even hourly. The panels had to be redrawn frequently, and this began to unnerve the people responsible for designing and building the sets. In fact, at the start of principal photography, probably fewer than half the storyboards were finished.

Jack Grossberg and Terry Carr came onto the film in 1975 to take over the organization and scheduling of the production, Grossberg as executive in charge of production and Carr as production manager. Theirs is the business end of moviemaking.



Both men had worked on Woody Allen's *Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex . . .*, for which Grossberg had been production manager and Carr an assistant director. Although their personalities are diametrically opposed, they had developed a mutual respect, and when Grossberg was asked to suggest somebody for the job of Kong production manager, he thought immediately of Carr. A picture Carr had been working on was suddenly canceled, and he was available.

Grossberg still has the sound of New York in his voice, though he has been on the West Coast for seven years. His long career in New York moviemaking began in 1947, and its high point was his association with the production of *On the Waterfront*. His humor is loud, at times vulgarly funny, and often outrageous. He can be abrasive, shouting to get his way, then exploding into



Carlo Rambaldi with some of his sketches of Kong

a big grin that says the battle meant nothing, that it was only a way of getting something done. He is cynical about Hollywood, believing it to be a gigantic conspiracy against genuine talent. Yet he is unabashedly enthusiastic about the potential of the film as a serious art form. Throughout the fall of 1975 he was busy negotiating deals with unions and companies to get the men and equipment necessary for putting the production together.

"Look," he says, laughing, "with the personalities on a movie set, one of my jobs is keeping people from tearing each other apart."

While Grossberg can often be heard down the corridor from his office, one almost has to lean against Carr's chest to hear what he's saying. With his soft-spoken manner, untainted sincerity, and prematurely gray hair, he has the solemn manner of an introverted young cleric. He is without Grossberg's innate cynicism,

but he has that same boundless enthusiasm about the possibilities of film. He is a native of California, but, unlike many Californians in the movie industry, he did not follow in anyone's footsteps to get there; his father is an auto mechanic in Oakland. After college, Terry started a career as a musician. "I still think musicians are more disciplined than filmmakers," he says. He entered the business through the Director's Guild training program, and he has worked mostly as an assistant director.

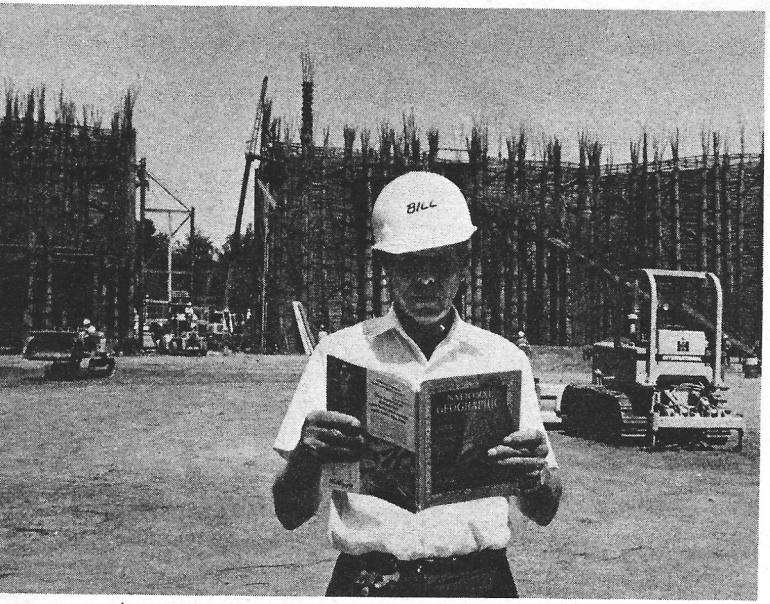
Now Carr is at his desk, blocking out a tentative shooting schedule, one that gets more tenuous every day as dates and locations are juggled. "When I was hired in November, 1975, I thought we were going to start in April, which would give us five months for preparation," he says with a shrug.

A persistent problem has been the failure to come up with a face for Kong that pleases De Laurentiis. The first sketches were labeled unusable. Key people have begun taking lunch breaks at the Los Angeles Zoo to study the face and body movements of the gorillas.

"I was down there quite a bit," Guillermin says, "to watch the actions of the chief gorilla, Bum." The director hoped to observe in Bum the facial expressions and walk that would confirm the image of Kong that he and De Laurentiis wanted to portray on the screen—an ape that was as human as possible.

Makeup man Rick Baker also spent a great deal of time studying the behavior of the monkeys and apes at the Los Angeles Zoo. Since his childhood he had been fascinated with primates. Still savoring the reviews for his incredible makeup job on Cicely Tyson—which aged her to more than one hundred years old for the television film "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman"—he had come to Guillermin's attention as an expert in the plastic makeup that would be used in *King Kong*.

In talking with Baker, Guillermin discovered the makeup man's knowledge about gorillas. Baker was hired, along with several other men, to alternate as the



A crew member bones up on his Kong lore by reading *National Geographic* on the back lot. Behind him the Wall is going up.

man in the monkey suit. And, making use of his experience with faces and with primates, he began helping Rambaldi with the design of Kong's face.

Another frequent traveler to the zoo was Federico De Laurentiis, Dino's son and an executive producer on *King Kong*. An amateur photographer with the ambition of becoming a professional, Federico shot a number of photos of the gorillas. The one he took of Bum became the ape his father wanted for his Kong. And now, getting it translated into a mask and suit had become imperative because of the critical race against Universal to get into production first.

But to everyone closely connected with De Laurentiis' Kong, it was evident that the picture was not ready. There was no full-sized mechanical Kong, no function-

ing arm, no man-sized monkey suit. The star was still on the drawing board—and there was no assurance that after his various forms were built they would *work*.

Unwittingly, everyone had been trapped by a line of copy from Paramount's poster announcement of its new Kong. "One year from today Paramount Pictures and Dino De Laurentiis will bring to you the most exciting original motion picture event of all time." A decision had been made. The picture had to be released by Christmas of 1976. De Laurentiis wanted it; so did Paramount. Distributors would pay an estimated twenty-five million dollars in advance for the Christmas booking. There would be an initial print order of twenty-five hundred



for theaters around the world; this would cost an estimated two and a half million dollars. This advance booking order and the phenomenal interest shown by companies wanting to tie in their products with the marketing of *King Kong* was compelling evidence of a worldwide interest in a new Kong.

But was it humanly possible to get the picture done in time for delivery of the prints? Even if the prints were still wet? Carr's scheduling called for principal photography to finish by the end of June, 1976, a date no one believed possible, not even Carr himself. But the studio and De Laurentiis needed to believe it could be done, and, to please them, the crew had to say it would be done; it became a litany for those stumbling in the dark places where sets should already have been if it was going to be a merry Christmas for Dino De Laurentiis, Paramount, and King Kong.

THE SHOOTING BEGINS

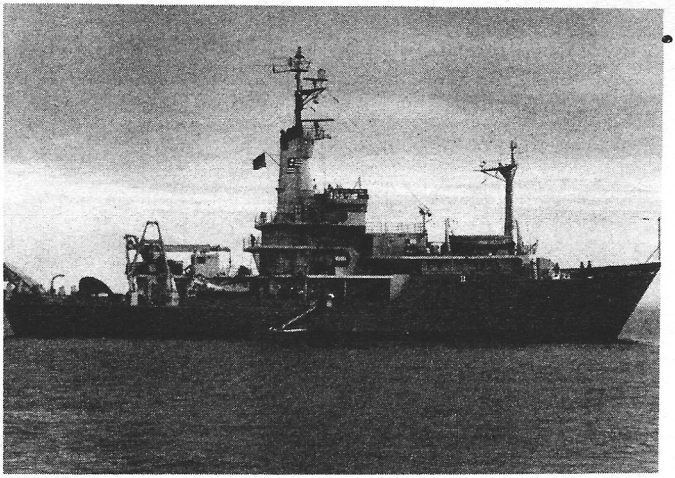
January 15—16, 1976

The freeway proceeds through a flatland of oil-storage tanks and high-tension wires before dead-ending at a row of docks. This is San Pedro Harbor, Los Angeles' commercial sea outlet to the markets of the South Pacific and Asia.

In the darkness of this first night of shooting, the tankers and the skeleton crews loading cargo and driving trucks beneath dim orange lights look like moveable toys under a Christmas tree. Behind a high wire fence at the dock nearest the open sea, the battleship-gray, three-deck *Petrox Explorer* rides placidly at anchor. Along the dock, guards in white uniforms and black-brimmed caps casually make their way past the bare-chested Oriental workers loading provisions onto the ship. Nearby, older men and women are squatting on small mats, cooking food over open fires.

From a distance the reflection of waves slapping against the gray prow of the *Petrox Explorer* seems to be real. But it is as artificial as the wisps of smoke generated by a hidden machine. The illusion of wave action is created by a large perforated disc spinning in front of an arclight and throwing shadows onto the ship's hull.

Tonight, this corner of San Pedro Harbor is a port in Micronesia. To heighten the Oriental effect, sampans are bobbing at anchor to the stern of the *Petrox Explorer*.



The *Petrox Explorer*—in "real life" a ship on loan from the United States Navy to the University of California, which rented it out to De Laurentiis

But unless the camera can shoot around corners, they will never be seen in the film.

Movie magic has turned the chilly night into a swelteringly hot, humid one. Off camera, the extras can see their breath, but near the ship, the bare-chested dockworkers are sweating profusely.

Three steps out of "Micronesia" and behind the camera is the support line of moviemaking: dressing trailers, prop truck, food tents, generators, sound equipment, and the very necessary honey wagons (portable toilets), which, when unattended and left to become ripe, soon give off odors that make them the most easily traceable items on the set.

The drone of constant, aimless talk fills the night. The crew and extras are discussing the chilly weather, the Rams' chances next season, who's cheating on whom, what the cottages will go for at Malibu Colony next summer—almost everything but what's happening on the set.

A hundred individuals are waiting to be told what to do, and the one man with the authority to tell them is John Guillermin, a middle-aged native of Great Britain with a slim build and an energetic, athletic way of moving that makes him seem much younger than his age. A pipe clenched in his mouth and a wool cap pulled down over his gray, moderately long hair, he is perched on the arm of a Chapman crane, surrounded by his camera operators and his director of photography, the capable veteran Dick Kline. Together, these men form a cell of extraordinary cinematic talent. Suspended ten feet above the noisy confusion on the dock, they are preparing to start the shooting of *King Kong.*

Even in the midst of his camera team, Guillermin seems to hold himself apart, isolating himself in deep concentration on what he must do to make order out of chaos and get the shot. Those who have worked with Guillermin find him extremely reserved and somewhat aloof; he is a man who seems compelled to keep his emotions under strict control and with whom it is better to establish a formal working relationship than a personal friendship. He speaks with a pronounced, crisp British accent and uses a minimum of words to get his point across, frequently relying on one familiar four-letter word to underscore his meaning. He has established a reputation for being able to direct the big action pictures, and his credits include *The Blue Max, Bridge at Remagen,* and his biggest hit, *The Towering Inferno.*

"Ready, boys!" Guillermin shouts. With these long-awaited words, the confusion below begins to take a specific shape that resembles a scene in a movie. The smoke machine expels a tropical haze; the perforated disc spins over the spotlight, and wave shadows play over the words *Petrox Explorer* on the bow of the ship; wiry Oriental workers lift crates and struggle with cargo nets, and their women sit patiently at the open fires, cooking their meals.

The crane lifts Guillermin and his team through the sky in a graceful arc, and the camera records the master

shot of the *Petrox Explorer* preparing to sail on the last leg of its journey to the land of King Kong. This scene will appear near the beginning of the movie. Aboard the ship is an exploration team headed by a Petrox Company executive (Charles Grodin). The team's mission is to find an undersea oil shelf reported to exist off Skull Island, which, in movie fiction, is located somewhere between Bali Hai and Borneo. After Guillermin covers himself by getting several takes of the master shot, he brings his camera in for the closeups of people and pieces of action that will be part of the overall master shot.

Waiting on the set are Jeff Bridges; burly Jack O'Halloran, a professional-fighter-turned-actor with a gravel voice that could bring an army regiment to attention; Jorge Moreno, a Mexican character actor; and Julius Harris, an extremely tall, black New Yorker with a shaved head. Character actors like O'Halloran, Moreno, and Harris, who work steadily in film and television, are important to any movie because they are instantly recognizable—and familiar faces reassure an audience.

Guillermin is purposely not rushing the first night's shooting. He wants to maintain a leisurely pace, to keep the atmosphere loose and friendly. It is a time for people to get acquainted. Early in every movie the production heads, cast, and crew spar with one another, all trying to see how far they can go. As soon as possible the director must establish limits and set requirements that will be tolerated by both egos and union rules. A grip cannot carry the star's wig from one set to the next; that must be done by the hair stylist. And a sound man knows better than to fool around with the light cables; that is the duty of the electrician.

A movie set is highly bureaucratic, and it becomes even more so if the production is prolonged and labor disputes are allowed to spread. Some of these disputes seem petty, and this tends to obscure the real issue: diminishing numbers of jobs in a depressed industry. Today movie work is sporadic; feature films are no longer the major entertainment source for the masses.

Periods of unemployment can be anticipated by everyone in the industry except a handful of stars and directors.

But at the beginning everyone is happy. The inevitable ego clashes and labor penalties will happen tomorrow, not tonight. Lifelong friendships are forming—which in the movie industry generally means that they will last until the picture's wrap party, or perhaps be kept up through the first Christmas, when there will be an exchange of cards.

Despite Guillermin's easy first night, there is some pressure to move quickly on the *Petrox Explorer* scene. The ship, which is on loan from the United States Navy to the University of California's Scripps Institute of Oceanography, is costing a reported $250,000 to rent, and she must sail back to the college in three weeks' time.

With her bland gray paint and complex superstructure, the *Petrox Explorer* resembles any number of Navy vessels that went to war for Hollywood in the movies of the 1940s and 1950s. She may appear to be a conventional naval ship, albeit slightly smaller than most, more cumbersome and squat in design. But inside she is equipped with a complex, sophisticated system of electronic machines that have been used by the United States and Russia in joint scientific sea explorations.

For the moment she belongs to Hollywood. Her decks are swarming with real and make-believe seamen wearing hardhats and ducking the cranes that carry nets of cargo over their heads. With all the possible dangers of falling cargo, the only casualty is Julius Harris, who trips over a cable and suffers a minor cut on the jaw.

Much of the first-night shooting is tedious. Bridges is still waiting to work and is reading a paperback. Attention to a scene being shot seems to diminish in direct proportion to one's distance from the camera. Back by the honey wagons and food tents the crew are reading the trade papers, playing backgammon, going farther into the darkness to smoke a joint or to nap. But suddenly everyone stops whatever he has been doing and

turns to watch the familiar, chauffeur-driven Mercedes-Benz as it comes down the ramp toward the set. The policeman at the wooden barricades waves the car through without asking for any identification. None is needed. He knows that the man in the back seat is Hollywood's most important independent movie producer—and the current source of his income.

Dino De Laurentiis steps out of the car and pauses for a moment, holding his hand to his eyes to shade them from the harsh camera lights. Even when he is standing still and not uttering a word, he gives the impression of fierce activity. Impeccably dressed in a conservative business suit, wearing glasses, De Laurentiis exudes an aura of power; and it is not a contrived appearance. His critics may question his taste, but no one questions his success. By artful business dealings and an acute sense of what the public wants, De Laurentiis has secured a position near—if not at—the top of the Hollywood hierarchy within three short years.

All that power makes people nervous. His subordinates greet him with wan smiles or half-hearted waves. They wait for his recognition, but it doesn't come—because he is intently studying the scene Guillermin is shooting. Everyone feels insecure, unwanted, fearful of having displeased the boss, fearful, maybe, even of losing his job. Insecurity is at the root of the whole movie industry.

It is a big week for De Laurentiis. Besides *King Kong,* which will be his most expensive movie to date (though his 1955 *War and Peace* would be more costly if it were made today), he has started two other productions. One, *Drum,* is the sequel to his successful *Mandingo,* which made almost every critic's list of 1975's ten worst pictures, yet racked up at the box office. (Heavyweight boxer Ken Norton will again play the leading role.) The second film, *The Shootist,* starring John Wayne, Lauren Bacall, and James Stewart, is a turn-of-the-century western in which a professional gunman, played by Wayne, is stricken with terminal cancer. In addition, De Laurentiis has recently released *Lipstick,* with Margaux

Hemingway. And as if to pacify the critics who claim he is interested only in making money—they forget that he produced two postwar Italian classics, *La Strada* and *The Nights of Cabiria*—he and Paramount have just distributed Ingmar Bergman's *Face to Face,* with Liv Ullman.

About the only people on the San Pedro dock who do not realize De Laurentiis' importance are the newly arrived South Vietnamese refugees who have been recruited by Sally Perle to play the "Micronesian" dockworkers. Sally is a transplanted New Yorker who followed movie production to Hollywood in October, 1975, after fifteen years at central casting in New York. Crossing the continent did not rob her of the hard-nosed humor and sentimental toughness so typical of New York hipsters—she could easily play the parts once written for Eve Arden. Undaunted by the task of coming up with extras who look Indonesian, not Chinese or Japanese, Sally searched the Oriental melting pot of downtown Los Angeles and discovered the Vietnamese at the Buddhist Center. Then, with the help of interpreters in three languages—French, Filipino, and Vietnamese—Sally told the men and women about the film. They were guaranteed the going wage of $47.50 a night.

The spokesman for the Vietnamese is a jolly, handsome man who could be in his early twenties but is actually just one birthday shy of forty. His English, while erratic, is understandable; he speaks it carefully, haltingly, as if he is constructing a beautiful mosaic out of sincerity and humility. Once he begins to talk, he tells more about himself than is necessary. He says he worked for the American military, and one can see him being exploited and oppressed by a corrupt foreign regime.

What did he do in Vietnam?

Beaming, he replies that he owned a restaurant, a steam bath, and a few other businesses, employing a total of eighty-two people. No longer does he seem so oppressed. He was a certified Vietnamese capitalist, and this conjures up images of Swiss bank accounts.

"But here I have nothing." Sympathy is again with him.

Would he go back?

"Only if the Americans come back, too."

His smile is formal, correct, and ultimately meaningless, a mask for all seasons. But whatever he was in Vietnam, he is a refugee in America, and he and his friends eat apart from the rest of the cast. Their assimilation into American life has hardly begun; they ignore the food offered at the tent and instead eat their own highly spiced dishes. Through interpreters, they do as they are told in front of the cameras, then quickly return to their women cooking food over the open fires, huddling beside them for warmth.

A few Filipinos are also used in the scene. One, very distinguished and erect, was dancing at a local ballroom when Sally discovered him. Another, who directs dock vehicle traffic in the movie, was a real-life cop in Manila until he was forced into political exile.

The next evening, at the same dock in the same frigid air, Jeff Bridges has his first big scene. The young scientist he plays has had access to information from Washington that there is something more than oil on Skull Island, and he is going to stow away on the *Petrox Explorer* to find out what it is. Getting aboard involves a difficult hand-over-hand climb up a mooring line from the dock to the ship. Ten feet below, the cold, murky water slaps against the gray hull. There is no safety net under the line, and Bridges has never practiced the stunt. One slip of the hand and he will plunge into the water.

Guillermin is ready for a take. Bridges, who has put on some weight but still has the build of an athlete, goes through the scene with complete dexterity. Starting his dash across the dock from a crouch, he rushes to the ship, his body bent low. Almost without a pause he grasps the mooring line and jumps over the edge of the dock, dangling in midair before beginning the climb up to the ship. Once there, he slips over the rail without being noticed by the *Petrox Explorer* crew.

The scene goes without a hitch. Bridges doesn't even appear winded as he walks down the gangplank to Guillermin, expecting to be asked to do another take. Everything went fine, Guillermin assures him. Only one take will be necessary.

Bridges goes back to a crate near the wire fence and sits down to resume the game of backgammon he has been playing with the script supervisor, Doris Grau. Bending over the board, he studies his next move with the concentration of an actor memorizing his lines. He is so intent on the game that he is unaware of the noise around him: gears meshing, Vietnamese extras chattering, equipment being dragged over the wooden planks.

The advance word on Bridges to the crew—especially from those who have worked with him—is good. He is said to be an unassuming pro, which is surprising, since he is so young. And he has a reputation for being friendly and considerate. He smiles a great deal, and his smile seems natural—not the defensive, mechanical grin so many actors hide behind.

Bridges' concentration on the game is broken when two boys, not quite teenagers, come up behind him to stare. Their parents have told them that he is a movie star and they should get his autograph. Sensing their presence, Bridges looks up and smiles. They ask him kid questions, about the games he still plays as an adult, and he answers politely. One boy boldly says he loved Bridges in a film he didn't even appear in, a fact that the other boy is quick to point out. Bridges eases him out of his embarrassment by listing titles of his other movies. The boys embrace each name, nodding their heads vigorously, saying they've seen every one. They are not being deliberately mendacious; they are simply trying to get out of an uncomfortable social situation, even if it means telling a few small lies. The boys are becoming adults.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

The Last Week in January, 1976

It is not the most spectacular way for an emerging star to be exposed to the reality of filmmaking. But there is Jessica Lange in slinky black dress, playing unconscious in a rubber raft, floating somewhere between San Pedro and Catalina, having been drenched with a bucket of cold water moments before the camera is turned on her.

She is miserably uncomfortable. Not only is she repeatedly soaked, but the scene is being done on the coldest day of what has otherwise been a warm, dry month. After each take she is wrapped in blankets and helped up the metal gangway to the ship, where she disappears into the shelter of a warm cabin. Guillermin administers the first wetting down, but he has no heart to do it again, and leaves the unpleasant job to his assistants.

In this scene the *Petrox Explorer* comes upon Dwan's lifeboat, and the women-starved men—jumping up and down, like the sailors singing "There is Nothing Like a Dame" in *South Pacific*—fall all over each other to be the first to rescue her.

The company will be at sea for more than a week, shooting the rescue scene and also the one of the *Petrox Explorer* entering the fog bank that surrounds Skull Island.



Jessica Lange, as Dwan, has just been rescued from a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean. *Petrox Explorer* crew members study her anxiously—and a little lustfully.

It is an impressive armada that sets out to sea from San Pedro each morning. There are seven big boats in all: the Navy research ship; a forty-foot boat for the camera crew; two thirty-five-foot support vessels, used primarily in shuttling personnel between ship and shore; and three other forty-foot boats carrying the fog-making machines especially designed for the film. The six machines, each costing $7,500, are basically Volkswagen engines on floating go-carts that can also pump water and create wind storms. Accompanying this expensive machinery each day is a cast and crew of one hundred and twenty.

When filming takes place in a Hollywood studio, the work week is five days. On location it is six days. But the first week of Kong ran seven days, with a second unit taking over on the weekend. Under the direction of William Kronick, a 1955 graduate of Columbia College, the second unit must get the master shot of the *Petrox*

Explorer approaching the fog bank, as well as the shot of the air drop of drums containing chloroform to sedate Kong. (After he is captured by the *Petrox Explorer* crew, the ape will be chloroformed for his trip to New York.)

A second-unit director must be the alter ego of the director, knowing how the latter would do the scene. Kronick is familiar with Guillermin's directorial style, having directed the second unit for him on *Bridge at Remagen,* a World War II adventure best remembered as the production that had to evacuate Czechoslovakia during the Russian invasion in 1968.

Kronick suspects that *King Kong* will be "the biggest film any of us has ever worked on." He sees film as theatrical expression in the old-fashioned sense of telling a good story through pictures. Yet he can intellectualize in an Ivy League way on the story values of Kong: "It's a great fairy tale, a sensual retelling of beauty and the beast. It also shows how humans differ from animals, yet can be very much like them. It is also about evolution. Is Kong a gross beast, or does he have human feelings for the girl? Which raises the issue of whether animals experience feelings that can relate or correspond to human feelings. Are we, as humans, no more than an extension of Kong? The story is really the reworking of Darwin's theory of evolution."

Kronick is certain the movie will be a smash hit at the box office, with the potential to overtake *Jaws* as the largest-grossing film of all time. "Kong is a fantastic beast," he says, "and audiences have more affinity for him than they do for Frankenstein or other screen monsters, such as a shark."

The weather holds for Kronick and his second unit. As the machines lay down the fog bank, the sea off Catalina is calm, almost without ripples. Kronick is ready to shoot the air drop of the big drums of chloroform that will be used to knock Kong out. Half an hour passes. No plane. Radio contact is made with the airport, and Kronick learns that the plane started out but then turned back because of engine trouble. As the

minutes tick by, the crew drinks more coffee and their grousing becomes louder. Time passes as slowly out here as it does ashore on a sound stage. Waiting is a fact of life on the movie set—it is expected—but abnormally long waits can become intolerable.

Now and then a man licks his forefinger and holds it up toward the sky, a primitive way of gauging the wind. Shades of an old Spencer Tracy sea movie . . . the least bit of wind and the artificial fog bank will be blown away. Everyone waits.

Harold Wellman, who was an assistant cameraman on the 1933 *King Kong* and is now a special-effects cameraman, reminisces about the original film. He had started in the business in 1929, moving to RKO in 1930. When the studio began shooting *King Kong,* the movie was only one of five in production at the time, and was not given much notice by the studio workers.

"All over the RKO lot jungles began to grow in one-quarter-inch scale, one-half-inch scale, one-inch scale, and full scale. There was a twenty-foot bust of Kong, and they had a full-sized hand with its fingers slightly bent to hold the girl, but it couldn't move like the one in this version.

"Equipment had to be built, some that had never before been used in making a motion picture. One was a thing we called 'armature,' which was links of metal hinged together so they could be turned in any direction. They resembled a human skeleton. They were then covered with a rubber-type plastic that could be shaped into the desired animal. The final skin put on was either simulated reptile or lizard.

"Animation equipment had to be built, including stop-motion motors and relays that could be adjusted to various speeds. Sometimes there would be three and four cameras used on the same shot. Also designed were projectors for front and rear miniature projection. And we had a sixteen-by-eighteen-foot screen made of ground glass, the largest ever built up to that time. Unfortunately, an electrician dropped a barn door through the screen about a week after it was installed. Luckily, just

about that time, the plastic-type screen we use today was developed.

"We were scheduled to have principal photography done in twenty-two days, so, as the production proceeded, there would be five to seven different scenes being photographed at the same time. Practically every shot involved miniatures, front or rear projection, matte painting, stereo projection, or a combination of all. Still, it took seven months for the picture to be put together.

"One of the biggest problems encountered was the hair on the miniature Kong. Step by step, frame by frame, the hair would move in a different direction due to the handling of the animators. After each move the hair had to be carefully combed back into position.

"Animation was fine for that time, but at best we could only get about ten feet of film a week. The big difference on this film is the use of a man in a monkey suit rather than animation. We could have done this picture cheaper with animation, but with the new processes we're using, I believe this picture will be far superior in every way."

Around the ship, the fog bank holds, if a little unsteadily. But the natural light is going. Soon it will be too dark to shoot. Radio contact is reestablished. The voice is almost sheepish, as if afraid of the obscenities that will be shouted at him when he tells them the bad news. The plane just won't work. A good shooting day has been lost. The boat is ordered back to port.

On Monday, Jessica resumes her on-the-job crash course in acting. She learns from her hair stylist, Jo McCarthy, that while she was drifting alone on the water, the camera crew had been keeping an eye on a shark circling her lifeboat. It is not the sort of news Jessica wants to hear before starting her second week in front of a movie camera.

In the course of her modeling career, Jessica has been used to looking toward the lens of a camera, to holding her face the way a photographer asks for a soft look or

a sexy look, to following abrupt instructions, with little time for creating any real emotion in her expression.

"Being a model made me aware of the camera," she says. "It taught me about angling my face to know which side is my best. In my case it's the left side."

Asked to make a comparison between being a professional model and a novice film actress, she says, "There is less money and longer hours in movies." It is a cheeky answer for one so new to the business. As if she is afraid she might have said something she shouldn't, she becomes serious again. "The energy output is much greater in film. I must be 'on' in front of the camera for longer periods of time, and in each take, I have to try to re-create a certain mood or emotion. As a model, I'd be 'on' in front of the camera for only an hour."

Her model's training came in handy for the interminable publicity stills—in tight shorts, curled languorously in the plaster model of Kong's hand, she turned her head sharply so that her blond hair (which was brown until De Laurentiis suggested she have it lightened) spilled sexily (*à la* Rita Hayworth) over her brow.

Jessica has already been subjected to her first studio publicity interview; the material from it will go into the press releases handed out about the film. Holed up in a room at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, she has answered frankly, almost innocently, the prying, highly personal questions; the PR men had wanted to know everything about her—her past career; her hobbies; her opinions on men, clothes, literature, art—anything that can be made marketable by the publicity mill that will grind around during her transformation from unknown young woman into movie star. . . .

The hotel room is small by the standards she will become accustomed to if she makes it in Hollywood. It is bigger than a linen closet but not quite a suite, and when the waiter arrives with a tray of drinks, he has to step over the legs of the publicity men to get to the table by the window.

Sipping a Scotch on the rocks, Jessica tells the story of her life in half an hour, a task she will become totally proficient at after her umpteenth interview. She gives her correct age—twenty-six—and admits that she has had no previous movie-acting experience. Most recently she was a fashion model for the Wilhelmina Agency in New York; her name is hardly a household word except perhaps to regular readers of fashion magazines. She is a native of Minnesota. "We moved so often, I lived in practically every small town in the state." She attended the University of Minnesota for two years and showed some proficiency in languages and literature, but wasn't particularly interested in disciplining her intellect according to a strict academic schedule. She left school and headed for New York, where she studied dance, and then moved on to Paris, where she continued these studies and also attended mime classes.

She has Middle American good looks, tempered by high cheekbones that give her an aristocratic mien. She is sensual without being overly voluptuous—in the tradition of Grace Kelly rather than Jayne Mansfield.

The phone interrupts her discourse. She picks up the receiver, pauses, then says something in French. She speaks fluently but with an American accent, which makes her conversation more understandable to a non-Frenchman who has had only high-school French. She is making plans to go house-hunting after the interview. Finally she replaces the telephone receiver, stretches her legs out on the bed, and continues with the facts and opinions—not in any rigid order, for her life is undergoing drastic change. She considers herself a romantic, preferring the literature of the nineteenth century (especially Stendhal and Flaubert), and the music of Brahms and Schubert. Her parents still live in Minneapolis, and she visited them over Christmas. But New York is now her home; she adores its pace and "madness."

As she talks, one becomes aware of her rather strange accent. It is neither American nor European, but a combination of New York, Paris, and Minneapolis. "People tell me I have a slight accent, but I

don't know where I picked it up. It probably comes from moving around so much in recent years."

She has always been interested in acting. Her favorite female stars are Bette Davis and Marlene Dietrich. One of the reasons she studied dancing was to get experience in moving properly in front of an audience. She did appear as a dancer on the Paris stage, and back in New York she studied acting under Warren Robertson.

Now, waiting for the next take, she talks, with considerable appreciation, about the willingness of her costars and director to give her advice. "I'm so lucky to have fallen into this production and to be surrounded by such wonderful people as John, Jeff, and Charles. John has been an incredible help, and Jeff and Chuck have been so supportive, giving me advice on how to place my body when my back is turned to the camera and then how to position myself when it's on me."

She has had no trouble learning lines, memorizing them the morning of the scene, reading them over until they become familiar. After the first few days on the set, she discovered that the actors had the right to alter their lines, to make them more comfortable if they found them irritating to say. She began in earnest to prune away what she did not like without tampering with the character of Dwan.

"In some ways she's similar to me," Jessica says. "She has qualities that are easy for me to do." Without specifying those she shares with Dwan, Jessica says the heroine is "unselfish, impulsive, adventuresome, a free spirit who is totally uninhibited. She may seem a bit kooky because she's terribly honest. But I'm not doing her as a kook." She thinks Marilyn Monroe could have played the role beautifully. "She was a very underrated actress."

Off camera, Jessica is a young, pretty woman alone in a city she would not choose to live in if she weren't making a movie. New York and Paris are her homes, the places where she feels in harmony with her environment. In Paris she usually stayed up half the night, unre-

strained by the early working hours of an actress. French photographers started later in the day and worked with less discipline than their counterparts in New York, where the standards and competition seemed so much higher.

"I lived a quiet life in New York," she says. "I had to keep it together there."

Jessica does not like to go into details about her marital status. She prefers the single life but is still legally attached to a photographer in New York, and shares an apartment with him when she is there.

"I find myself always being attracted to Latins. I guess it's because I dated so many Frenchmen. They seem more at ease with their masculinity than the Americans. And they're not so possessive in their dealings with women. Unfortunately, I've never ended up with a rich man. I always get the struggling artist."

Jessica's work hours in Los Angeles hardly allow her an active social life. She needs eight hours of sleep a night, and she must be on the set early, though not quite so early as she would have to be if she were going to wear a lot of makeup or an elaborate wardrobe in the film. She really needs very little time to get ready for her scenes. Her clothing—skimpy shorts, shirts knotted over her midriff, a sacrificial gown of feathers and straw that reveals all of her splendid back—is not hard to get into. And her hair in the film is to be natural and tousled.

Jessica has rented a ranch house in Brentwood, not far from the ocean. The house could just as easily be in suburban Connecticut if it weren't for the grass, which looks plastic and too neat, as if studio workers have just nailed down a swath of artificial turf. Nothing in the decor of the house reflects her free spirit, and she moves from room to room without leaving any personal imprint. Only the albums of Schubert and Brahms scattered on the living-room rug and the few books on the coffee table betray her presence in the house.

Her neighbors know that she is appearing in a movie, and a few have started dropping by to offer her their unsolicited assistance in getting settled. She is too polite to start locking the door. Whenever she can, she rides her bicycle to the beach to stare at the sea.

"Dino has me under contract for seven years," she says. "I guess I'd better start liking Los Angeles."

THE SOLUTION

January 28, 1976

There has been no real warning that this will be the day of liberation from doubt about the continued existence of the production. Throughout the month, there has been a persistent rumor that the *King Kong* legal conflict is moving toward a favorable conclusion. But on a movie set, rumors, true and false, are rampant —the major source of entertainment between takes.

The legal tangles date back many months; they involve the Paramount-De Laurentiis *King Kong* and Universal Studios' plans for its version of the monster film.

There were potential millions in the remake of the classic monster story. But it was doubtful that the market could sustain two new versions; by the time the advertising posters were circulating, the corporate powerhouses were battling in court to secure the right to remake *King Kong*.

When Dino De Laurentiis and Paramount took out newspaper ads announcing that he had secured the licensing rights from RKO and was moving ahead with his own production, Universal was goaded into action. In early June of 1975, the studio sued him for twenty-five million dollars, alleging that RKO, which had made the 1933 Kong, had reneged on a deal to give Universal the rights to produce and distribute the remake.

Liking nothing better than an industry fight, Holly-

wood feasted on newspaper headlines pitting Universal against the upstart De Laurentiis. The legal war simmered through the summer into early fall, each side periodically sending out press releases announcing its intention to go on with its own production. By November, Universal had redesigned its legal strategy and come up with a new tack. Filing another suit, Universal claimed in federal district court that the story of King Kong was in the public domain and that RKO had had no legal right to sell the story, for it was not protected by copyright.

Answering the suit in the November 5 issue of the *Los Angeles Times,* De Laurentiis said, "I've made hundreds and hundreds of pictures. And my experience is, if there's any doubt, pay the money. If we bought rights we didn't need to buy, that's a waste of money. But I'm a private company. I prefer the benefit of the doubt. I don't want to risk making a picture for twelve million dollars and then find suits from RKO."

The legal issues surrounding the copyright to Kong are as puzzling as a maze in a formal British garden. Universal contended that in 1932, about the time RKO made *King Kong,* Grosset & Dunlap published the novel *King Kong,* by Delos W. Lovelace, based in turn on a screen story by Edgar Wallace and Merian C. Cooper. Arguing now that the novel and the 1933 Kong movie script were separate works based on the Wallace-Cooper original, Universal stated that De Laurentiis might own the rights to the old film itself, but that the *King Kong* story had been in the public domain ever since the copyright lapsed in 1960.

Next to get into the legal maneuvering was RKO, which filed a counterclaim in federal district court, alleging that Universal's *King Kong* would be an infringement on the RKO copyright, and asking for an injunction against Universal's continuing with "announcements, representations, and statements" about its proposed film. RKO also asked for more than five million dollars in infringement damages.

Everyone had been waiting for De Laurentiis' move.

It came in December, when he filed his own suit asking Universal for ninety million dollars in damages caused by "copyright infringement" and "unfair competition." The producer sought an injunction against Universal to prevent it from interfering with his production. Ultimately De Laurentiis and Universal would resolve their differences but the suits between Universal and RKO would continue.

The *King Kong* office staff begins gathering in the production rooms of the Lions Building on the Metro lot before 8 A.M. The image of Hollywood as a wild night-life town is totally alien to those in the movie industry who must be at the studio very early each morning, five days a week and often on weekends.

The staff are usually at their desks before Dino De Laurentiis' invariably punctual entrance at 8 A.M. He arrives alone in his chauffeur-driven limousine, comes in through the studio's narrow main entrance, and walks briskly up the peeling, gray-metal stairs. His head down, lost in the complexities of his worldwide operations, he does not seem to notice the people who glide past him in the corridor.

His office is functional, wearing well the impersonal air of temporary quarters. The furniture has been there through a thousand productions and will remain long after *King Kong* is completed. De Laurentiis' studio secretary, an attractive and efficient young woman named Tara Cole, has already noted the calls he must make to New York and Europe. With the time difference, business calls from Hollywood to the East Coast can be made at dawn.

When he finishes telephoning, there are often production meetings with the heads of the various departments. Usually gathering at these sessions are Grossberg; Carr; Rambaldi; Chiari; Christian Ferry, who shares with Federico De Laurentiis the title of executive producer; Bob Kocourek, the young auditor; and Fred Sidewater, De Laurentiis' most trusted and influential lieutenant. New to the group is Dale Hennesy, the bril-

liant production designer who received an Academy Award for his sets depicting the interior of a human body in *Fantastic Voyage*. He has been brought in because there is too much work for Chiari.

Hennesy has the advantage of having worked recently at Metro on *Logan's Run;* he knows the temperament and work habits of the studio's construction crews. He has brought Gary Martin with him to supervise the construction of the sets he designs. Martin is a heavyset young man with an unflappable personality, well suited for the high-pressure conditions on *King Kong,* where the demand for finished sets overruns the ability to *get* them finished.

At these meetings, the storyboards are consulted, shooting schedules are revised, people are hired and fired. Sitting at his desk, sometimes with his shoeless feet on top, De Laurentiis listens to every recommendation from his staff—and then makes his own decisions, most often after the men have left and he has reviewed his options with Sidewater. De Laurentiis serves as the active line producer on *King Kong,* something he has not done since his European productions. He makes all the major decisions, from budget costs to the color of Dwan's gown in the New York sequence. It is his picture—eventually his own money will be invested in it —and he is the boss, accepting full responsibility for his decisions. The men under him simply make recommendations—they do *not* make final judgments—and carry out orders. (Ultimately this is a safer, if a less exalted, position in the production hierarchy. If the staff are criticized, it is for how they perform their duties, not for what they establish as policy.)

In dealing with De Laurentiis, his staff is assured of one thing: when De Laurentiis has decided what to do, he will follow through with it. He often imposes seemingly unbeatable deadlines for construction workers and shooting crews, but the top people know that De Laurentiis will back them up when they say that X *has* to be done.

De Laurentiis' top-level meetings are only part of the bureaucratic life going on in the second-floor complex of offices in the Lions Building. The first office a visitor sees on entering the complex is Grossberg's. He has decorated the walls with posters, both American and foreign, magazine covers, newspaper articles, and photographs—all heralding De Laurentiis' *King Kong* remake. Interest in this film does not have to be stimulated or bought; it is self-perpetuating, there to be mined and directed by the publicists. Before the production is over, it will have become one of the most publicized in Hollywood memory.

In this office Grossberg, Carr, and the other department heads meet after the Big Meeting with De Laurentiis, to see how they can best carry out the producer's orders. It would be a chaotic office if it were not for Lori Imbler, Grossberg's secretary, who not only does the paperwork for the production but answers the telephones and takes down the complaints of people in the cast and crew who devoutly believe that they are being neglected, cheated, and/or abused. She must filter the telephone calls—some go to Grossberg, others to Carr, the rest to the various shops around the studio. There are probably other secretaries in Hollywood as good as Lori, but her competence is surprising because she is so young and because she has the rare and invaluable ability to get rid of people—who think as they are being ushered out the door how nice she is. She is also very attractive, which is a bonus for those who have to wait in the office to talk with Grossberg.

After a few minutes with Grossberg it becomes clear that his job is to keep the costs down. He gets involved in the procedural issues of cost cutting, working from advice given him by Kocourek, who always has the actual budget figures in hand. Grossberg is smart enough not to overstep the bounds of the budget authorized by his bosses; he operates on the expectation of frugality, cutting back perhaps even a bit more than is expected. His enemies call him cheap, but he has

survived in an industry that is not always kind to executives at his level.

Carr occupies the adjoining office. His secretary, Charlotte Dreiman, is also young and attractive. But unlike Lori, she is an authentic movie buff; she spends her few free hours in the darkness of movie houses. Charlotte prepares the daily bible for the movie company: it is the call sheet, which is issued late in the afternoon to notify cast and crew of what scene is to be shot the next day, who is to work, and at what time. On *King Kong* the call sheet is frequently more fiction than fact, since the shooting schedule is revised hourly; crews push equipment from one sound stage to another on a moment's notice. Like Lori, Charlotte seems to become more and more tranquil as the chaos increases around her. It is as if she has adopted the almost unreal serenity of Carr, who displays a stoic calmness in times of greatest crisis.

Working out of this office are three young men who go by the title of production assistant; they are "go-fers" and also perform a variety of other jobs. They are Scott Thaler, Jeffrey Chernov, and Michael Winter, all from New York. They came west to get into the film industry—not to be actors, but to find undefined positions through which they can get a chance to move nearer the top of the production ladder by the time they are thirty years old. Jeffrey talks seriously about going back east—but then so does almost everyone in Hollywood when he or she first comes out from New York and discovers how dull life is in movieland compared to the constant action of New York.

The next office is shared by Christian Ferry and Federico De Laurentiis, and—trilingual, with French, English, and Italian spoken—it is the most European office outside of Dino's own. Ferry, the production troubleshooter and diplomat, is more often on the studio sets (or en route on a bicycle that seems much too small for him) than in the office. A veteran in the industry, he is experienced in dealing with the ego skirmishes that invariably plague movie productions. His

French accent and good humor make him an excellent choice for the role of company mediator between De Laurentiis and Guillermin—between the front office and the front line.

Federico is friendly and well-mannered, with the polish of one subjected to the best finishing schools abroad. His English, learned in Europe, is clear and spoken slowly. It is much improved since he first came to the United States in the summer of 1974 to work as a lowly production assistant on *Mandingo*. What he learned there he practices on *King Kong*—hard work, sometimes physical work, the thing that gets sets constructed, pages written, lights arranged, costumes sewn, and cables spliced—the thing that gets pictures made.

Few in the company believe that at this stage of his film career Federico makes important decisions. But few doubt that he is his father's heir apparent. And Federico is not just waiting in the wings; he wants to learn, and he sits in on the production conferences. On the set he continuously asks questions to keep himself informed about all aspects of the shooting. There are some who have had to fight hard for every step they have taken up the ladder to success in the industry; they are jealous of Federico's sudden emergence near the top. And some think he should take some time off to attend college, meet young Americans his age, and live the kind of life available to the rich of Southern California before getting too involved in the process of filmmaking. He will eventually do what he thinks his father wants of him.

In a corner office next to Ferry's and Federico's is Guillermin. Of course, the director is rarely in it—only at lunchtime, when he eats from a tray brought from the commissary by his loyal secretary, Beth Voiku. She is hardly ever in the office, either, preferring to be on the set with her boss, ready to type for him there. At this point in the filming, Guillermin is as much an enigma to her as he is to the crew. They recognize, though, that his emotional outbursts, brief and intense, are not directed against them personally but against the

intolerable, ever-increasing pressures to get the film done, cut, and available for the Christmas release.

Next to De Laurentiis' office is Fred Sidewater's. Referred to in a national magazine article as "the part-American Indian-Jew who speaks fluent Italian," Sidewater is dark, handsome, and reserved. He is executive vice-president of the De Laurentiis organization, the man who sees De Laurentiis first and last, the one to see if you want to get to De Laurentiis. He is so close to De Laurentiis, in fact, that he seems to be able to read the producer's mind, acting before being told what to do. Sidewater is relentlessly devoted to his boss, willing to surrender his free time, to be ready on a moment's notice.

Around the corner from Sidewater's office is the auditor's office run by Kocourek and his assistant, Meryle Selinger. The plasma of a movie production is cash, and Kocourek is the historian of its flow. Kocourek, a native of upstate New York and a graduate of Fordham, possesses a brilliant mind for statistics, and he has been the auditor for a number of De Laurentiis films, including *Mandingo* and *Buffalo Bill.* De Laurentiis' willingness to bring him into the decision-making processes of production inspired Kocourek to give up his New York apartment and move permanently to Hollywood.

On *King Kong,* Kocourek also developed his latent organizational talent. If it had been made in a studio, a picture this size would have had its own payroll department and computers to do the work that was swamping Kocourek's small staff. Soon it became impossible for him and Meryle to manage on their own, and he had to create an auditing department almost overnight, bringing in a three-woman payroll department headed by Thelma Norris. Thelma is a World War II Army veteran, one of those totally competent behind-the-scenes workers who keep the industry functioning. Before *King Kong* is finished, this department will have issued approximately fifteen thousand weekly paychecks.

On this day everyone in the production office is aware of the item that appeared in *Daily Variety* a few days earlier, repeating a rumor that Universal is about to surrender to De Laurentiis over *King Kong*. De Laurentiis is riding hot, and almost everyone working for him has believed all along that he will emerge victorious. And this very afternoon, De Laurentiis' Hollywood muscle is confirmed by the terms of Universal's surrender. Barry Diller, Dino De Laurentiis, and Sid Sheinberg, president and chief operating officer of MCA (the parent company of Universal), jointly issue a press release containing these terms. The language is formal, the meaning quite clear:

> Basic terms of the agreement include the provisions that the two producing companies will each withdraw the legal actions filed against each other, in addition to providing the De Laurentiis film, *King Kong,* which will be distributed throughout the United States and Canada by Paramount Pictures Corporation, with a clear and unencumbered way to the world theatrical market. . . .

At the end of the very long paragraph is the one newsworthy fact: "It is contemplated that Universal will not release its King Kong film earlier than eighteen months following the De Laurentiis motion picture." Translation: unless Dino's film is such a disaster that the public stays away from it, Universal is not about to make its version. The eighteen-month time period is a face-saver for Universal.

De Laurentiis is magnanimous in victory. A separate release quotes him as saying, "I am very pleased and I would like to thank MCA's Lew Wasserman and Sid Sheinberg for their understanding and generosity in making such accommodations possible."

Nothing is said of what becomes generally known: that in return for this favorable resolution to the dispute, De Laurentiis has agreed to give Universal a percentage of the profits from his *King Kong*. The exact

amount has never been revealed, but everyone has his own educated guess.

Sheinberg also issues a separate statement:

> Our agreement permits Mr. De Laurentiis to make the best possible film and permits Universal to select the best possible approaches to its *King Kong* venture. Universal intends to produce and release a *King Kong* film under optimum production and distribution conditions, subsequent to the De Laurentiis film release. Universal Pictures' legal actions against RKO General, Inc., will continue and will be vigorously pursued.

In the same release, Diller states, "I am extremely gratified that an agreement has been reached. *King Kong* has already created a phenomenal impact on the public, and we believe our Christmas release will be one of the most exciting and original motion picture events of all time."

In the trades the next day, the settlement story leads *The Hollywood Reporter* but is midway down the first page of *Daily Variety,* which can gloat journalistically because it broke the general outline of the story several days earlier. Neither newspaper asks the big question: what did Dino give up financially to achieve this major victory over the established studio?

A few weeks later *New York* and *New West* magazines run an article on the great *King Kong* war. There is a cartoon of Wasserman and De Laurentiis in ape skins, Wasserman clinging to the Empire State Building and De Laurentiis astride the twin towers of the World Trade Center, holding an attacking jet in one hand and a banana in the other. From his greater height, De Laurentiis can be assumed to be the winner. The caption to the drawing is a model of dubious taste: "Towering egos: Lew Wasserman, of MCA/Universal, is not used to being outmoguled. But that is exactly what the little ape with the banana, Dino De Laurentiis, seems to have pulled off."

SLOWDOWN, THEN SHUTDOWN

The First Week in February, 1976

De Laurentiis may have won a Pyrrhic victory.

The second unit is disbanded. It has nothing to do now that the footage of the *Petrox Explorer* at sea is completed.

The company has been in the studio for a week shooting interior sets of the ship's cabin and a tropical bar that will hardly show on screen. A languor has overtaken almost everyone. Why rush when there are no more sets ready for shooting? The production staff is considering pushing up the Hawaiian expedition.

"If we keep rushing ahead at this pace," a crew member kids, "we'll have to stop shooting."

Could Universal be laughing up its corporate sleeve over the doldrums in which De Laurentiis' Kong is adrift? There are sets enough for only one more week of shooting in the studio. Hawaii could be a welcome change from the dry gloom of a Hollywood winter, but February is the wettest month in America's island paradise. There are reports from Brian Frankish in Kauai that strong wave action, normal for this time of year, has washed away a section of the beach on the north coast that was to be used in the filming. He sends a distressing photograph to confirm the disappearance. As things stand now, the company will have to delay its departure for Hawaii until March, when the weather will be better.

Since neither the monster nor its mechanical hand is expected to be ready for at least another month or two, De Laurentiis decides to change the location of the Wall set from Bell Ranch, at the far end of the San Fernando Valley, to Lot 2 at Metro. In preparation for the trip to Bell Ranch, a roadbed has been cleared at enormous cost; the fact that this expense was unnecessary is just one of those unfortunate things that have to be borne when an extravagant film is not ready to be in production and has to keep juggling its shooting schedules.

De Laurentiis is in firm control of almost every major phase of the production. "This film is too difficult, too expensive," he says. "I know problems come up every day about the size of the monster, its face! The star of this picture is Kong, and then the story. I worry about everything in my pictures. There can be no surprises. Decisions must be made every day. Fast decisions—and I don't trust those of too many people."

The frighteningly high—and still rising—costs of production now have De Laurentiis reestimating the total budget for his movie. He acknowledges it will probably be twenty million or more. But somehow, being De Laurentiis, he says it without making his listeners shudder in remembrance of such big-budget pictures as *Star, Darling Lil,* and *Paint Your Wagon,* which lost unbelievable amounts of money. The rule of thumb in money-conscious Hollywood is that a picture must take in about two and a half times its original cost to break even.

De Laurentiis knows that starting Kong too early has placed a financial hardship on his picture. "It cost me four million to five million to start before we were ready," he says.

Is this his most expensive film? An emphatic no is his reply. *"War and Peace,* made in 1955 for six million, today would cost me well over twenty million dollars."

For many in the second unit, *King Kong* is over. They have been notified that their services are no longer

needed, at least at this time. Kronick will be retained. Those laid off are not expected to wait around to be rehired. Before starting to look for a new job, most will pay yet another visit to the unemployment line, that social leveler in the movie industry.

February 9, 1976

Downtown Los Angeles could be any city where the real-estate operators have been allowed to take over, tear down every building with any architectural flair, and destroy all sense of history. Tomorrow begins with today's jackhammer and drill. Towering above the small Chinatown, the Japanese district, and the Mexican street that give this area of the city its only ethnic flavor are the gleaming, monotonously uniform skyscrapers.

But amid the modern chrome-and-glass jungle there still stands one lovely landmark: the Biltmore Hotel, a place for presidents and shahs, millionaires and stars. With its high-domed corridors, richly carpeted hallways, and stately arcades of shops, it is a building worthy of the days when style and comfort were important to American travelers.

An upper-floor suite has been taken over by the company for a New York scene in which Dwan prepares to go to Shea Stadium, where Kong will be presented to the public. Finding the suite is easy; the trail of light cables, snaking down the corridor, marks the way. Inside, the furniture has been rearranged and two thousand dollars' worth of fresh flowers have been placed in vases on the piano and tables. But the only people here are the clever, funny set decorator, John Franco, and his staff. They are wondering what to do with the flowers, which will wilt before they are ever photographed. At the last minute the schedule has had to be juggled and this scene canceled because Jeff Bridges has the flu—as do first assistant director Kurt Neumann and second assistant director Nate Haggard. Predawn telephone calls have redirected most of the

crew from the crowded downtown freeways to the studio. The flowers are finally distributed to the women in the Kong production staff—lending the offices an appropriately funereal air.

In the studio Guillermin is redoing the scene where Dwan, still unconscious after being rescued from the sea, is brought to the captain's cabin. When she comes to, she begins telling Bridges and Grodin how she was saved from the sea explosion. She is in closeup most of the time, and her dialogue goes on for pages of script. It would be a difficult scene for even the most experienced actress, since the dialogue gets somewhat cute —it is comic without being subtle.

Grodin has come in early to work with Jessica. He is off camera in this part of the scene, and the lines *could* have been fed to her by someone less expensive. The scene will be done in an excruciatingly long take. Guillermin is patient, doing more takes than are ordinarily necessary. It is unfair to Jessica that this scene comes so early in the shooting, before she has had sufficient practice.

Terry Carr has been called onto the stage to take Neumann's place as first assistant director, a job he is used to performing. Each assistant has his way of relaying the director's wishes. Some bellow. Others plead. Kurt Neumann, of German descent, barks "Quiet on the set!" in a way that makes people drop whatever they are doing. Terry's approach is far milder. "Shh," he says softly, somehow making it sound polite.

Suddenly, from inside the confining ship's-cabin set, Guillermin shouts, "I am getting engulfed!" Someone has accidentally pushed against him.

The crew not directly involved in the shooting step back into the safe, shadowy gloom of the sound stage.

Moments later there is another outburst by Guillermin. He has been rehearsing the scene with Jessica, kneeling by the camera, getting just the right perspective of her face in closeup. Thinking the director wants absolute quiet, Carr has said, "Shh!" This distracts Guiller-

min, who reacts as if the small sound were a stampede. "Everyone can move and talk until we put on the damn red light," he says.

The rehearsal continues without Grodin, who steps away from the jumble of bodies and lights hovering over the girl. He has recently finished a season on Broadway in the smash-hit comedy *Same Time Next Year* while also starring with Marlo Thomas in the film version of *Thieves,* which he directed on Broadway. He likes theater work but thinks it can grow stale quickly.

"You just can't be any good after six months playing the same part night after night," he explains. "I don't see how the great stage actors and actresses did it, playing the same role season after season, finishing it on Broadway, then taking it on the road. My desire for sanity forced me to get out of the play after the first half year."

He is no stage snob. In fact, he says, "There is as much junk being done on the stage as there is in film and television."

Visiting Los Angeles for pleasure after months in New York, he was offered *King Kong.* On one reading of the script he agreed to do it.

"It's a totally different part from *Thieves* and *Same Time Next Year.* In those I was a romantic leading man." Grodin's role in Kong could be interpreted as that of the villain, since he represents an oil company that is exploiting the animal and mineral resources of the world. But really, Grodin feels, "Wilson is a single-minded, kind of funny company man who finds himself in a very comic situation: a city man going to the jungle looking for oil and finding an ape. No actor wants to play the antagonist in a movie, but I don't think Wilson is. It's not hard to identify with Wilson. It's not reasonable to expect that when he stumbles onto Kong, he wouldn't see the exploitation value in him. You'd have to be Albert Schweitzer not to have taken Kong away from his island and brought him to New York. People can identify with Wilson and what he

does to Kong. After all, exploitation is the dominant posture of mankind today."

Grodin believes that this version of Kong has deeper social implications than the original, without diminishing its entertainment values.

"It is a wonderful, theatrical presentation about the rape of the environment. Kong is really the pure, natural animal when he is in his jungle habitat. His fate is to be exploited by men who put him in bondage and carry him off to a hostile environment.

"If you had gone out to make a film about how man has exploited and polluted his streams and atmosphere, and you did it in a documentary style, no one would come out to see the film. But in doing *King Kong,* I realized, I had a chance to work in a film with the potential of being seen by more people than any other film in the history of the business, and it could say something."

Grodin is older than he looks, amused by things happening around him, and serious about himself and his acting craft.

"I've never felt like giving up acting for something else," he says. "I started acting at eighteen, and I've been doing it for twenty-three years. I never thought it would be easy. I expected to live in cold-water flats and be rejected. But how hard can our life be in show business? It's a relatively easy life. I'm almost never depressed or sad unless there's been a death in the family or of someone close to me. It's like being in heaven compared with the conditions that most of the rest of the world live under."

He has a liberal social consciousness nurtured by reading of biographies and histories. At the base of his social commitment is an absence of any profound personal desire to become rich; he claims that money has never been a consideration in his decisions.

After his success in *The Heartbreak Kid,* he turned down pictures because he refused to be typecast as the ambitious social climber. He simply won't be in a movie unless he thinks people will come to it and like it.

He is not needed any longer on the set; his basic humor reasserts itself as he prepares to depart. No, he says, he doesn't go to the daily rushes of the scenes shot the previous day. Sure, he is curious about how he looks on the screen. "But I don't want to see if I'm being upstaged by a monkey."

The reshooting of the cabin scene is finished by mid-afternoon, and the company is dismissed for the day.

Bridges' illness has turned out to be somewhat more serious than was at first believed. He is placed under a doctor's care and ordered to stay in bed. The company shuts down filming until February 17, the Tuesday after the long Washington's Birthday weekend. During this period of inactivity the crew reports each day to the studio, lingers at the office to chat and guess when the trip to Hawaii will take place. The company begins to collect on its insurance policy—days lost because of a star's illness are covered.

About the only good news during the shutdown is that at last a supertanker has been found for the scenes in which Kong is taken to New York. De Laurentiis has been looking for such a ship for months. She is the *Susanne Onstad,* owned by the Onstad Shipping Company of Oslo. Recently built, she has been in service carrying oil from the Middle East to America's West Coast for only six months. It will cost $120,000 to rent her for the movie shooting.

Once she unloads the fuel in San Francisco, the ship will sail back out to sea. There she must be defumed, to reduce the risk of an explosion when the electrical movie equipment is brought aboard. Since she is much too big to be maneuvered into the channel of San Pedro and must in any event stay within a prescribed zone because of environmental considerations, she will remain at sea. The crew and cast will be taken out to her by launch.

With nothing to shoot in the studio, the company puts in several nights at Zuma Beach, just north of Malibu, filming scenes of the *Petrox Explorer* crew com-



A small party of *Petrox Explorer* people, with Jessica Lange (Dwan) and Jeff Bridges (Prescott), comes ashore at Skull Island.

ing ashore on Skull Island. Tents are set up on the beach, but the tides are not taken into account. After the first few waves, the cast and crew beat a hasty retreat up the beach. Nature does seem to be conspiring against the production.

Returning from the last night of shooting at Zuma Beach, the company is told to be prepared to go to Kauai over the weekend of February 15 and to stay for four or five days. At one point in the planning, it was estimated that the Hawaiian shooting would take more than a month. The shorter trip was quite a disappointment for those expecting sunny days on a Hawaiian beach.

Sal Mineo is dead.

Some of the *King Kong* crew knew Mineo from previous movie work; others just feel depressed by the mindless violence surrounding his killing.

It can happen to anyone as suddenly as it did to him, in the underground garage of his apartment building in West Hollywood, on the night after rehearsing for the opening of a play in which he hoped to start a comeback on a career that had faded after his early fame as a juvenile in *Rebel Without a Cause.*

Movie stars are not expected to die, particularly those who were child stars and are still only in their thirties. Movie magazines have never conditioned their readers for the heavier realities of life.

The section of West Hollywood off Sunset Boulevard where the crime took place has a heavy concentration of male homosexuals who nightly yank their dogs out of the house for the stylized parade up the hill toward the action. The Strip draws on drug addicts for its night people, and the addicts have a habit of burglarizing neighborhood apartments for objects that can be sold quickly by fences. The Los Angeles police say this section has one of the highest crime rates in the city.

Mineo was stabbed to death by an assailant unknown to police. A tenant in Mineo's building heard a man

cry out. He rushed to the garage and found the actor dying, unable to speak, blood on his chest. The name of his murderer (if he was known to Mineo, as some people maintain) went with him.

A junkie is suspected. Later, police announce they are looking for a young white male with long blond hair who was seen fleeing from the area about the time of the crime. The description is vague enough to apply to any number of young men along Sunset and Santa Monica Boulevards, languishing against light poles waiting for rides from attractive strangers.

A young woman who was a long-time friend of Mineo's and had dinner with him earlier that evening goes voluntarily to police headquarters after she hears the report at about midnight. She wants to tell what she knows of his activities that day—at least, to tell what he *told* her he did up till the time he left the restaurant to return to the Westwood Playhouse to resume rehearsals.

While she's in the detective's office, a cop in the reception room at the front of the building routinely handles the telephone inquiries about the actor's death. He has seen other crimes; he can only respond professionally, any emotion concealed by the monotone voice. Yes, there has been a murder. Mineo is dead.

A friend has accompanied the young woman to the police station. He waits in the reception room, sitting on a wooden bench. Next to him is a girl, perhaps in her late twenties, nervously pulling loose strings on her sweater. She holds her face sternly, in an unnatural pose, so that when she speaks her face becomes prematurely lined. She offers the man a piece of chewing gum. The wrapper is wet from sweat. He declines the offer and resumes staring at the street outside the door.

It could have been interpreted as a social rebuff, but she is too desperate to accept it, and she begins her story with haste, not wanting it disturbed until it is over.

She was driving down Hollywood Boulevard by herself, late at night, and had stopped for a traffic light. A car with two young handsome men pulled up alongside

of her. The one nearest the window then exposed himself.

The unwilling listener slides further down the worn bench.

He was so nice looking, she says. Why did he have to do that?

There is no answer for those who must use the local police headquarters to ease the loneliness of a long night.

It happens to me all the time, she says. Just the other night I had to come here to report another handsome young man doing the same thing as I was driving past him on Hollywood Boulevard.

When the stranger does not respond, she gets up and walks to the desk, repeating her story to the officer in charge. He does not look up. Though he has heard the story before he takes it down dutifully, becoming an official record of what is happening—real or imaginary —that night in Los Angeles.

We will do our best to find him, the policeman says to her, and she releases a smile that erases the lines. She is again a young girl.

Here, take it, she says to the stranger, now at the end of the bench. This time he claims the damp wrapper from her, and when she turns to go to the other end of the bench he drops it in the waste basket.

Outside, a police siren rises in the night, an alarm for a city under siege.

No one in the headquarters reception room speaks to anyone else.

Los Angeles is a lonely city. But then, any city is lonely in the middle of the night when the only sound is a piercing wail and someone is dead.

HAWAII, ALOHA

February 17—March 10, 1976

On the hill overlooking the majestic northern coastline of Kauai, where the movie *South Pacific* was filmed, there now stands a Club Mediterranee. The poolside swimmers look up from their books and newspapers to observe, high above them, a blue portable toilet suspended from a helicopter being lifted toward the awesome splendor of the Na Pali coast.

"We even have colored toilet paper in it," says Doris Grau, the Kong script supervisor.

The toilet's destination is an uninhabited valley miles from the spot where the only road on this part of the coast ends, just beyond Hanalei Bay. Inaccessible except by helicopter, boat, or foot—and only the most intrepid hiker would attempt the walk—the valley will serve as the latest location for *King Kong*. It is a wild place, its steep walls covered with dusty, faded foliage hanging from crooked, low-lying branches. A stream cuts through the valley, and on the bank of the stream, where it bends eastward after passing through a narrow opening in the high walls, the *King Kong* company has set up camp for the day's shooting.

At dawn the first helicopter lifts off from a makeshift heliport just behind the Club Mediterranee and a mile from the unfinished resort where the company is quartered. The chopper will take the first essential

crew and pieces of equipment to the valley. Within an hour and a half, four helicopters have delivered fifty crew and cast and more than two tons of equipment, from cameras and props to sound boom and boxed lunches.

Logistically it is an impressive maneuver, though it is an obvious annoyance to the vacationers at the Club Mediterranee who want to sleep beyond the first light of dawn.

The copter pilots have been up since 5 A.M., when it was still dark and the coast was just a humpbacked outline against the blue-black night. At that hour the sound of a dog barking or a car door being slammed travels for miles, for the only sound in the night is the steady, reassuring roar of the surf as it gathers force, crests, and descends in a roll over the beach.

The heliport consists of a few tents and trucks that form a circle around a square of ground rubbed naked by the copter tires. The pilots are met by company production assistants, who are already loading cases into the copters. Coffee, black and hot, is downed from styrofoam cups. The conversations are terse, somewhat gruff. A few of the crew have hangovers, and their pain and guilt could better be endured in private. Everyone is suffering from lack of sleep; systems have not adjusted to the time change.

The pilots stand apart from the movie workers, not yet sure of them. The crew represent all that caused them to flee the mainland: an urban, crowded America. Here, in the open sky over these still valleys and in the thundering surf that crashes against the Na Pali cliffs, they have found challenge and excitement—an alternative to nine-to-five drudgery, crowded freeways, and urban decay. There is adventure in flying their own copters—quite inadequate by the standards of the military—over this savage terrain, pitting their technical skills against the sudden changes of wind currents that make each lift-off so potentially hazardous. Some of the small copters used in the airlift seem to be held together by rubber bands and chewing gum. But all

receive tender care from their pilots, who go over them thoroughly, inspecting every seam and bolt, listening for any unusual sounds that could mean desperate trouble in the air.

Radio contact must be maintained with the copters in flight and with the company in the valley. A relay station—that is, a man with a walkie-talkie—is set up on either the beach or a cliff, depending on where the day's location is. From there, messages are forwarded as they travel between the shooting crew and the company headquarters at the Hanalei Beach and Racquet Club, in Princeville.

For the relay man the beach location near the road's end is ideal. It affords a great view not only of the blue waves but of a nearby nudist colony, where young, stoned, mainland dropouts have set up a makeshift village of tents and shacks in the wooded area above the beach. As the relay man directs the flight patterns of the copters and reports messages from base to valley, pretty, bronzed nude women walk past him, generally smiling in a friendly, mindless way, though not really suggesting anything by it. Kneeling beside the radio, his lips pressed against the speaker, his eyes are naturally on a level with the area around the women's navels.

The location at the top of the cliff is less interesting. In late afternoon, clouds descend swiftly on this part of the Kauai coast, locking it in an impenetrable fog. Copters are automatically grounded in this pea-soup weather. As the clouds begin their predictable descent to the sea, the voice of the relay man, waiting for his pick-up, becomes somewhat frantic. If a copter loses the race with the fog, he will have to spend the night alone on the cliff without food or bedding. Fortunately, the copters never lose.

Hawaii's dubious winter weather was explained to the picture's scouting team when it arrived there in the fall of 1975. Another Paramount film, Ernest Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream,* was being shot there at the time, and producer Irwin Allen's representatives were

looking for locations for a proposed film about a volcano erupting. The residents of Kauai thought they'd never had it so good—Hollywood was boosting the local economy, which, up to that time, had depended on sugar cane, fishing, and tourism. (The Allen film was postponed, but the news that another movie was on its way made a nice Christmas present for the people of Kauai.)

Although the company was forewarned about the weather, losing the prime beach location was a major disappointment. And even now, in March, conditions are chancy; the company is taking a risk with the weather.

Hawaii in winter is a paradise with a leaky roof. Weather reports collected over the years reveal that the last eighteen days of February are the wettest period of the entire year. But with no set ready in the studio, the company had to gamble—it would be more costly to keep everyone on salary doing nothing on the Metro lot.

The one sunny piece of meteorological information is that Kauai has been in a drought since the previous summer, and though some rain has returned to the island, it has not come in steady downpours, as might have been expected.

Since so much money is being spent on *King Kong,* the crew heard—and hoped—that the company would charter a special flight to take them to Hawaii. But that was mere rumor: the cost of such a generous expedition is prohibitive. So it's back to a standard commercial flight, with the usual protocol: stars and top production personnel in first class, the rest in tourist.

Crew and cast arrive in Honolulu on various different flights over the weekend of February 15 and are shuttled on the first available commercial flights to Kauai's Lihue Airport, which is not one of the largest airports in the world. It consists of one very small building and a single runway that is perilously close to the edge of the water. While they wait for

their luggage in a sweltering area sheltered only partially from the sun, the Hollywood people are easy to spot among the normal tourists. The cast and crew are mostly in Levis and T-shirts; the tourists wear leis and aloha shirts.

The only clouds in the sky are bunched over the tallest mountain of the island, fitting the peak like a lopsided crown. Only the wilting stalks of sugar cane along the road north to Hanalei give any indication of the drought.

Most of Kauai's population is on the southern and western coasts. After Kappa, a village halfway up the east side of the island that is known for its barroom brawls, civilization is reduced to an occasional post office, liquor store, or food market.

The north coast of Kauai—particularly around Hanalei and particularly the first few miles of the Na Pali coast—gives the island its justifiable reputation for scenic beauty. Here there are only natural vegetation, stunning mountains, a pure ocean, and a few native shacks left over from the filming of *South Pacific* in the 1950s. The movie company is staying in hotels on the southern shore; hence the daily shuttles of people and equipment via helicopter.

For a real-estate dealer, land is something to be developed, not admired, and Hanalei Bay was too choice to be left alone. The best site was Princeville, a plateau overlooking the bay and offering a spectacular view of the surf and the mountains rising sharply from the Pacific. So formidable is this terrain that engineers were unable to blast through the rock to complete the one major road, which would have completely circled the island.

Before Princeville was developed, Hanalei offered only what had served its natives for years: a few restaurants, all with the same menus (frozen mahi-mahi, lobster and steak, gobs of steamed rice); one or two small lodgings, not big or efficient enough even to be called motels; and several general stores, run by Chinese

people and selling everything from dog-eared copies of dated pornography to home remedies for tropical rashes.

But Princeville was slowly altered to fit the image of luxurious tropical living for tourists addicted to golf, booze, bizarre architecture, and cultural isolation. On what was once a tree-filled pasture there is now a collection of heterogeneous housing units—some resembling Tudor cottages, others Miami Beach condominiums. Their unnatural link is a golf course, its clubhouse providing a passable restaurant and a bar filled with florid-faced golfers cooling off after their games in the sun. A car is mandatory in Princeville for anyone who dislikes the clubhouse food. The nearest restaurant is five miles away, and though most of the housing units have kitchen facilities, the nearest supermarket of any size is in Kappa, more than twenty miles back down the road toward the airport.

Television is not widely in use on the north shore of Kauai. One station is brought in by cable from Oahu, and after the pictures are transmitted across the sea and mountains, they are reduced to wavering images almost totally obscured in a blizzard of black-and-white flecks. Nightly entertainment of necessity centers around the clubhouse and drinking. There is not even a movie house on this side of the island.

The company is staying at the Hanalei Beach and Racquet Club, which must have seemed a good idea from the brochure. But the money apparently ran out before the club was completed, and it is only the shell of its proposed luxury. And it looks as though many of the rooms went unused and unattended during the dispute over what was going to happen to the club. Spiders that came to visit the rooms and died there remain suspended in graceful rigor mortis within gigantic silvery webs over the windows and beds. A variety of other tropical bugs have found suitable final resting places in the sinks and bathtubs. The maid service has been improvised by a group of young female dropouts who live in beach shacks around the bay. They

are new to domestic endeavors, and believe it is enough to make the bed—upon request—provide fresh towels, and run a rag over the mirror above the sink.

The restaurant that was promised the company is nonexistent. In the space where it was supposed to be is a glass-enclosed room with a cement floor and a few tables and chairs.

After a few days of complaints from the crew about having nothing to eat before going on location, a kitchen is opened and eggs and coffee are served in the mornings, as are high-priced hamburgers during the day. But at night, when the crew returns, there is no food. The restaurant is used by the card players in the group.

On the afternoon before shooting resumes, a Hawaiian Protestant minister wearing a white robe and carrying a Bible shows up to conduct a traditional native ceremony of blessing a new project. He has the names of the important people on a card. The ceremony takes place outside in the blazing sun. The people who are wanted for the service would prefer to spend their last few hours of free time at the beach, but they dutifully show up.

Auditor Kocourek puts aside work on payrolls, time cards, and petty-cash requisitions, and Grossberg hangs up on a native who has called to report weather and tide conditions, probably with greater optimism than the official weather bureau. They go outside to line up with Guillermin, cinematographer Dick Kline, first assistant director Neumann (who atteneded a similar ceremony months earlier when he worked here on *Islands in the Stream*), and stars Jessica Lange, Jeff Bridges, and Charles Grodin. Each receives a lei, which is placed around his or her neck by the minister's female assistant. A garland of leaves is stretched across the entrance to the production office.

The minister's remarks are short, and his religious references are vague enough to be nondenominational and morally inoffensive to secular Hollywood minds. In reading off the names on his card, he does stumble over

the pronunciation of a few, but that only makes him seem even more human. Guillermin is so moved that he says rather loudly to Grodin, who is standing next to him, that he has never been to such a lovely service. The minister proceeds through the compliment, closes his Bible, and says a few more words of blessing over the garland across the doorway.

The good spirits of Hawaii, called *kahunas,* are with the company for most of the first week of shooting in Kauai. The rain that does fall comes in brief showers and does not hold up shooting for any length of time, and the clouds, while always ominous, never descend far enough to trap the company in the valley on the Na Pali coast.

Taking another load of equipment into the valley, pilot Ron Thrash says, "The only thing you have to worry about in here is the sudden shift in wind currents." Mountains on both sides of the entrance to the valley seem to block the opening almost completely.

"Right about in here the wind comes roaring out of the valley toward the sea," he says with a knowing shrug and a reassuring smile. Skillfully he executes a slight turn of the controls, and the copter moves laterally, as if sliding on a rug. Ahead, the valley slopes upward until it touches another mountain in the distance.

If central casting had been called, it could not have come up with a better type to play a young, handsome pilot who has served time in Vienam and retreated to a remote tropical island to do what he does best—pilot aircraft—and be a rugged individualist in a time when certain masculine postures are ridiculed. His drawl is from the Southwest, redneck country, and his blond hair is cut short, evidence of his former military life. He radiates total self-assurance at the controls as he takes the copter down to the location.

The cast and crew are finished with the valley, having completed a shot of Dwan and the *Petrox Explorer* crew walking up the valley floor. In the scene are Jessica, Jeff, Charles, Rene Auberjonois, Julius Harris, Jack

O'Halloran, Jorge Moreno, and Mario Gallo. An airlift will now take the men—Jessica is not needed in the shot—to a desolate ridge in the neighboring Kalalau Valley. This valley is a great tourist attraction on the island because a lookout on a cliff at its rear can be reached by road from the west coast.

Four helicopters have started the day, but one breaks down and a second has to go to another island for parts. This leaves the moving of the cast up to Ron and his copter—the largest of the four, capable of carrying a dozen passengers—and a second copter, a four-seater without a side door that is piloted by another young mainlander, Tom Hauptman.

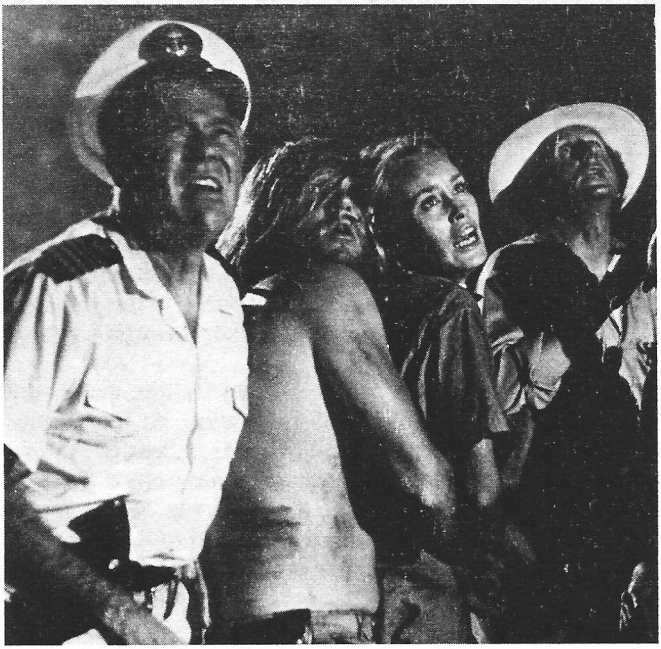
Landing on the ridge in the Kalalau Valley is an exercise in terror for anyone afraid of flying. From a hundred feet, with the best visibility, the ridge is almost nonexistent, and, as the copter hovers close to the ground, what has looked like a lush green carpet turns out to be a dingy brown covering of twisted, dead branches and dusty green foliage.

In one swoop, Ron approaches the ridge from the south side, leaving at least one passenger with his stomach in his mouth. Over the ridge the copter shudders to a stationary position, then begins its descent. Ron must be the only one in the copter who is sure that there is a place to land; the ridge resembles the edge of a razor blade.

Below, oblivious to the copter's maneuvering, are Guillermin and the first of his crew to be brought into the new valley. They are climbing up the ridge with camera equipment, their shirts stained with sweat.

Ron makes a perfect landing, touching down on the only level ground. After the copter is unloaded, he takes it off the ridge, banking it steeply over the valley before lifting it up and away from the barrier of the mountain wall.

Without the aircraft, and with only the ocean and mountains in the distance, the people are overwhelmed by the silence of the valley—until Guillermin breaks the spell. "A little more delicate," he says talking to



The *Petrox Explorer* group on Skull Island hears Kong's roar for the first time. From left to right: John Randolph, Jeff Bridges, Jessica Lange, Rene Auberjonois.

Bridges, who is positioned in front of the camera, a heavy pack strapped to his back.

The copters return with box lunches. Some of the crew are already familiar with their contents, having been subjected to the fare while working on *Islands in the Stream*. They ignore the mound of pink cardboard boxes. Those who do eat from them soon learn to sort through the mass of soggy food, picking out the edible pieces of fresh fruit and vegetables, tossing away the overcooked, dried-out slabs of meat, the rubbery chicken legs, and the tepid cold cuts.

The company is very conscious of the ecological balance in the valley. A local conservationist has already written a letter to the editor of a Honolulu newspaper

suggesting that the Kong company may defile the purity of the valley with its litter. The crew and actors now go out of their way to make sure all the garbage goes into huge plastic bags that will be airlifted back to the main base at the end of the day. But on both sides of the ridge, farther down its sides, are layers of rotting cardboard and rusty beer cans, left behind by less environmentally concerned nature lovers.

Though the sun in the winter sky is weak, the afternoon is warm. The actors and crew, except for Guillermin, sweat profusely. His concession to the weather is to remove his jacket, but he still wears his ever-present wool cap.

Above, white birds soar effortlessly on the wind currents. But this Eden is not uninhabited. At lunchtime, up from the valley floor winds a line of aging male dropouts who have constructed a few shacks out of odd materials left in the valley. (From the ridge their homes are hidden by the trees.) These men live off the land with rudimentary sanitation—and they look it. Their hair is long, unkempt, and knotted. Their jeans are either cut off at the knee or worn out at the crotch and rear. One, who at first glance looks like all the rest, turns out to be a young girl. Dazedly she follows the men into the movie camp.

The spokesman is an older man, somewhere between forty-five and social security. What he lacks in mental coherence he tries to overcome by the zealousness of his speech, running sentences together with a forced joy. As he extolls the virtues of life in the wilderness, away from the wicked, materialistic world, he scratches vigorously at the sores that cover his lower legs. He says the commune makes a living by raising the highest-quality marijuana on the island. When money is short, he carries out a load to Hanalei, a three- to four-day trek. There he finds any number of willing buyers. Like a seasoned commercial announcer selling a product he believes in, the man lights up a joint, sucking in the smoke in rapid gulps and then releasing it slowly, rolling his eyes in a kind of delirium.

There are enough untouched box lunches to provide food for the group from the commune, and they devour the contents. When they are finished, one of the crew suggests that they pitch in and help move some of the equipment farther up the ridge. Their spokesman says he will huddle with his boys and, en masse, they walk to a clearing on the side of the ridge. They do not return. They are stretched out on the ground passing a joint.

By three o'clock, a layer of clouds again hangs over the radio relay man at his post on top of the mountain. Wisps of these clouds break off and curl over the edge of the cliff. The man's voice on the squeak box becomes urgent with concern.

At 4 P.M., when the director says he has the last shot and it's a wrap, the crew, with an eye on the clouds, work quickly to get the copters loaded and out of the valley. Most of the crew, who do not really know Federico De Laurentiis yet, are agreeably surprised to see the producer's son pitch in with the hard physical work, doing everything they have to, cleaning up the ridge, and loading boxes of equipment onto the copter.

Federico's smile is his most disarming quality, and he uses it rather indiscriminately, almost flirtatiously, in a sort of blanket friendliness for everyone in the company. He may be management, but to the crew he is now one of them. Bare-chested and sweating, he lifts the boxes, and, crouching under the spinning blades, tosses them inside the copters, never complaining, doing his job.

Everyone gets out of the valley before nightfall. But a few days later the company barely escapes. Instead of remaining suspended about the mountain, the clouds begin to descend in mid-afternoon, bringing with them heavy rains from the ocean. By 4 P.M. the Na Pali coast is blocked from view by rain and clouds. Those watching from base headquarters are becoming anxious about the company, still somewhere in the valley.

The pilots have begun their airlift earlier than scheduled. They have to fly visually, charting their course by using familiar landmarks on the coast. But the mist is

quickly becoming as dense as a heavy spring rain. The pilots cannot hug the mountains, the shorter route to the base; they have to swing the copters out over the ocean.

Inside base headquarters, a babble of voices and commands comes over a radio operated by a young man hired locally as a production assistant. Ron Volz came to Hawaii seven years ago, a teenager attracted by surfing and a life-style that turned out, if possible, to be even easier than the one he'd known in Southern California. The girls and the surfing were good on Kauai, and he made enough money to support his materialistically undemanding life by waiting on tables at the local restaurant.

Ron is no longer really young; now approaching his thirties, he suspects that surfing may not be the ideal way of life for an adult. His life is in flux—as is the operation of getting the cast and crew out of the valley. From his first day in the office he has competently taken over the radio operations, becoming so efficient at it and all his other duties that Grossberg tells him he should come to work in Hollywood. It is not a specific offer, but it is promising to someone wanting to break out of his current mold.

Now, speaking into the radio, Volz tries to sound calm, to avoid transmitting his nervousness to those in the threatening sky. As Volz takes the radio messages from the relay man, who is stationed on the beach, transportation coordinator Joe Sawyer stands by the swimming pool outside the production office, a walkie-talkie in his hand. Sawyer is directing the copters that are making their way across the bay through the atmospheric soup. He is doing the job of a traffic controller, a new task for him. Suddenly he is fantasizing a heroic role, but he is conscious that his inexperience may cause him to misdirect a copter.

To complicate the rushed airlift, there are just two copters to get the people out of the valley; a third has been grounded because of a fuel leak.

In the production office everyone sincerely tries to remain calm, which only makes them more tense. Sawyer

keeps up a running chatter with the pilots, talking out of the corner of his mouth, never taking his eyes off the copters' course across the water. What am I doing here? he asks himself.

The first copter comes in low, rattling over Club Mediterranee, followed by the second copter a short time later. After depositing the first contingent of crew and equipment, the copters lift off again quickly and fade back, through the dimming visibility, over the first mountain on the Na Pali coast.

Miraculously, the evacuation is a success. Nothing is left in the valley at nightfall. In Princeville the rain is undiminished, but at sea the sky breaks and a patch of blue emerges.

By the end of the first week on Kauai, the company realizes it should have packed clothing for longer than the brief four or five days originally scheduled.

The reason for coming to Kauai was to film "environment"—scenes of the beautiful jungle island that was Kong's habitat. Before arriving on the island, production planned to shoot most of its work in the valleys. But schedules change when pressure is applied, and soon other scenes are being considered, then added. The work day becomes like a wartime commando operation: forces move in swiftly by copter, scenes are shot on the run, the company moves to another location. It is a frantic, unsettling schedule, one guaranteed to wear down the smoothest of temperaments. Soon the tension begins to tell on Guillermin, who must bear the brunt of the production difficulties, must try to get the required shots while knowing it is impossible for the crew to do what is being asked of them.

With the crew Guillermin remains a very private person, never allowing his face to register his emotions. He is always, on the surface, the very image of self-control: pipe clenched in his mouth, voice crisp and alert. But he is quick to erupt, and there is no warning, no hostile glance or angry frown, to indicate that the rage is building up. The more he is harassed by pro-

duction problems, the less controllable his temper becomes. He shoves a worker he thinks is not moving fast enough, then apologizes. He lifts a small folding table Doris Grau uses to type on, holding it menacingly for a moment before slamming it down onto the sand. These outbursts intimidate the crew; they complain about his temperament behind his back, but they dutifully strive to do whatever he asks of them.

The movie must get made: it is the ultimate justification for all the good and bad that goes on during a film production. This attitude makes the crew a very subservient group of men and women. They try to do in reasonable time what the director asks, even attempting to anticipate his next command, but their blind obedience to the grand design of shooting a picture and their acceptance of almost anything handed them—even bad manners—shows an almost masochistic passivity, as if they wish to be beaten into working. A smart director knows how to manipulate this tendency to his advantage. Fear and insecurity are what get the movie done.

The personal relationship of director to crew and cast is really of no moment to those back in the studio watching the rushes of what is being filmed on Kauai. De Laurentiis is enormously impressed with the rushes. He wants more scenes shot in Hawaii, particularly shots of the boats coming ashore from the *Petrox Explorer,* which were originally done in Southern California.

A plane is chartered in Los Angeles to fly over more equipment, including two Chris Crafts, each twenty-two feet long; three open Zodiacs, nineteen feet each; and the fog-making machines. The plane is a transport more suitable for a World War II bombing run over Germany than a 1970s crossing of the Pacific. On the first takeoff attempt the load turns out to be too much for the plane, and the flight has to be aborted. This information is received in the production office with various examples of gallows humor.

The next report, that the plane will begin its transoceanic voyage from San Francisco, not Los Angeles, is

greeted with snickers. The reason for the change in the flight route is never explained, but the suspicion among the office cynics is that the plane will find better air currents and be blown across the ocean rather than flown under its own power.

Hours go by without any confirmation that the plane has taken off. Some now suggest it would be faster to send the boats by water. Grossberg says, "The production is so strapped for money now, we can't afford to put a penis on Kong."

But the plane has actually taken off. In the general confusion of incoming telephone calls, relayed radio messages, people strolling in to seek King Kong posters and jobs as extras in the movie, the confirmation has simply gotten lost.

Finished with the valleys, the company now heads for one of the loveliest beaches in the world. It is a twenty-minute copter flight from base headquarters down the Na Pali coast to a swath of brilliant light sand flanked by mountains. Its most distinctive visual feature is a high rock that divides the beach. Over eons the water has worn away the center of the rock, and it is now shaped like an altar. For this reason, the area has been given the name Cathedral Beach.

Most people never get to see this beach unless they fly over it in a tourist helicopter or come by boat. Two who have made it and who plan to stay for a while are Dennis and Debbie Lofstedt of Gresham, Oregon.

They were married just the previous Saturday and are spending their honeymoon in Kauai. Dennis' brother is a copter pilot on the tourist run, and he has convinced the newlyweds that they will find uninterrupted bliss here, away from the hordes of tourists on Waikiki. He has deposited them on the beach with provisions for a week, and they have set up camp under the arch, which gives them protection from sudden rain squalls without completely obscuring their view of the starry night sky.

Dennis is up early, with the first light of dawn, and is going for a swim in the surf. His wife is still sleeping

when the first helicopter swings in off the sea, hovers for a few seconds over the crest of a dune, and touches down near her startled face. The workers get out and begin unloading cameras and lights, unaware of the bewildered honeymooners.

When they are discovered, their presence is taken in stride; nothing really surprises people used to making movies in exotic locations. But the romantic plight of the young people touches the sentimental souls of the Hollywood crew. Unable to offer them privacy for the day, they come up with the next best thing: coffee and doughnuts. Jeff Bridges' girl friend asks the young bride to go swimming with her, and they walk as far from the cameras as possible, sitting on their towels to watch Dennis, a novice at body surfing, flounder in the waves.

The morning shots will be of a waterfall that cascades down the side of the arch. In the shadow of the mountain, the water in the pool beneath the fall is forbiddingly dark. The collective nerves of crew and cast are orchestrated by the director, and today everyone is a bit jumpy. Some, with hangovers and no specific jobs at the moment, seek the far side of the sand dune and go to sleep. Jessica, weary of waiting for her first shot, curls up on the sand in her blue housecoat and promptly falls asleep as well.

A reporter from a Honolulu newspaper is a guest on the set. His appearance near the movie camera prompts Guillermin to ask threateningly, "Who is that?"

The reporter picks up on the inflection in the director's voice and moves away to interview an actor. He finds Grodin alone, sitting on a rock at the water's edge, his jaw resting in the palm of his hand. The reporter introduces himself and asks him some general questions about the film. Grodin tells him *King Kong* is making a definite ecological statement about the rape of the environment. The reporter takes it down on his notepad and then wanders off, muttering, "He must be kidding!"

The newlyweds are now at their encampment, standing inside the circle of sleeping bags and boxes of food like pioneers in a wagon train wating for the Indian attack. They have already accepted the invitation of the company to watch the scenes at the waterfall, but they are not impressed by moviemaking; the waits while lights and equipment are rearranged seem interminable. The Lofstedts are eager to abandon their paradise. When, early in the afternoon, the brother returns to check up on them, as he has promised he will, they are packed and ready to go to another part of Kauai.

The reporter is also ready to go. Not much is really happening on Cathedral Beach, and he is apparently not interested in pursuing interviews with the stars. Since there is no forty-foot automated monster to write about, he takes the first helicopter back to headquarters. It is the copter without the door, and the reporter is rather large. As the chopper rises over Hanalei Bay, though the reporter is strapped in, one has a vision of him plummeting down on top of the surfers.

His story breaks the next day, and he is very generous, despite the remarks he makes about some aspects of the production and about Guillermin's response to his appearance on the set. Three photographs taken by unit still man Sid Baldwin are published with the story. Baldwin is a first-class photographer and the shots are good. The one of Jessica asleep on the beach is the most candid and alluring.

It is fortunate that the reporter came the day he did. Over the next few days things began to fall apart. Jack O'Halloran, horsing around on the beach, slips and falls on a rock. The flesh over his eye is cut open, and he has to be taken by copter to the hospital near Lihue Airport. It takes thirty-five stitches to close the wound, but O'Halloran works the next day, the stitches covered with makeup.

There is also the problem of getting the boats with the fog machines to the sea off Cathedral Beach. These boats are docked at Mawilliwilli harbor, near the town of Lihue on the east coast, and to get to the beach by

sea takes from three to four hours—if the water is reasonably calm. But the sea is not calm on the night before they are to be used, and the boats are half a day late getting to the site. The Hawaiian boat captains have a perfectly legitimate excuse; they accuse some of the men of getting drunk and not securing the boats the previous night, and then, when they arrived at the harbor, the weather had turned bad and it would have been dangerous to take the small boats into the open sea in the darkness. At any rate, in practical terms for the production, half a day of shooting has been lost.

Then there is the water off Cathedral Beach. It is marvelous for surfers, but the boats brought from Los Angeles are not suitable for riding in waves that reach the height of ten or twelve feet. And on any normal day, especially in winter, the surf off the north coast does build up.

In setting up the first shot, one of the small boats has to be steered to shore so a light reading can be made and the camera angle worked out. Despite the skill of the captain, the boat is caught up in the surf and spun around so that it is riding parallel to the beach on the crest of a wave. Another big wave and it will capsize. The captain wisely dives overboard, clear of the boat. Seeing that the craft is in serious trouble, everyone stops whatever he is doing and runs into the waist-high water. Cast and crew work together to help move the boat around, out of its precarious position—and leading the charge are Guillermin and Federico De Laurentiis. A helicopter is called in with ropes to help maneuver the boat to safety; eventually this succeeds. But it is clear that these boats are not constructed for high surf, and the company really does not have the luxury of being able to wait for calm seas.

The camaraderie and cooperation of cast and crew established through such shared common danger on the set does not carry over to private life. Whether by intent or habit, the social hierarchy on a movie set is as stratified and position-conscious as England under Victoria.

At the top of the ladder are the director and stars, and just a fraction of a rung below them are the cinematographer, production manager, and some of the more important department heads. Next come the crew, organized into cliques by jobs.

This bonding by craft lines continues after work on Kauai; electricians go off by themselves, as do the people in costume, makeup, props, sound, and special effects. Guillermin, who likes to maintain a close off-camera association with his actors, dines almost every night with Charles Grodin and Jessica Lange. The character actors who have come with their families cook in their hotel rooms, while the unattached personnel go out to eat in the local restaurants rather than face a meal in an empty room. Some, the least highly paid—or those who think they are—take an extra box lunch at noon to eat at night and then claim that they did not eat on the set and are entitled to be reimbursed for the meal.

Jack Grossberg, wanting to keep the company together as a working unit, comes up with the idea of having a luau the first Saturday on Kauai, and he opens it to the Hawaiian crew, particularly the boatmen and their families. It is held on the beach at Hanalei Bay, across from the point of land on which the Princeville development stands. The food, including a huge pig roasted over a spit and bowls of *poi,* a bland paste rich in protein and calories, is prepared by a Tahitian woman who owns a popular local tavern. At dusk, sitting down to the banquet, the guests can see the last surfers hand-paddling their boards ashore through the calmer water.

Uninvited, but not turned away, are the young mainland dropouts. They appear at the table unannounced, materializing from the shadows of the palm trees, standing forlornly in front of the food like urchins out of the orphanage in *Oliver Twist.* When asked about their life in Hawaii, the best they can say is that it is easier than it was in Southern California because it is less competitive. (In addition, the Hawaiian police on Kauai

are more tolerant than the mainland cops of the weed they grow by their shacks.)

The native Hawaiians at the luau look down on these people, calling them *haoles,* the generally derogatory word for all Americans from the mainland. The older Hawaiians are not intentionally rude, but they do treat these people disdainfully.

It is best for the movie *haoles* to try to gain acceptance—if not respect—from the Hawaiians, who remember their history of oppression by white Christian missionaries and still resent it. A few young Hawaiian toughs around Hanalei Bay have started beating up *haole* tourists for no apparent reason; one couple they attacked—chasing the wife across the street from the restaurant and tackling her in a cane field—were people they had never even seen before; the couple had only been on the island for a few days. (Many suspect that the attack was an act of racial revenge.) The toughs have boycotted the luau, which is welcome news to the company.

The Hawaiian women, in their best clothes and most regal manners, are now squirming on the hard picnic benches, impatient to see the stars, who have not yet arrived. The pig is cut and grease pours off the skin, soaking the sweet chunks of pinkish meat. The cold Olympic beer runs out. And still the stars do not show up.

However, Rene Auberjonois, along with his attractive wife and young son, has been there from the beginning. If not a star, he is certainly a fine actor on both stage and screen, and he converses easily with the Hawaiians about their interests, not about his acting. If natural intellect counts on movie sets, Rene is Kong's brain. He is bright, a good conversationalist on a variety of subjects, and he reads more than the daily trade papers. But to these Hawaiian women, he is largely unknown, since his screen appearances have been mostly in character parts. They are waiting for the big stars: Jeff, Jessica, Charles.

Jeff never shows up. Jessica and Grodin arrive with

Guillermin when all that is left of the roast pig is its charred head, a few pieces of stringy meat, and a pool of hardening grease. But they barely stay long enough to be noticed, slipping out the door to go to a local restaurant. Their abrupt departure is interpreted by the Hawaiians as a social snub, and they talk about it among themselves, away from the untrustworthy *haoles*.

The ice chest is replenished, more beer chilled and drunk. The lower-ranking film people move agreeably among the Hawaiians, drinking and smoking dope with them. Two older boat captains begin playing their guitars and singing island folk songs. The falsetto voices tell the story of lovers who leave the islands to roam the world, their hearts aching for the paradise they have left behind.

The luau ends in song, the way it should, with people feeling good in one another's company despite the fact that they have come together from different races and cultures. Their songs are hard to forget, staying with the *haoles* as they drive home.

The next day, Sunday, is the last the company will have off during its stay on Kauai. It is a perfect day for tennis, swimming, sunbathing, and visiting other parts of the island. It is also the last good weather for a week.

The rains come with a vengeance on Monday. When the copters take off with the crew and cast in the morning, the storm has already moved in off the ocean, bringing a chill wind and a drizzle that soon becomes a torrential downpour. Guillermin tries in vain to complete the day's work; he is finally defeated by the weather. Everyone has to be flown back to base by early afternoon.

On Tuesday Jeff and Charles report in sick, with sore throats. No shooting is done that day.

On Wednesday production resumes at Cathedral Beach. Under the pale, exhausted winter sun stand-ins are being used in the long shots for those who are still sick. Tents and cameras are set up on the beach near the surf, but once again tides are not taken into consider-

ation. A big wave breaks beautifully, rolling through the encampment. Lost in the drenching, along with the director's steely calmness, are Doris' production notes, the records of such important data as the number of shots taken, the positions of the actors in the scene, and the nature of the action.

To make matters worse, illness continues to plague the company. Al Santos, a hard-working Hawaiian grip, is stricken with cramps and has to be flown back to headquarters for treatment by a local doctor. Trying to work the next day, he is overcome by even more violent cramps and rushed to Honolulu for medical care. Then, just as Jeff has recovered and is working again, Ed Lauter gets sick. The familiar character actor who usually plays the villain (as he did in *The Longest Yard*) is now the victim. And to top things off, Grodin resumes working only to lose his voice.

Back at production headquarters, Kocourek and Grossberg are going over the books with the eyes of misers, trying to guard De Laurentiis' financial interests. They don't have to be mind readers to conclude that the Hawaiian expedition is getting much bigger and more costly than they'd planned.

"But it's still cheaper to shoot here than in the studio," Kocourek rationalizes—"as long as we don't stay here forever."

Renting and operating the helicopters is a constant expense: an estimated $1,200 per day. And that money doesn't even include the repair of the small red chopper; the starboard side remains open to the elements. Even the most stoical passengers find it extremely unnerving to go soaring over a mountaintop, with the wind whistling through the open door and nothing but space between them and the rocks below. Not surprisingly, it is Guillermin's favorite copter. Always one of the first to fly out of the Na Pali coast after a day's shooting, the director climbs eagerly into the single seat in the center of the bubble. Guillermin was an RAF pilot during the latter part of World War II and he speaks enthusiasti-

cally about learning to fly a helicopter after the picture is finished.

Still more Hawaiian scenes are added. De Laurentiis wants to shoot one with Jessica dressed in a torn, scanty outfit and running through the jungle to escape from the ardent Kong. Plans are made for the scene to be done in Kauai, but are scrapped when Guillermin argues persuasively that such a run could be dangerous for Jessica.

By this time De Laurentiis is aware of the production problems in Hawaii, and he is worried. His anxieties are compounded by the lack of progress in Hollywood, for the forty-foot mechanical Kong is still in the planning stage and the sets are nowhere near completion. Since De Laurentiis has also heard reports of the emotional flareups in Hawaii, he sends Christian Ferry over to Kauai in the hope that the Frenchman's estimable diplomatic skills will be able to solve at least that one problem.

Dale Hennesy, who has been busy building the Wall on Lot 2, also flies in for a brief visit. He and Guillermin have to go over the storyboards for scenes that will be shot in the studio when the company returns.

According to sympathetic friends, Guillermin is suspicious of the arrival of Ferry and Hennesy. Misinterpreting their motives, he thinks that they have come to check up on him and report back to De Laurentiis. It is really too early in the shooting to know how the picture is turning out, and Guillermin is apprehensive. Insecurity lurks in the soul of almost everyone in the business, and Guillermin is no exception. He is probably wondering whether De Laurentiis holds him responsible for the delays and problems—perhaps he is even afraid of being taken off the picture.

At a dinner meeting with Federico and Hennesy, Guillermin engages in a shouting match with the two men. The other people in the restaurant—civilians who are not familiar with the high emotional level of the movie

industry—cannot help but overhear. They are visibly startled.

While the role of director may have been magnified recently by avant-garde critics, there is no doubt that it is a crucial one. The director must have the artistic concept of the film—and see that it gets shot—and he must also regulate the emotional stability of the people in the production. The way he treats his crew and actors is all-important. At this point, the Kong production, trapped on a stormy tip of land on a remote island in the Pacific, is charted on a rough course.

Guillermin's concern over final artistic control is not altogether unjustified. On a Dino De Laurentiis film there is always one man more powerful than the director; it is De Laurentiis himself who makes the ultimate financial and artistic choices. He has been known to take the editing away from a director—even to fire him, which is exactly what happened on *Drum*. In a film like *King Kong,* with so much riding on it, the pressure on the director is almost unbearable. Even the people Guillermin yells at are grudgingly sympathetic with his plight.

Now, on Saturday, nature seems determined to compound Guillermin's problems. As one of the boats is coming through the surf its motor conks out. The waves spin the craft parallel to the shore. As before, everyone rushes into the water to grab hold of and turn the boat. This second near miss makes it obvious to the company that the size of the waves increases dramatically around noon. Scenes of the *Petrox Explorer* coming ashore through the fog bank will have to be shot earlier in the morning, so the company sets the regular 5:30 A.M. crew call back to four o'clock to allow the boats an additional hour and a half to get to Cathedral Beach.

But the tides foil the production once again. The boats arrive off the beach at the new hour, but the waves have come up even earlier. Some of the actors, trying to maintain their balance in the rocking boats, get seasick.

Faced with the possibility of another serious delay, Guillermin decides to move the company immediately. They will go back up the coast by boat and shoot the fog scene in the protected waters of Hanalei Bay. Guillermin's command throws the production headquarters into an even greater state of confusion: radio messages about the proposed movement become garbled; written instructions on the deployment get lost under piles of discarded lunch boxes; pilots at the heliport wait to take off sometime for somewhere; and Grossberg maintains an outward appearance of administrative equilibrium by smoking another pack of cigarettes.

With all the majesty of the civilian fleet going to the rescue at Dunkirk, Guillermin's convoy moves out to sea. There the director is once again in total control of his picture.

By late afternoon the fog machines are working well and a cloud bank is laid down on the calmer waters of Hanalei Bay. The Hawaiians picnicking on the beach are startled by a sudden change in the weather; their sun is now drifting behind a manmade cloud.

There is no time off for the company this weekend. Sunday is just another work day.

On Monday the cast begins to complain about the way Guillermin is treating them. He has asked the character actors to stand in the surf during preparation for the scene so that he can get the correct lighting and camera angles. One actor slips under a wave and has to be pulled up by his shirt collar. Everyone thinks Guillermin could have used stand-ins.

To compound all the frustrations, the crew make the sea a gift of two radios, accidentally dropping them into the water, where they sink rapidly to the murky bottom.

Hawaii has ceased to be a paradise to the crew. The dreary winter sky, with its faded sun, is the perfect backdrop for their bone-aching weariness and bruised egos. The intolerable schedule gets to one of the older men, who becomes dizzy and then collapses. Rushed by helicopter to the hospital, he spends his fifty-ninth birthday

in intensive care, a heart-monitoring machine attached to his arm. Knowing the company will soon be heading home, he is afraid of being left behind if some heart problem is detected. But the diagnosis is good: he is only suffering from physical exhaustion, an understandable malady among this crew.

On one of the last nights, the stars and moon—which have up till now offered a celestial display of extravagantly moving proportions—suddenly disappear into total blackness and a Kono wind roars in from the sea with the sound of a hurricane. The noise wakes the crew, and, looking out their windows, they see the large palm trees whipping in the wind, straining and bending, leafy tops almost touching the ground. The roar of the surf increases to a scream.

By morning the rains have stopped, but the wind has not, and people line the beach to watch the huge walls of water build to unbelievable heights before crashing down onto the rocks.

The company shoots a few more scenes at Cathedral Beach and cancels one night scene in Hanalei Bay because of the storm. It is time to go home. The Hawaiian interlude has been extremely costly: $32,000 for hotel accommodations, $10,000 for catering, $24,000 for living expenses for crew and cast, $20,000 in air fares, $14,000 for scouting locations, $59,000 for the support boats, and $65,675 for the helicopters. Grand total: $224,675.

At the Honolulu airport the crew resemble the defeated French waiting for the trains on which they will escape Paris before the Germans arrive. They are too tired even to ask the name of the movie being shown on the long trip home. Some make inquiries about getting onto an earlier flight than the one they are booked on. The tans they have acquired are beginning to fade. And adding to their exhaustion is the latest rumor: there are no sets ready in the studio, and the production will be forced to shut down.

THE SUPERTANKER

March 15—17, 1976

For the ecologist the giant supertanker is a not-so-natural disaster; for the businessman it's a financial life-saver; and for King Kong, it's the only way to travel.

Since the studio system of production finally broke down in the 1950s, a period when most movies were shot almost entirely on Hollywood back lots and sound stages, companies have been traveling to many unusual places to create authenticity in their pictures, believing that modern audiences no longer accept fake scenery.

No company has ever filmed in the areas of the Na Pali coast where *King Kong* did—and no company has ever shot aboard a supertanker. But on the Monday after their return from Kauai, the seventy-member Kong crew and cast show up for shooting aboard the *Susanne Onstad.*

The search for a ship that could handle the Kong company had gone on for months, with De Laurentiis using all his connections to get a big enough ship. Not that the forty-foot mechanical ape, even if ready, would be used on the ship; Kong in seaboard captivity will be done in miniature on the sound stage. But a love scene between Jessica and Jeff will be filmed on the tanker, and so will the beginning of the scene where Jessica crawls across an air-vent grill and drops into Kong's arms. Moviegoers have to believe that a forty-foot monster is aboard that same ship.

Many shipping companies around the world were contacted, and a few showed some interest. But when concrete rental proposals were made, they were always rejected for one reason or another—most because of the rental fee, availability for the location of the shooting, and readiness at the time when the ship would be needed to get the scenes done.

After one of his more exasperatingly long discussions with Fred Sidewater about finding a supertanker, De Laurentiis supposedly sat back in his chair, slapped his forehead, and said, "If only Onassis were still alive!"

Sidewater eventually made contact with a friend in New York who is an agent for a shipping consortium, and the friend put the Kong people in touch with the Onstad Shipping Company of Oslo. In the Onstad fleet was an eighteen-month-old supertanker, the *Susanne Onstad*. She was then in Indonesia, bound for San Francisco—so she was a natural choice, because she would be available. Few supertankers sail into the ports of the West Coast; this part of the country gets its fuel mostly by truck and pipe. An agreement was reached and signed; De Laurentiis would pay close to $125,000 to rent her for three days, and another $8,000 for the necessary insurance policy on those who would be working on board.

There were days when the queens of the sea were judged by the beauty of their lines and the grace with which they settled on the waves. But this is a more functional maritime age, and size and speed are more important than oceanic elegance. With two fuel pipes running from bow to stern on her open deck, the *Susanne Onstad* resembles a mammoth animal, dissected and baring its spinal column. Her superstructure is located well aft, giving the ship a lopsided appearance, as if any sudden shift in the tonnage would cause her to sink the stern. Those who never saw the first *Queen Elizabeth* or the *Normandie* sail up the Hudson River might think that the massiveness of the supertankers gives them a beauty and grandeur. But to anyone who remembers the great old ships these tankers are awesome, clumsy

brutes, the projection of the unesthetic concerns of international commerce.

Before her arrival off Los Angeles on the weekend of March 13, the *Susanne Onstad* has to go through a degassing process to cut down on the risk of explosion. Stray oil fumes could easily be ignited by a carelessly discarded match or cigarette, or by the electrical equipment used in production. This would surely send *King Kong* up in flames.

"This degassing is a tedious and time-consuming process," Terry Carr says while waiting for the ship to come to her Southern California port of call. Carr wanted to have an assistant director from the movie company aboard on the trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles, but his plan got snarled up in federal red tape. (The Bureau of Navigation in the U.S. Commerce Department informed Carr that no American can travel between ports in his own country on a ship flying a foreign flag.)

It takes four days to degas the ship. The procedure begins with cleaning out the oil tanks, and, by international agreement, this must be done a hundred miles offshore. When she is finally degassed, the ship sends a telegram to the production office, notifying it of her anticipated time of arrival.

At one point in the *Susanne Onstad*'s southward voyage, the sea becomes so rough that the Petrox Company insignia put on her hull is washed away. There is no mistaking her, though, when she comes through the haze toward San Pedro. The advance unit from the movie company goes aboard to rig the light cables, haul on two cameras, and set up the sound equipment and props.

The Americans find a pleasant surprise aboard the Norwegian ship: female crew members. Having more liberated views on the comforts of life—at sea, as well as on land—Norway permits her sailors to take their wives on long ocean voyages. It is not a free trip, though; the women must work not only in the kitchen but alongside their men on deck.

With the women, the Norwegian crew number thirty-

three. By Monday the Hollywood crew members on the ship outnumber the Norwegians by more than two to one. They soon show a mutual respect for the jobs each has to do, and the movie company learns not to get in the sailors' way during their daily rounds of deck-swabbing and brass-polishing.

The *King Kong* company is brought to the *Susanne Onstad* in three support boats: the largest, eighty-five feet long, carries most of the crew and cast; another, fifty feet long, hauls the equipment; and the smallest, twenty-eight feet long, acts as a tender, or sea shuttle, between the supertanker and shore.

Limited to a prescribed course by environmental-protection law, the supertanker cruises twenty miles off-shore. Sometimes Guillermin gets carried away and directs the tanker full speed ahead, leaving the three support boats in the wake, unable to catch up. One boat is not insured beyond the twenty-mile limit, and her pilot has to make a ship-to-shore call to get the company to put a rider on the policy.

On occasion radio contact among the boats fails. One evening when it is quite misty, the smallest support boat heads out from shore to the *Susanne Onstad*. Losing radio contact, the twenty-eight footer is lost. There are moments of navigational panic before the course is charted correctly.

Twenty to thirty miles out to sea, the three-day shooting aboard the supertanker couldn't go more smoothly. There are no major temperamental flareups, no gas explosions, no crew lost at sea. Only when the company comes ashore does the fate of *King Kong* seem uncertain.

It is not an idle rumor that the movie is in serious trouble, that the company is having difficulty building a workable forty-foot mechanical monster, getting a mechanical hand to function, coming up with a man-sized monkey suit and matching face masks, and keeping ahead on construction of new sets. And it's not simply a question of a temporary layoff; some people are saying

that *King Kong* has already gotten to be too expensive and will have to be closed down permanently. Fortunately for its publicity, the press has not been investigating the situation.

Everyone has an opinion: De Laurentiis has too much money in it; he won't quit. . . . He doesn't have his *own* money in it; he can use it as a tax write-off. . . . Paramount plans to stay in. . . . Paramount wants to pull out. . . . The rushes are good. . . . The rushes are bad. . . . Guillermin will stay. . . . Guillermin will quit. . . . Guillermin is doing a great job. . . . Guillermin will get fired. . . .

The day after shooting on the *Susanne Onstad* ends, one rumor is confirmed: the production will shut down temporarily. The press will be told the company will continue working on tests on the ape suit while the director updates the storyboards.

"Look at *Jaws*" becomes the optimistic password of those facing another layoff. The guessing now centers on how long the picture will be shut down; the range is from a week to more than a month. No one wants to believe the production is over for good before it has really gotten started.

Besides, even the crew wants to see the forty-foot King Kong move.

A LAYOFF, THE SHAPING OF KONG, AND THE RAISING OF THE WALL

The End of March, 1976

Three people who witnessed the event attest to its authenticity. Besides, it's too good a story not to be true. . . .

Despite the publicity—which could lead you to believe that somewhere on the Metro lot there exists a huge, automated Kong, protected by the kind of security afforded the first atomic bomb—he does not exist. Nor does a mechanical hand or a monkey suit. Throughout January and most of February, Kong has lived only in the inventive minds of Robinson, Rambaldi, and their international staffs, all busily sketching concepts of how to make Kong move when, as, and if they can get him into a standing position.

Actual work on the full-sized Kong and his automated hands does not begin until February 28. The first piece of machinery completed is a rudimentary hand. However, its fingers are contorted in an arthritic-looking fist, and they cannot be pried apart by the normal electronic impulses in the hydraulic system. Force has to be applied—and then, slowly, majestically, the middle-finger rises straight as an arrow from the other bent fingers.

An appropriate gesture considering the state of the production.



Director Guillermin (wearing his ever-present wool cap, and pointing), directs a scene of a native ritual in front of the



Wall, which is made up of 126,000 yards of grapevine, among other things.

Between top brass and the troops there is no communication about the picture's current position. Uncertainty has its effect on the disposition of the department heads, who are pushing ahead on sets that may never be used and a Kong that may never get up. The brunt of the indecision is borne by Dale Hennesy, a worrier and a perfectionist; if he cannot finish the mammoth Wall in reasonable time, the daily cost of an extended layoff may prohibit the eventual resumption of production. He does now what he did in January: he quits. He takes the news to an already harassed Grossberg, and the production chief hauls out the bottle of Scotch, the liquid over which reasonably sane men under normal circumstances can work their problems out. Grossberg spends an hour trying to talk Hennesy out of quitting. The staff in the other offices, expecting outbursts and curses, are surprised that it is so gentlemanly. Grossberg is usually more persuasive, but after the first half hour he is still unable to convince Hennesy not to quit. The Scotch doesn't help, either. Hennesy, adamant and red-faced, leaves the office first, muttering in a low voice that he is finished. Grossberg comes out next and shrugs. "He isn't kidding this time," he says.

Everyone goes home, convinced a search will be on the next day for a new production designer. In less than twenty-four hours, though, Hennesy is back. Like most of the top men in the movie business, he can get fired from a picture. But once he has agreed to do something, he won't quit before he's done it.

When a production as costly as *King Kong* shuts down, it is best to keep it quiet. But a production with a huge staff and crew is bound to have its share of blabbermouths, and that first Monday, Rona Barrett is on television telling America over its breakfast from coast to coast that *King Kong* is in desperate trouble, that it has closed. And she implies that the monster is in the clutches of incompetent craftsmen who have built him two right hands.

Since the passing of Hedda and Louella, the loss of



In a scene from the movie, Grodin, Bridges, and Lange spy on the Skull Island natives. These good people are preparing their monthly sacrifice to Kong.

Joyce Haber by the *Los Angeles Times,* and the obsession of Sheila Graham with her four-decade-old love affair with F. Scott Fitzgerald, Rona has single-handedly kept the movie-gossip tradition going, and though she never quite gets her stories about Kong right, there is always enough truth in them to cause the people involved with the production to gnash their teeth.

The true story of Kong's two right hands is not nearly as stupid as Rona's malicious story would have it. In the drive to create a mechanical Kong, Robinson and Rambaldi work separately on their own designs during the initial planning stages. Communication between their two departments is somewhat difficult because of the language barrier. And nationalistic rivalry has to be one factor that prevents a closer working relationship.

Rambaldi is going for a monster that will be run by manual controls. In his twenty-four years in the Italian film industry, Rambaldi—a member of the Fine Arts Academy, a painter and sculptor, with a specialty in electronically operated moving parts—has earned a justified reputation as a genius in special effects. But, like many men with brilliant minds, Rambaldi tends on occasion to keep some of the details to himself. And no project has been as challenging for him as this one.

Poring over blueprints in his office at the construction shop, which is becoming more a home to him than his apartment in Santa Monica, he sometimes goes thirty hours without sleep.

"I work in cinema because I like to travel," Rambaldi jokes, referring to what he has seen of America: the road between the studio and his apartment.

"Rambaldi's were very good plans," Robinson comments. "But it would have taken at least eight months to build Kong from them, and we were talking about getting this picture out by Christmas."

Robinson has designed a variation of a mechanical monster he has seen in a local amusement park, and he wants Kong to be operated by a complicated hydraulic system. He believes that even under the brutal pressure of the Christmas deadline, it can be built in his construction shop with a work force of about one hundred men and women. According to Robinson, "The main secret of the Kong design is the proportional balance of the hydraulic valves."

First to be built in rudimentary form are Kong's arms, based on Rambaldi's design for a ten-meter, or thirty-three-foot, Kong. Guillermin inspects these hands and asks that they be six inches wider, to be better able to hold Jessica Lange. The enlargement of the hands, however, throws them out of proportion to the rest of Kong's body. This means the full-sized Kong has to be taller and wider—but it isn't really a problem because Kong has not been built. Working from the bigger hand, the correct proportions can be maintained if Kong is forty feet, or twelve meters, tall.

Work goes ahead on the full-sized ape, which leaves the production with an unusable right and left hand for a ten-meter Kong. Eventually workable right and left hands are built for a twelve-meter Kong. In theory, the production does have two right hands, but it also has two left hands: the matching sets for two different Kongs.

Of course, Rona has not explained all this to her audience.

Sensing it may have another *Cleopatra* on hand, the national and Hollywood press begin running snide stories. The most damaging is one that appears in *Time* magazine; it is followed by a similar item in *Newsday,* Long Island's biggest newspaper. Both articles imply that without special effects, De Laurentiis' *King Kong* is a basic schlock monster flick that could be cranked out in eight weeks. None of the reporters who have written Kong stories have consulted the production, though they would probably not have believed the official company line, anyway; the mistrust between reporter and news source, especially in the movie business, is long-standing.

There is some talk about having De Laurentiis immediately answer the charges at a press conference; there is also some talk about bringing a handful of reliable journalists to the construction shop and showing them Kong's hand. (They will have to be kept away from the full-sized Kong, who is still just a pile of unassembled wires and valves laid out on a very long table.)

But De Laurentiis maintains a dignified silence. A basic decision, urged by Cathi Polich, Paramount's official liaison between De Laurentiis and the company, was made by Diller early in the production: Kong would be kept a secret. No pictures of him or information about how he worked were to be released until the movie was ready to come out, in December.

De Laurentiis has gone along with the idea and for the time adheres to it. He is shrewd enough to know he can only lose in a running dispute with reporters. A denial never quite negates the charge in the public's mind;

the first one in print or on television makes the lasting impression, as if a charge is always true.

De Laurentiis does make an important staff change. He brings in Gordon Armstrong from Twentieth Century-Fox to be director of publicity and advertising for his corporation. Ready to assist him at Paramount is hard-working, efficient Carol Pokuta, who works for Bob Goodfried in the publicity department. She has an uncanny ability to remember what material has come into her office and where it has been channeled.

At Paramount's New York headquarters, promotion and advertising campaigns go on as if there isn't a single problem back at the studio.

Ralph McGeehan, a talented young artist from Keyport, New Jersey, is brought in to design a *King Kong* newsletter; this will be sent to everyone who has written for the Kong poster. De Laurentiis is pleased with the look of the letter.

Mildred Collins, director of special products for Paramount, proceeds to handle requests from companies seeking promotional tie-ins with the film. With Gordon Weaver, now vice-president in charge of worldwide marketing (they worked on the fabulously successful campaign for Paramount's *The Great Gatsby*), Mildred Collins begins her new campaign by seeking out companies with products that will need national promotion at about the time of *King Kong*'s Christmas release.

"We have to make sure the product goes to the audience at which the film is aimed," she says. "It's a balancing act. By tying in with the film we give the company an exclusive promotion. For instance, Sedgefields Sportswear, which manufactures men's and boys' jeans, will do a plastic key chain giveaway. On one side is a reproduction of the Kong poster, and on the flip side a hair from Kong. Each recipient will also get a letter of certification saying that it really is Kong's hair."

An estimated ten million dollars will be spent on advertising and promotion—much of it in newspapers and magazines, and on television—by companies having tie-ins with the film.

Some of the companies are Jim Beam, GAF Viewmaster, Colgate-Palmolive, Schrafft's candy, and the 7–11 stores.

The Beam liquor company broke into 611 newspapers in September, 1976, with an advertisement containing a Believe-It-Or-Not type column of movie firsts about *King Kong*. (They ran this ad eighteen hundred times.) In January, 1977, Beam will come out with a different ad campaign, promoting a King Kong cocktail made of bourbon, orange juice, grenadine, and a slice of lime.

"We have to hit as broad and diversified a market as possible," Mrs. Collins says.

The children's market is covered by the GAF Viewmaster, which will sell Viewmaster scenes of the production of *King Kong*. Advertising for these goes to the children's television shows on Saturday and Sunday mornings. "The company expects Kong to be one of their all-time great sellers, comparable to *Mary Poppins,*" Mildred says.

Schrafft's is coming out with a King Kong candy bar: a peanut-butter cup covered with chocolate and wrapped in black and bright orange paper with Kong on it. The 7–11 stores will feature their slurpy drink in a special Kong cup. And *Family Circle* magazine will have an iron-on Kong decal in the January, 1977, issue (which actually comes out in December).

"It's really been quite something," Mrs. Collins says.

Another aspect of the tie-in campaign is the licensing of products. This is handled on the West Coast at Paramount by Lou Mindling. The Kong products are Viewmasters, T-shirts, belt buckles, belts, posters, games, articulated and stuffed figures, plastic construction models, and drinking cups.

At Paramount, there is a justifiable pride in what may become the classic movie poster.

Back in October, 1975, just before the company executives were scheduled to fly to Europe to inspect new films there, Barry Diller telephoned Gordon Weaver to notify him that the studio was going to do *King Kong*

with Dino De Laurentiis. Weaver immediately huddled with Steve Rose, executive director of advertising; William O'Hare, executive director of publicity; Jeff Katzenberg, executive director of marketing/administration; and Mildred Collins about future advertising and publicity campaigns. These conferences continued at the airport terminal, on the overseas flight, and with Diller at the Dorchester Hotel in London.

"These were very precise meetings," Weaver says. "We plotted out everything."

Topping the agenda, however, was getting an advertisement announcing the De Laurentiis–Paramount version of Kong into *The New York Times.* (Universal had run its Kong ad on the Sunday the Paramount executives were in London.) Diller wanted the Paramount ad to run the Sunday of his return to the States, which would be November 30, 1975. "I assured Barry it would be a terrific ad," Weaver says.

Four agencies (including Deiner-Hauser, which is used regularly by Paramount) were asked to submit an ad. The three outside presentations were rejected; Hauser's was enthusiastically accepted. Drawn by John Berkey of Minneapolis, who is noted for his science-fiction work, it was the one—somewhat modified in a subsequent version—that became famous.

In the final poster Kong is holding a burning, wrecked airplane. The jets that were in the original drawing have been replaced by helicopters; Kong's right leg is off the south tower of the World Trade Center to indicate he has just jumped from one to the other.

When the first poster was shown to Diller, it had no copy. Right there, Weaver, Rose, and Katzenberg began throwing out lines, and from this skull session came the famous wording: "There still is only one *King Kong* . . . the most exciting, original motion-picture event of all time." It was Weaver's idea to add to the bottom a coupon for the poster.

Rose says they knew the poster was a hit when the men in *The New York Times* composing room called for copies of it before the paper came out. Also, when

Weaver asked to have the original metal plate of the ad, Rose discovered it had already been stolen—and a second plate made for Weaver was stolen, too.

The day after the ad ran, 219 letters arrived at Christabel Winerman's desk at Paramount. She had been assigned to answer them. "I had never even seen the original version of the movie," she says. "I was completely taken by surprise the second day when four thousand letters came in, and there were eight thousand on the third day." Eventually sixty thousand requests for posters came to her.

In the field of pop art, the Kong poster had attained the status of a collector's item.

The public-relations aspect of Kong is of no moment to Robinson and Rambaldi, who go about their jobs as if there isn't a doubt about Kong's fate. When De Laurentiis approves one of Rambaldi's designs for Kong's exterior form, Robinson goes ahead, assembling the pieces of aluminum into a skeleton for the monster.

Robinson speaks cryptically about his pet monster. A degree in engineering seems necessary for a full understanding of how a hydraulic system works, but Robinson assumes everyone knows about hydraulics, and he talks in fragmented sentences, with distant smiles, presupposing more knowledge on the part of a layman than is usual among graduate engineering students.

Through a complex system of valves, hydraulic fluid, and long cables, Kong is activated by hydraulic jacks on a panel to be operated off camera by a number of men: four men for the mechanical hand, seven for the full-sized monster. The mechanical hand has sixteen jacks; the full-sized Kong fifty. Each jack moves a different part of the ape's body, making his toes wiggle, eyes blink, feet lift, head turn, neck rotate, jaw lower, and chest heave.

"The volts, which are started when the hydraulic jacks are turned, control spools in the valves inside Kong's body and arm," Robinson explains.

Now forty feet tall, Kong will eventually weigh six

and a half tons, have a twenty-foot chest span, twenty-foot arms, hands seven feet long from wrist to fingertips and four feet wide, and an aluminum skeleton weighing three and a half tons. Inside his body will be three thousand feet of hydraulic hose and forty-five hundred feet of wiring.

Brought in now to cover up Kong's nakedness is Michael Dino, a noted custom wigmaker for movie stars. He has collected thirty-four samples of various types of hair from which De Laurentiis and Guillermin will make the final selection.

The wigmaker has also done his tour of duty in front of the gorilla cages at the Los Angeles Zoo.



Skull Island "natives," recruited from Los Angeles and surrounding communities, try not to break up as they perform Hollywood's idea of a South Sea islands ceremony. The first assistant director has just reminded them, "This scene is serious!"

"Gorillas are gentle, and they can be fierce," he says. "But Kong has to be special. He's got to have a sympathetic side to his nature—and, watching gorillas for hours, I started to see this quality in them."

While Robinson begins the painstaking process of assembling his piles of wires, aluminum pieces, and valves, Rambaldi continues working on the design of Kong's face, using Federico's photograph of Bum as his model.

"Kong," Rambaldi says, "should have a good character, but one that can become terrible at any moment. While Kong sometimes does horrible things on the screen, he is not basically an ugly beast."

As Kong in all his sizes is beginning to shape up, so is the Wall. It is one of the most elaborate sets erected on a Hollywood back lot since the Civil War South was constructed at Culver City for *Gone With the Wind.* But like the making of a mechanical Kong, the raising of the Wall is a perilous venture.

From the start of production Chiari has gone with a design for a stone wall, similar to the one in the original *King Kong.* But no one is really satisfied with its look, and when principal photography began in mid-January, work on the Wall had not even started. To make matters worse, it is to be the first major set the company will use when it returns from Hawaii.

The idea for the monstrous Wall eventually to be erected on Lot 2 at Metro is based on photographs of primitive native villages in New Guinea, which Guillermin saw in the book *The Gardens of War.* What particularly intrigues the director is a tall tower the natives have built to follow the movements of enemy tribes. The photographs also have a visual quality he likes: a thin haze of smoke wafting over the natives from open fires.

Using these photographs, Hennesy conceives of a wooden wall. It receives De Laurentiis' approval. The Wall has to be enormous—appreciably taller than the full-sized Kong—and if it is to be made entirely of

wood, Hennesy estimates that labor and materials will cost two million dollars.

The Wall ends up forty-seven feet high and five hundred feet long. Its basic ingredients are eucalyptus trees and preheated sheets of plastic that, when painted, look like wooden planks. Small trees are lashed around the telephone poles that hold up the structure. Going into the Wall are 5,500 pounds of nails, 8,157 eucalyptus poles, 126,000 yards of grapevine to hold the trees around the poles, tons of concrete and cement, 150 sheets of preheated plastic, 1,350 gallons of vinyl paint, and 50,000 staples.

Working in two shifts, six days a week, the labor force of one hundred men completes the Wall in eight weeks —a feat that Hennesy would have thought impossible when he designed the set. It will be finished by the time the company resumes shooting in mid-April. And it will cost $800,000.

When the company begins reassembling after the layoff, several days are spent testing the mechanical hand with a stunt girl in it. Then the production shifts to the Wall.

TO THE WALL

April—May, 1976

The huge, awesome black shape looms out of the darkness, cast into dramatic relief by the lights of downtown Culver City. The Wall stands ready for any assaults.

Behind it, as legend has it, is the rotting false front of Tara used in *Gone With the Wind*—in reality, it's probably the set erected for the much later *Raintree County*. Nearby is the empty Esther Williams swimming pool, its cement side cracked, its paint long ago faded, its bottom littered with ankle-deep debris. To the right of the Wall are the peaked roofs and cobblestone streets of a French village, built during World War II and last riddled with bullets during a show in the television series *Combat*. Beyond is Andy Hardy's middle-American street of the 1930s, redressed endlessly until the lot was sold and the homes were left to rot. Metro's Lot 2 is eerie in the darkness, invaded by the blurred, persistent drone of distant night sounds, haunted by the memories of great films once shot in what has become a garbage dump.

Anticipating the sacrifice of yet another beautiful girl to Kong, the natives become actively restless. The bank of arc lights suspended twenty feet above the ground on fork-lift trucks are turned on. A riff of loud, seductive, thumping music composed by Britisher John Barry, of *Born Free* fame, is played over sound-speakers.



On Metro's Lot 2, where the Wall set has been constructed, De Laurentiis tells director Guillermin how he wants a scene shot. Standing by is first assistant director Kurt Neumann.

From the grove of trees, planted long ago for other pictures, come the natives: men in loin cloths (really nothing more than glorified jock straps), and women in bits and pieces of straw and cloth that cover only enough flesh to keep the rating at PG.

"Kong! Kong! Kong!" rises the chant, and soon all of Sally Perle's three hundred extras, black men and women recruited from Los Angeles and surrounding communities, are within range of the camera. The sturdiest ones are assigned to carry the wooden platform on which a beflowered "native" girl sits cross-legged. Around her, dancers are stomping and swaying to the irresistible music. The procession stops at the gate in the center of the Wall. Through it the girl will be carried to the altar; there she will be bound and left for Kong. The dancers continue their wild motions until the director snaps, "Cut!"

Kurt Neumann, the first assistant director, puts the

bullhorn to his mouth and says, "Remember, now, we talked about laughing. This scene is serious. And we had people looking up at the cameras."

Another take is ordered. This time the female dancers put more oomph into their shoulder movements, which tend to enlarge the appearance of their breasts with each thrust.

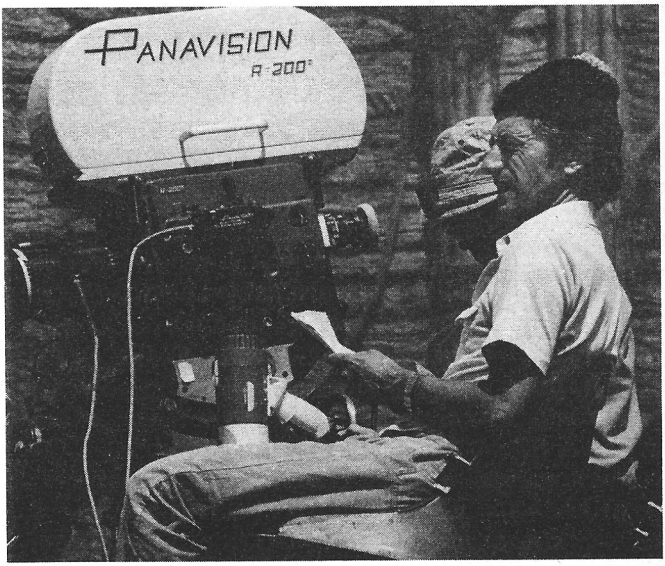
"Kong! Kong! Kong!"

Guillermin turns to his assistant director. "Better?" he asks.

Neumann nods affirmatively.

"That's fine, folks," Guillermin says. "But let's do it one more time."

Bosoms heave. Loins quiver. Feet raise dust from the arid ground. The girl to be sacrificed stares blankly at the gate. The director remains inscrutable, his pipe clenched in his teeth.



Director John Guillermin, his pipe clenched characteristically between his teeth and a bullhorn between his knees, squints at a scene he is filming in front of the Wall.

Surviving is what counts in Hollywood, and against the betting odds of many in the crew, Guillermin is still with the picture. The realization that he will not be removed has steadied him, leveled his anxieties. He is practically serene amid the frenzy of the extras in this make-believe native village patterned on photographs of Borneo.

He says now, and will repeat over the months to come, that the demands of the shooting schedule—to have Kong out by Christmas—make every day's work a kind of madness. "Crazy," he mutters. "Simply crazy."

Behind him is the Kauai experience, never very pleasant for him emotionally. But he would agree with Bob Kocourek's judgment that the time in Hawaii was needed for the crew and cast to get to know one another. It was a shakedown cruise for the troops, preparing them for the larger war. Guillermin is in firmer control now of this picture; it can be *his* picture if what he gets on film works.

The extras reassemble in the trees and come forth on the music cue for the third take.

Guillermin is really not a slow director. He gets his shots in three or four takes, rarely asking for more. He is addicted to careful preparation, which is mandatory for the large-sized pictures he has worked on. But the *King Kong* shooting—dictated by when the sets go up (and many of them are still behind the announced construction schedule)—defies precise organization. There is something almost improvisational about this filming. Yet the sheer size of it—the number of people in front of the camera for any given scene, the intricate logistics required for moving equipment and people between the sound stages, and the painstaking optical processes—make getting the film done a very slow process. Waiting becomes a way of life.

"There's no way you can rush this shooting," Doris Grau comments.

A piece of Culver City begins to truly look like Borneo this morning as the extras line up outside the

costume shack on Main Street, in the middle of the studio. When *King Kong* first began, Metro was practically deserted; the streets were empty during the day. De Laurentiis and his pictures have brought life to these streets. Now music and voices fill the air, the crew continually wheel lights and cameras over the pavement, and at noon extras in costumes walk briskly to the commissary, jockeying for a front position in the food line.

Most of the Kong extras are "waivers," nonunion people. Usually a certain percentage of extras on any picture this size must be members of the Screen Actors Guild, but when SAG does not have members who fit the description of the people needed, it permits hiring outside the union ranks.

In his discussions with Sally Perle, Guillermin brought with him a book by Margaret Mead on the people of the Stone Age. He wanted this look for his extras, and SAG was unable to come up with them. Of the paid extras, most are professional dancers.

"John wanted small, skinny, broad-featured natives," Sally says. "The union only had very pretty blacks, so they gave us a waiver for most of our extras. When they can't supply us, we can go out and find them."

Sally first went to the so-called impacted areas in Long Beach, Pasadena, and Watts that receive federal funds for minority programs; then she went to social clubs and churches in the black areas of Los Angeles. She came up with more than three hundred people, most of them young and out of work, many of them college students, a few of them teachers, all eager to get the twenty-five dollars a night and the meal that comes with it.

Some extras come from as far away as Riverside, and transportation poses a problem for many without cars. Working at least until midnight, they find that bus service from Culver City to other parts of Los Angeles is nonexistent or, at best, spotty. They begin doubling up on rides, helping one another out.

Now they wait to be checked out by their dressers.

Awkward in their near nakedness, they keep their eyes on the pavement to avoid the stares of passersby.

"I haven't seen so much bare ass in my life," says John Franco, Jr., the set decorator. He has been on Lot 2 for hours, dressing the native village with real bananas and mangos flown in from Mexico. Keeping a few days ahead of the shooting, he is now working on the miniature Wall set inside one of the sound stages—all of which look alike. They are identifiable only by the big black numbers painted on the walls and sliding doors.

Franco does not have to be on the set tonight, but he exhibits a quality that is eventually noticed about most of the *King Kong* crew: a willingness, perhaps motivated by the long shooting schedule and the complexity of it, to be around the set even when he's not required, to pitch in and assist. This makes it a special crew.

The girl on the platform in the center of the procession passes Franco. "Real vulture feathers and ostrich plumes on her," he says. It is obvious that the look of the village pleases him. "But where am I going to find the fruit baskets for the miniature Wall set?" His thinking remains several days ahead of the camera.

To use the back lot at night, the production has to consult with Culver City officials and police. Noise-abatement ordinances prohibit any loud disturbances after 10 P.M. Shooting can go on all night as long as there is no noise, but silence is of course impossible when dealing with more than three hundred chanting, dancing extras and accompanying music.

A bit of public relations is used. People who live in the houses next to the back lot are invited to see the night's shooting, but they are so far back from the cameras that they can barely see the backs of the heads of the crew, let alone the extras in their full glory. They get impatient and go home.

On the first night of shooting at the Wall, the first take is recorded at 10:45 P.M. The first call from irate neighbors arrives at police headquarters before midnight. The production can be shut down if the noise continues.

At this hour only Metro is pleased to have Kong on



Richard Kline, director of photography, and De Laurentiis confer on the Wall set on Metro's Lot 2 in Culver City.

the back lot. Metro no longer owns it, having sold off everything from back lots to costumes to stave off bankruptcy. But with so much filming now going on at the studio, Metro would like to buy back Lot 2. Unfortunately, the asking price is now double what Metro sold it for.

"Ingrates," a grip sneers, nodding toward the row of houses beyond the back fence. "They should be happy we're bringing work to this dump."

Jack Solomon, the sound man, is leaning on his control panel, beating time with his fingers to a tune he is humming to himself. The collective sound of the natives chanting is being recorded, but Solomon is not worrying too much about the balance, knowing some of this will have to be dubbed on the soundtrack in the studio.

"I don't make a fuss over what's not going to be in the picture," he says. "*King Kong* is a pictorial movie. The dialogue in it isn't too important."

Solomon is a man well into his middle years, still lean, with gray hair that he wears in a youthful style: long on the forehead and over the ears. He is an encyclopedia of memories about Hollywood's better days, and during the dull spots in the shooting he amuses the crew with ribald stories about the sexual gymnastics some of the more famous actresses used to perform on their lunch breaks. A particular favorite is his tale about how he was fired from a picture near the beginning of his career for holding the sound boom over a star's dressing room while she was entertaining a male guest on her couch. (In those days the dressing rooms on the sound stages had walls but no roofs.) The love chatter broke up the crew but infuriated the star; Solomon was off the lot in an hour. Years later Solomon again worked with that star. He reminded her of the incident, and, thinking she would want to fire him again, offered to quit. Instead, she smiled forlornly and said wistfully, "If only the men would come to my dressing room now."

A Polish suburb of Detroit was Solomon's home through his teen years, but he always wanted to travel.

Not necessarily to the West Coast; it just happened that way. Like many teenagers during the Depression, Jack hit the road, a tramp athlete bumming his way across the country and picking up games for a few dollars to cover meals and board. Eventually he reached California.

At that time the various Hollywood studios supported teams that competed with one another, and there was competitive bidding for the young athletes who drifted into town. Solomon was hired to play ball, but an older man at the studio, a mixer from New York, became his mentor and talked him into giving up sports to work in the studio's sound department.

There Solomon met Robert Aldrich, and they became best friends, as they are today. Now they reminisce about how they worked their way up in the business, Aldrich going into directing, becoming hugely successful with *The Dirty Dozen,* and Solomon winding up as one of the most respected craftsmen in sound mixing.

In the first pictures, Solomon worked as a boom man at Monogram and Republic studios, long since gone from the Hollywood landscape. Only the name of Vera Hruba Ralston and the U.S. Marine charge John Wayne led up the mountain on Iwo Jima are remembered from these studios' largely inferior pictures.

In 1940 Jack was hired as boom man on Orson Welles' first movie, *Citizen Kane,* and in 1946 he worked on what he still considers the greatest movie Hollywood ever made: *The Best Years of Our Lives.*

"Seeing it is like reading a great novel," he comments. "It remains the textbook for the movie industry. The film is successful because the audience can identify with what is happening on the screen. The people may never have experienced the emotions and situations themselves, but at least they dream they could have, and that is the secret of all art."

In 1950 Solomon moved up from boom man to sound mixer, collecting eight Academy Award nominations and winning twice—for *The Alamo* and *Hello, Dolly.*

"The big difference in mixing from when I started is the use of tape. Before, it would go on film."

Another big change is in the pay scale for sound men. In the late 1930s they would get one hundred fifty dollars a week. The minimum now is about a hundred a day, but the best mixers make their own deals. "I don't work for scale," Solomon adds. He's not boasting, just acknowledging the fact that a professional recognized by his peers can make certain pay demands and usually get them.

Solomon works most of the time. Many in his union do not, since movie production continues to shrink. "There are about twelve hundred sound men in my union, of whom three to four hundred are mixers, and I'd say only about ninety mixers keep working the year round."

What makes a good mixer?

"You've got to have a good ear and judgment. That's about what it takes."

What is the difference between the stars of today and those of the forties and fifties?

"Back in those days the stars didn't have anything to prove. They just accepted their star status and didn't fight it. And they had a tongue-in-cheek attitude about who they were. The studio heads then were tough enough to get the stars to do a day's job for a day's pay. Most of them had come up the hard way, and they appreciated what they had."

The best, Jack thinks, was Robert Ryan, who died several years ago of cancer. Solomon worked with Ryan on *Marine Raiders* and *Tender Comrade*. "On the screen," he says, "Bob Ryan registered as a fine human being, and as a person and an actor, he got better as he aged."

Does Solomon have any regrets that he didn't go to the other coast and into professional sports?

"The business has been very good to me," he replies.

Solomon cannot regulate the noise of the movie natives, and no one can do anything about the smoke

from the fires burning on the set. It is the combination of these elements that gets the company into legal trouble. Terry Carr, who by now has probably had second thoughts about giving up his budding career as a jazz musician, must represent the company's interests before local government officialdom.

The first citation is for violations of the air-pollution code by using open fires. The company has already obtained a variance to bend the code a bit until the shooting is over, but someone must also make an appearance before the Los Angeles County Air Pollution Control Board. The defense is that the shooting is only temporary; that natural tree sap, which is being burned in the fires, does not produce health-endangering industrial smoke; and that *King Kong* is employing hundreds of people who would otherwise be collecting unemployment checks, thus providing a service to the community. The case is argued persuasively enough for the board to extend the variance for the short duration of the backlot shooting.

Then there are the noise citations. In the office of the Culver City Manager a repentant and, as always, sincere Carr, his voice even more boyish and trusting than usual, swears that the company will not shoot after midnight. Since shooting at the Wall is almost completed, this concession is a nice community gesture without much effect on the remaining schedule, which is now divided into half day shooting, half night. As it turns out, the company is not too careful about keeping an eye on the clock. On more than one night shooting goes on past the witching hour.

Most of *King Kong* takes place at night. One of the few daytime scenes is the one in which the *Petrox Explorer* crew and the intrepid Dwan come ashore on Skull Island, make their way down the side of the mountain to a choice location behind some boulders, and there observe the activities of the natives at the Wall. The natives spot the intruders and charge up the hill to get a better look. They only have eyes for Dwan, and,



Skull Island natives dance around the girl who is to be sacrificed to Kong. Their costumes are based on those of real-life natives of Borneo.

through sign language, they indicate that she should come with them. She declines, and the *Petrox Explorer* crew scares off the natives by firing guns over their heads.

The movie mountain is made of concrete, poured and left to harden over a wooden frame, which in turn is supported by telephone poles. The surface is a soft composition painted a dull green. It may be a phony, but the mountain rises to a height of nearly forty feet. There is no railing to protect those who may wander too near the edge, and the uneven surface makes it extremely difficult for the actors to walk. While these conditions are not particularly important in this scene, they could pose serious problems later when the *Petrox Explorer* crew returns to the village to rescue Dwan. (She has been

captured by the natives and put upon the altar as a sacrifice to Kong.)

The extras in full costume are spinning and hopping through a post-sacrifice dance when the men from the *Petrox Explorer* charge at full speed down the mountainside. A flare fired over the natives' heads terrifies them, and they scatter for the interior—which, on the set, is behind the line of lights and camera. Of the *Petrox Explorer* people, only Bridges, O'Halloran, and Lauter manage to move with athletic poise on the dash down the mountain; the other actors barely manage to make it down without falling. Granted, the packs on their backs and the act of firing the guns over their heads do pose real problems of balance, but even so, their basic movements are lumbering and uncoordinated; they are made even clumsier because they have to look at the ground frequently to keep from tripping over the outcroppings of rocks.

Bridges reaches the bottom first. Everyone expects him to make it, but there are doubts about Grodin. Grodin surprises even himself, though, even if his running form wouldn't exactly qualify him for the next Olympics. One by one, the other actors follow down the hill. Amazingly, no one falls.

"They can put away the insurance policy for another night," someone comments drily.

Between takes, the extras try to stay warm by sitting around the two big bonfires at either side of the gate to the Wall. They are into moviemaking, and few complain about working conditions. Pay is pay.

At the beginning of shooting at the Wall, the extras did carp about the special conditioner they have to use to give their hair a muddy color. It irritates the scalp and is difficult to wash out. The women, being pragmatists, have bought cheap wigs to wear in the scene.

"It's a happy bunch of extras," Sally Perle purrs. "They even beg me to keep them on the nights when we have to cut back on the numbers being used."

To show her appreciation, she brings a carton of marshmallows, and the extras gleefully poke sticks into



Dwan is seized from the *Petrox Explorer,* to be readied as a peace offering to the mighty Kong.

them and hold them over the fire; some wait too long and the marshmallows burst into flames, burning down to little more than charred black blisters.

Sally's largesse is later reported in a magazine as an example of racist paternalism. The magazine reporter did not interview the extras, who seem to have thoroughly enjoyed the marshmallow roast, interpreting it in the spirit in which it was intended—as a spontaneous moment of fun.

Sally is genuinely fond of them. She's the type who would have brought out chicken soup on the cold nights if food were not already provided. She sympathizes with

the extras, giving the impression that she is on their side against management, even if she offers this support in the most general, noncommittal form.

On a manmade rise just below the mountain a group of extras start tapping the bongo drums used as props in the film. An impromptu jam session begins. Men and women, their bodies oblivious to the cold now, drop their coats and blankets and move to the hypnotic rhythms. People drift away from the cameras being set up for the next shot and surround the rise. A camera crew on the set to get footage for a proposed television featurette turn their cameras on the dancers, who see them and become even more animated, showing off.

"Hey, man, it's the Kong hustle!" one of the male dancers calls out, doing a lot of gyrations before swinging into the bump, touching hips with the girl nearest him.

"No better way to keep warm," she adds.

The only large drop-off among the extras comes near the start of shooting at the Wall, when it rains—not steadily enough to stop the filming, but enough to make the extras, forced to sit unprotected in it, uncomfortable. Illuminated by the arc lights, the rain is really a persistent cold drizzle. Many extras want to escape by going home early for the night. Sally and two assistant directors, Nate Haggard and David McGiffert, who are in charge of moving the extras in the scene, talk patiently but forcefully with the recalcitrants. No one goes home this night, but a good number in this group do not return the next evening.

Apparent from the first night is the effect of drugs and liquor on some of the extras.

"After an hour with them up on the Wall, I come down half ripped," McGiffert says.

If it were only marijuana—accepted, like a can of beer, as an appropriate social stimulant—no one would protest. But some of the extras sprinkle angel dust, a potent animal tranquilizer, over the grass, and this, combined with booze and other drugs, causes two ODs. One



The Americans, led by Charles Grodin, storm the native encampment and try to rescue Dwan, but without success.

of them makes his way to the production office, a trailer near the food tents, and drops to the floor, writhing and clutching at his flesh, screaming that his body is on fire. He is taken to the hospital. The ODs are reported in *New West* magazine. But there are no repercussions, since the Wall sequence is finished by the time the article appears.

In some sequences the extras' work is quite dangerous. Leading to a platform that runs along the top of the Wall are two rather flimsy ramps. In one scene the natives must dash up the ramps with torches in their

hands, lining the top of the Wall to watch Kong make off with the girl. The extras are barefooted; a few have on thin sandals. The ramps are made of eucalyptus limbs, and there are big spaces between many of the branches. While running up and down the ramps, the extras have to look out for the holes. A foot caught in one of them could be easily broken. But they improvise a way of *seeming* to run while avoiding the holes by taking giant strides; this creates the effect of running, while giving the extras time to look down.

Once on top of the Wall, staring at the girl on the altar, the extras are disappointed that the forty-foot Kong is not there.



The natives, greatly pleased with their prize, celebrate Dwan's capture.



Dwan, apparently in a stupor, waits passively to be sacrificed.

"Come out of those bushes, Kong. Don't be afraid of her."

"Hey, lady! Up here. I'm Kong."

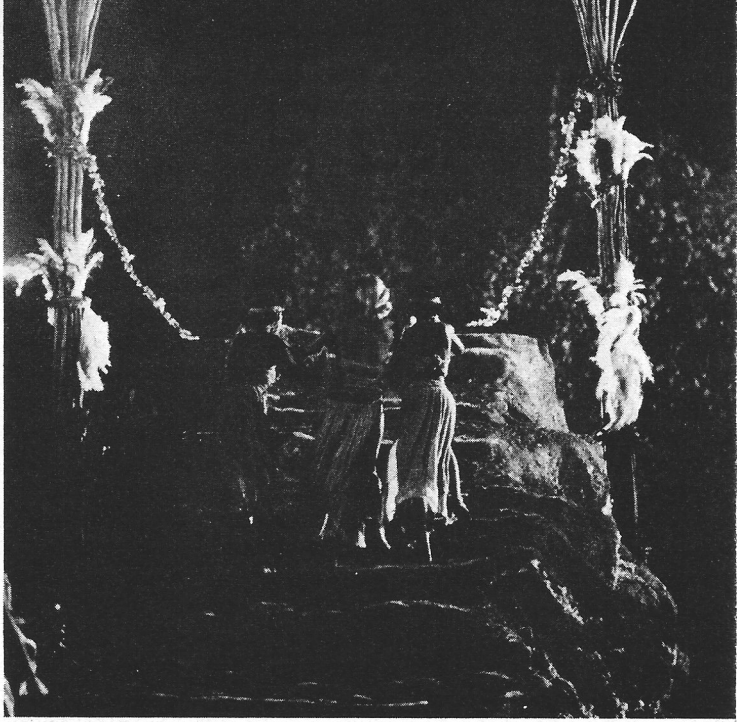
The camera is on her; though there is no monster in front of Jessica, she struggles convincingly in her bondage.

The extras are not satisfied doing scenes with the movie stars. They want Kong, the forty-foot mechanical ape, and each night the question is repeated: "Where's Kong?"

When they're not required in front of the cameras, Jeff and Jessica do not linger at the Wall. They retire to their separate dressing-room trailers, parked behind the Wall in front of the burned-out southern mansion. Bridges is a loner, staying by himself in his trailer, reading books suggested by his friends or playing his guitar.

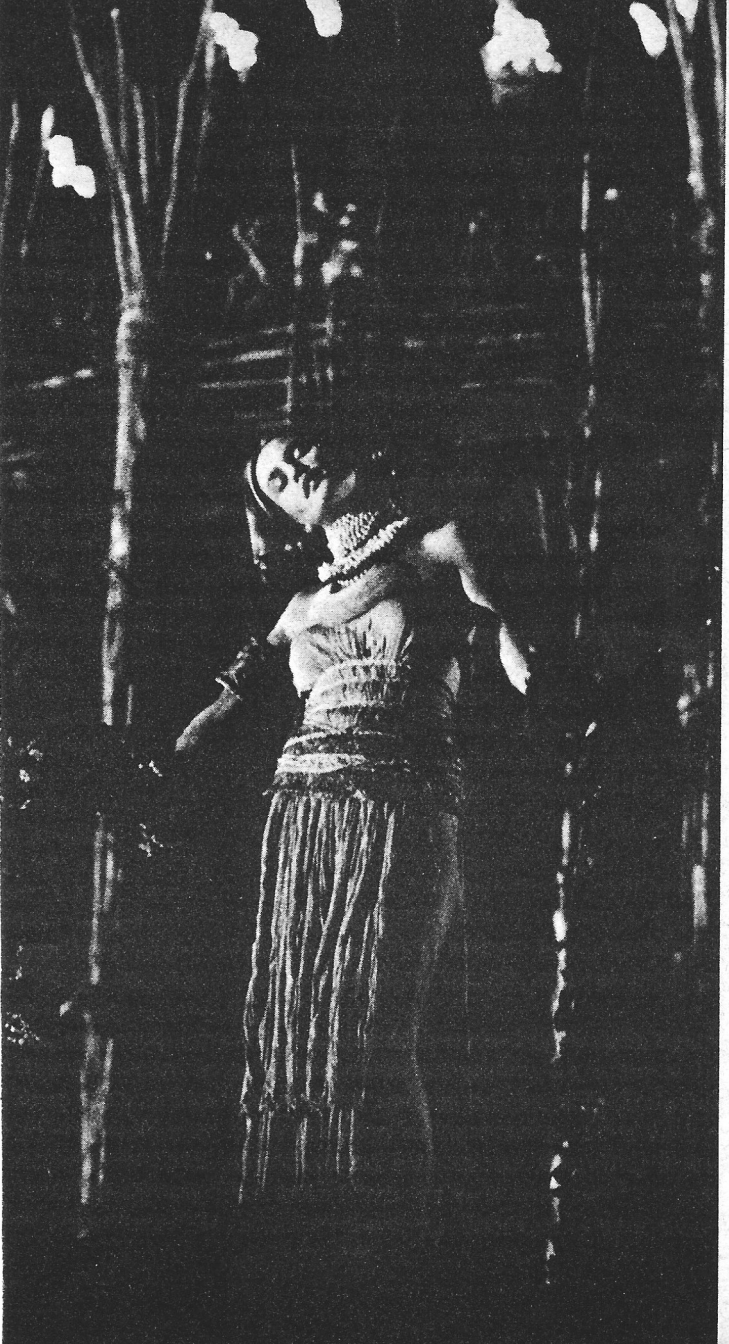
Jessica, on the other hand, rarely stays alone. She has developed an informal social relationship with the people who get her ready for the camera: Fern Weber, the costumer, who spends almost an hour each night sewing her into her skin-tight sacrificial garb; Jo McCarthy, her hair stylist; and Del Acevedo, the makeup man. Jessica spends her free time with them, swapping gossip and jokes. They're usually joined by a puppy Jessica has acquired, a Scottie named Jake, who becomes a real movie dog, romping with the crew, grabbing hold of pants legs and tugging at them.

Grodin, who shares equal billing with Bridges and Lange, thinks he should have a trailer as large as those of his co-stars, and he makes a formal request for one. The crew shows him one next to the Wall, pointing out that it has more floor space than Jessica's. But Grodin is dissatisfied because it lacks a toilet. The grips, practical jokers at heart, go to a junk pile and return with a beat-up toilet bowl, which they put in the corner of the trailer, sticking some flowering weeds in it. But when Grodin is shown the redecorated trailer, he is not amused.



Dwan is dragged up onto the stone altar by two native women, tied with vines, and left for Kong.





Shooting at the Wall proceeds on schedule, but the cast and crew often have the feeling they're working in a place under siege—sometimes literally. One night a frightening call comes into the production office. A man's voice says there will be a sniper on the lot tonight. Though several security guards watch the front gate, their function is mostly traffic control. And anyone can get onto the back lot simply by scaling the small wire fence running around it. A search is immediately made, but it can only be haphazard, considering the size of the staff and the vast number of potential hiding places on the lot. No one is found. Filming continues. But apprehension is not easily dispelled.

The next day it is assumed that the call came from a disgruntled extra who had recently been laid off. There is no solid evidence against him, only a general suspicion, and no formal accusations are made.

Then, a few nights later, a bomb threat is phoned in to the production office. Again, a quick search is made of the grounds, but without calling in an army regiment it would be almost impossible to find a bomb in the debris of the sets. Some thought is given to shutting down for the night, since it is already eleven o'clock, only an hour before the official closing time. But Guillermin presses on with the shooting. The scene is at the altar, which is in a clearing in front of the Wall.

In the distance, a car backfires. Everyone jumps. But no sniper ever appears, no bomb ever explodes. Soon the incidents are forgotten in the very real, ever-present danger of missing the Christmas deadline.

On the night of the most spectacular sequence, with Dwan struggling on the sacrificial altar—and three hundred extras dancing and chanting, torches blazing on top of the Wall, and men rushing down the ramp—Ingmar Bergman pays a visit.

All day the rumor that he may show up has been circulating, and everyone worries about how to act if he or she is introduced to him. Those who think of him as a cinematic god would not feel foolish bowing to him for his movie masterpieces. One person makes up his

mind to decline any offer of an introduction, knowing that anything that he can say about how deeply the director has moved him with so many brilliant films will only come out sounding banal and foolish.

Bergman has arrived recently in America after going into self-imposed exile from his native Sweden because of a dispute with the government over taxes. De Laurentiis publicly welcomed Bergman to Hollywood with a full-page ad in the trades. It was a shrewd gesture, for it put De Laurentiis on the side of the angels in Bergman's conflict with the Swedish government. Here is one of the few geniuses in the world movie industry being oppressed unfairly by a mindless bureaucracy—and who welcomes him to the land of the free but Dino De Laurentiis, another European in America. De Laurentiis, incidentally, has Bergman signed up to do another film later in the year. It will be shot in Munich and will deal with the Nazi rise to power in Germany of the 1920s. De Laurentiis can move in the best and most prestigious circles, and a film association with Bergman does lend very high artistic credibility.

Bergman, with his wife, is escorted to the set by Federico De Laurentiis. He stands on an elevated plane, on the slope of the fake mountain, while below him the extras, unaware of who he is, go through their dance, running up and down the ramps.

In his well-worn hat and dark topcoat, Bergman resembles a Lutheran minister sentenced to a parish in a cold climate. A man of stoical mien, he looks as if he has endured and survived all the ills of society and of the soul. He has a reputation for having a violent temper, but on this set he shows nothing but polite interest in the production and in the crew, asking each member he meets about his job and how things are going. He leaves them all with the impression that he really cares.

Guillermin is brought up the hill to meet him.

"How are you?" Bergman asks.

Smiling and extending his hand, Guillermin tries to make a joke to cover any nervousness he feels about

meeting the Master. "What are you doing here? Slumming?"

Bergman asks how long it has taken him to prepare the scene.

"Not long enough," Guillermin responds, the irony of those words lost on Bergman.

"It took me three years of preparation for *The Magic Flute,*" Bergman informs him. "What kind of film is *King Kong* going to be?"

"Romantic," Guillermin replies. He excuses himself and returns to the native village.

Federico explains the scene to be shot to Bergman, who then relays the information to his wife. "They are going to make a dance," he says clearly in English.

Bergman is amazed when he hears that the cost of the Wall is about $800,000. In Sweden, he says, he could make two entire pictures for that amount of money.

From behind the camera, after a rehearsal of the dance, Guillermin says, "Make it frantic. All hell is going to break loose."

On film, everyone hopes, the scene will convey the impression of sweating native dancers in a steamy tropical village. But on the set the Hollywood night air borders on the frigid.

"It is cold for the people," Bergman says sympathetically, referring to the mostly naked extras. He wants to know what they get paid and how long they work. His films are shot between the hours of 9 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. for, he says, "It is impossible to be creative beyond a certain number of hours."

Bergman seems genuinely interested in the shooting. For a European filmmaker used to small budgets, this production must symbolize the Hollywood he has always read about.

"If the producer is not here," he asks, "who is to see where the money goes?"

It is a significant question. However, Dino De Laurentiis knows very well where the money is going. *King Kong* is getting to be a fabulously expensive movie. De

Laurentiis is also very much aware that the picture is getting a bad press. *Time* magazine, particularly, keeps harping on the technical problems besetting the making of a mechanical Kong.

Until now, De Laurentiis has stuck by the earlier decision to keep the set closed to the press, permitting no stories or photos of the mechanical Kong to go out before the picture is released. But on the advice of Gordon Armstrong, De Laurentiis agrees to let a European camera crew film a television interview for the foreign market and also to talk with veteran Hollywood AP correspondent Bob Thomas. He hopes that a favorable story—and Thomas' reputation is not for being a tough critic—will appear in newspapers across the country and stop the rumors that Kong is a disaster.

The camera crew is taken to the art department, where the walls are covered with storyboards, and there are models of the sets under construction: the ravine and the crater. Hennesy does not usually make models of his sets, but construction for Kong is so hurried, and so complicated, that models of the big sets are necessary.

De Laurentiis is on time, accompanied by Armstrong. The interviewer is a young, attractive woman, and the producer turns on the Continental charm with wit and easy smiles. It is agreed that De Laurentiis will do the interview in English, though some thought was given to having him do it in French; it can be dubbed later for the foreign markets. He will answer the questions while giving the interviewer a tour of the art department, the storyboards featured prominently in the background.

First he is asked about his role as producer.

"A producer does too much. If the picture is a flop, a hundred-percent responsibility belongs to the producer. He selected the script, cast, editor, and director. But if the picture is a success, it belongs to everyone, including the producer."

The advantage of being an independent producer in Hollywood, De Laurentiis thinks, is that "you are not a slave of the studio."

Asked about the violence in *Death Wish* and *Serpico,* he answers, "Violence is around us. The motion picture industry is in the middle of our society, and if you make pictures about the world we live in, then the violence must be shown. These pictures had a story the people in the audience identified with. They believed them to be real stories. And audiences are looking now only for good movies. They are much more selective today.

"We are showmen," he continues. "We work for an audience. Moviemaking must be a one-man decision, and this man must work for his audience."

King Kong, he believes, is a special movie because it has a basic appeal to all audiences. "It is a good story for everybody, about beauty and the beast. And we are telling it with quality. It must be better than the original to succeed with movie audiences." He repeats his pledge to have it finished and out by Christmas, though confessing, "It is the most complicated picture of my life."

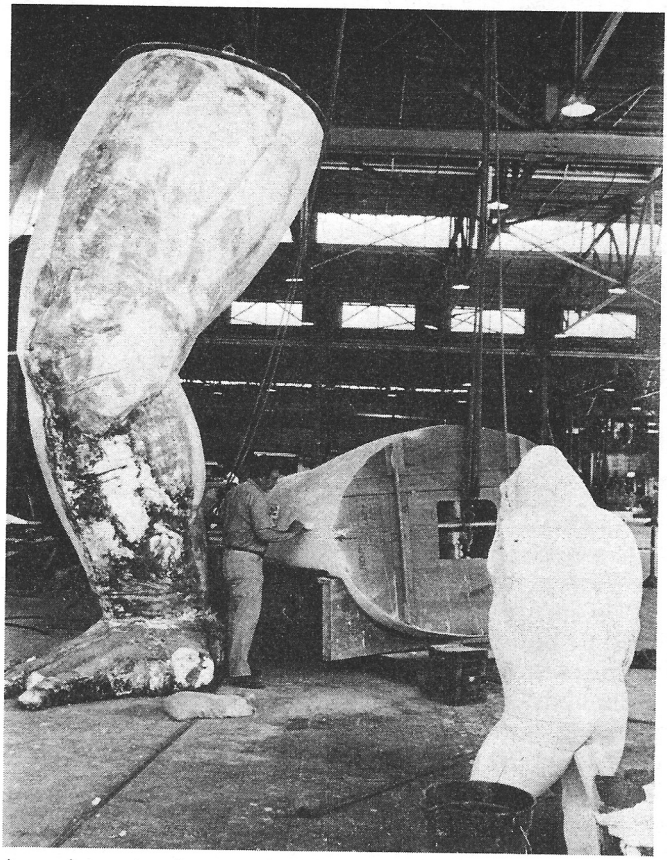
It is a short, satisfying interview. The questions are harmless generalities and give De Laurentiis an opportunity to be positive about his film.

In his private office with Bob Thomas, the AP man, De Laurentiis comes over as straightforward—hiding nothing, talking honestly about the picture's problems. In a one-on-one situation he is superb.

"Every one of my pictures has problems," he says, ticking off *The Bible, War and Peace.* "But Kong is a special situation. When I decided to make the picture last year—and I had an approved script in August—I knew I would need seven, eight months of preparation, and I planned to start shooting on April fifteenth.

"Then, in November, Universal says it's going to start its own *King Kong* on January fifth. I don't believe it, but this industry is so crazy, they just may do it. I had to start my picture in January, too, and I saw I was going to be in a big race with Universal.

"My production staff supported my decision to start on January fifteenth. We knew that without the mechan-



A workman touches up the forty-foot Kong's left leg; the right leg stands behind him. A man-sized Kong model lurks in the foreground.

ical Kong and special-effects scenes, principal photography could be completed on *King Kong* in ten weeks.

"And we had to face the possibility of shutting down production, once we had started, if the sets weren't caught up."

De Laurentiis suggests that Universal knew he was going to win the race and that the studio started to talk settlement early on. "But by then it was too late to stop our production, and because of this race with Universal it cost maybe three to four million dollars more."

In a frank assessment of his film's chances at the box office, De Laurentiis states, "It will be a success only if it is a better picture than the first Kong. It must have a huge quality to it."

He went to a full-sized mechanical ape, he explains, because today audiences will not accept what they did forty years ago, when the original Kong was made. The stop-motion photography with a miniature model was too artificial.

Claiming that his Kong is a completely different story, though still retaining the basic beauty-and-the-beast plot line, he says, "It is a straight romantic adventure picture, with some humor. It is a picture for everyone, good entertainment for the whole family."

The rating will be PG. "We have a relationship between beauty and the beast, so it can't be just a G," he adds with a sly smile.

De Laurentiis is relaxed now. Thomas has asked no upsetting questions. The producer leans back in his chair, puts his hands behind his head and his feet up on the desk, and stares at the ceiling. The day looks good to him. The press has been met and conquered by frankness—at least as much as necessary to make the point—and charm. He has come a long way in his fifty-seven years, surmounting financial catastrophes to land on the top in Hollywood.

According to Dino De Laurentiis' official biography, he was born in a small town outside Naples. When he left home in his teens, it was to sell pasta for his father's

spaghetti factory. But once in Rome he decided to study film. Thinking this decision was just a whim, his father cut off his allowance, prompting De Laurentiis to get a job as an actor.

By the age of twenty he was running a small studio, and he then decided to produce his own motion pictures. *La Strada* gave him critical acclaim, but it was *Bitter Rice* that paid off at the international box office. He married its star, Silvana Mangano.

With this success, De Laurentiis went ahead with plans to build one of the world's largest and best-equipped movie studios just outside Rome. Unfortunately, the Italian film industry went into a severe depression, and De Laurentiis suffered through several financial reverses before making the decision to come to the United States.

He is unable to conceal his childlike fascination with moviemaking; it is like a dazzling toy he has cherished since infancy. Participation in the process of film keeps one forever youthful, and De Laurentiis looks remarkably fit.

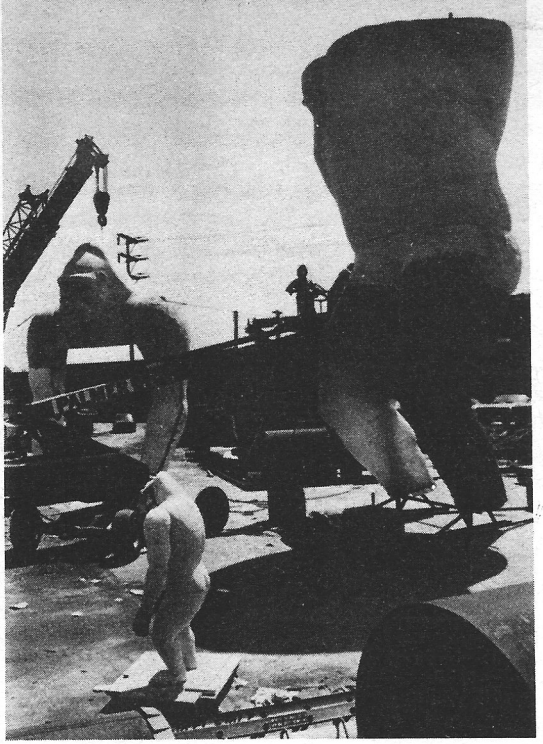
The formal part of the interview is over, but De Laurentiis still wants to talk about film.

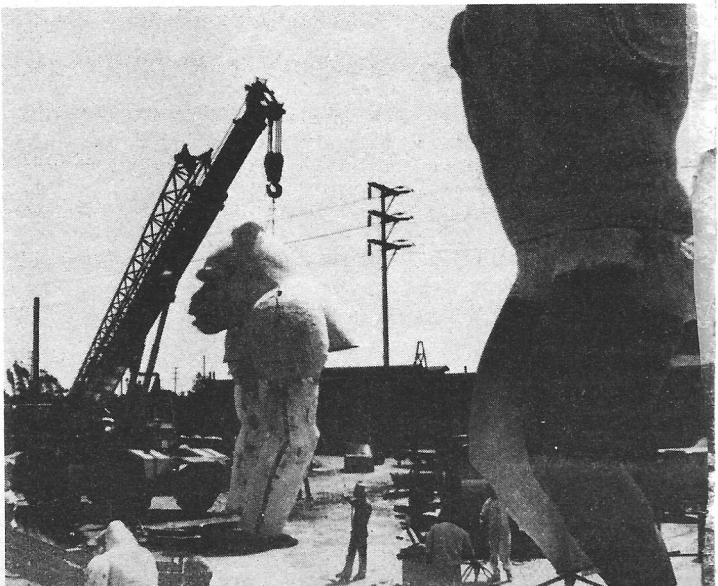
"In Kong, the monster is the star. But in a western you need a human star. The audience wants to identify with a hero, a McQueen or a Newman, not some unknown.

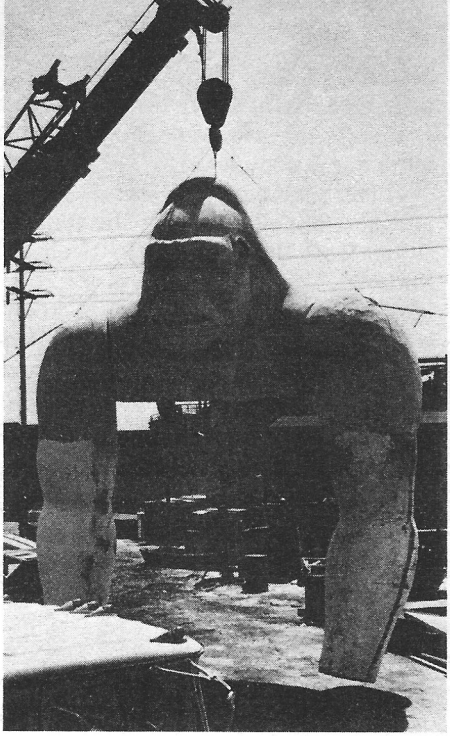
"You know," he reminisces, "I put Burt Reynolds in his first picture. He played an Indian in a 'spaghetti Western.' "

Back at the Wall, work with the extras is over. The principal actors go through the scene in which the *Petrox Explorer* crew swing open the gate and, exhausted, Jeff and Jessica stumble through it a few steps ahead of Kong.

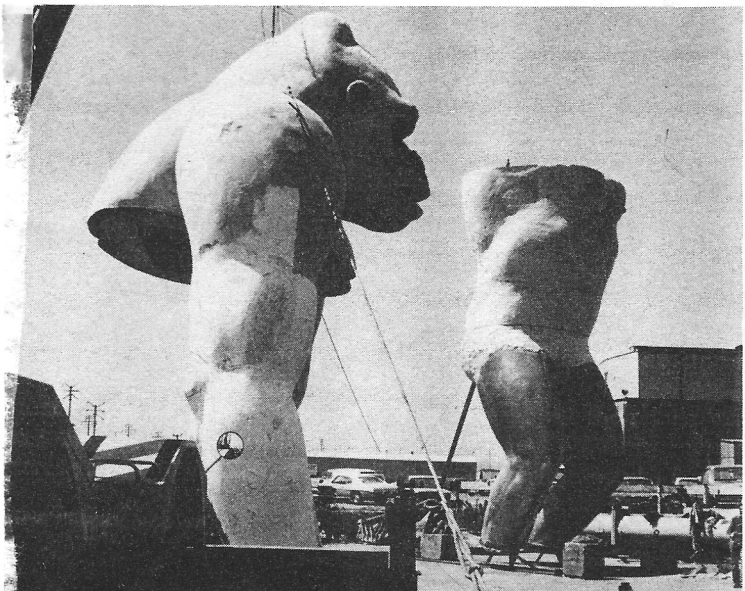
Jeff does the scene bare-chested. It is a cold night in Hollywood, but he has to be sweating in the Skull Island heat. Del Acevedo squirts a shivering Bridges with water. The scene has to be redone several times







Workmen prepare to assemble the forty-foot Kong with heavy construction equipment. The smaller model stands by.



because Bridges is taking too long to pull open the huge gate. Before each take, he is doused again.

Finally the gate is closed for the last time. The Wall sequence is completed.

It has been costly. A box of Nikon cameras, the latest and best models, used in the film by Bridges, has been stolen from the prop truck. Their value is an estimated $20,000. Also missing is a $1,200 jeweled watch belonging to Dino De Laurentiis, borrowed for Grodin to wear in the film. At the start of production Guillermin wanted to buy an expensive Cartier watch, but De Laurentiis, cost-conscious, said Grodin could use his. The watch, when not in use, was locked in a box that was in turn locked in the prop truck.

Everyone knows the theft is an inside job, and no one is particularly surprised. Looting on a movie set is a fact of life as natural and American as apple pie. Surprisingly, no one accuses the extras of the crime.

THE GIRL IN THE HAND

April—May, 1976

Kong's automated right hand is the first part of his body to be finished. It is made of foam rubber and covered with panels of Argentinian horse tails, each strand some twenty inches long, the color a somber black-brown. It will be Jessica's principal acting partner for the rest of the film.

For a novice screen actress—and Jessica is the first to admit she has to learn her craft—playing to a mechanical hand extended from a forty-foot monster that's not even there has to be somewhat unnerving.

"John Guillermin made it so easy for me the first day in front of the camera. They were easy shots without dialogue, to be used in a montage. It was just like posing as a model," she says. But the euphoria lasted only one more shooting day before she was taken to sea and dumped, soaking wet, into a rubber raft.

And now, the morning after she has been snatched off the altar by Kong, she is staring up at the massive mechanical hand, waiting for it to come down to trap her as she attempts to escape. Off camera four men are working the sixteen hydraulic jacks to limber up the hand.

Standing in a full-scale jungle set, wearing native jewelry and the sacrifice gown and looking very beautiful and vulnerable, Jessica is wondering how she must respond to the ape looming over her.



Kong's right hand, the first part of his body to be finished, is tested on the sound stage by the men who work the hydraulic jacks.

"Even when I first read the script," Jessica says, "I never saw Kong as a monster. Kong is not frightening, the way Lorenzo Semple wrote the part. He is almost a romantic leading man."

But at the moment Kong's innate tenderness is not her primary concern; she is worrying about the safety features in his giant hand. She has been assured by his designers that in each finger there is a bolt at the knuckle to prevent Kong from making a fist and squeezing her to death. The special-effects department, in charge of Kong's mechanical parts, has made repeated tests with a stunt girl and is completely convinced that the hand is in excellent operating condition—that it is

almost miraculously efficient, in fact, considering how little time there has been to make, test, and perfect it.

If it is difficult for Jessica to get used to acting to the anonymity of a nonexistent Kong face, it is equally trying for Guillermin to direct the movement of a hand over which he has no control. Tell an actor to move and he does. But tell an automated hand to make a fist and the order has to be dispatched by the young men at the control panel, reaching the fingers precious seconds later. It is timing—and ultimately the pace of the entire film—that is the issue in these scenes, and there are maddeningly long pauses between command and movement. Guillermin gets frustrated by the inherent slowness of the process, but he manages to refrain from openly showing his displeasure, only biting down somewhat harder on the stem of his pipe and scowling. Testing the arm is one thing; shooting it in a scene is something else. And for Guillermin this is a period of learning to adjust to the men at the panel and to temper his demands on the hand.

Hours pass slowly as Guillermin and Kline go over the lighting of the scene and the positioning of the camera, which is on a Chapman crane. Suddenly the jungle seems very cramped, the area in which the camera can move limited. Guillermin, however, remains remarkably tranquil, knowing that from now to the end of principal photography he is working on the heart of the movie: the girl, the ape, and the special effects.

It is late morning when the scene is ready. Guillermin, on the crane above Kong's outstretched hand, looks down on Jessica. She is coming out of the cave where she has slept and is trying to crawl to safety when the hand comes down to form an imprisoning arch over her.

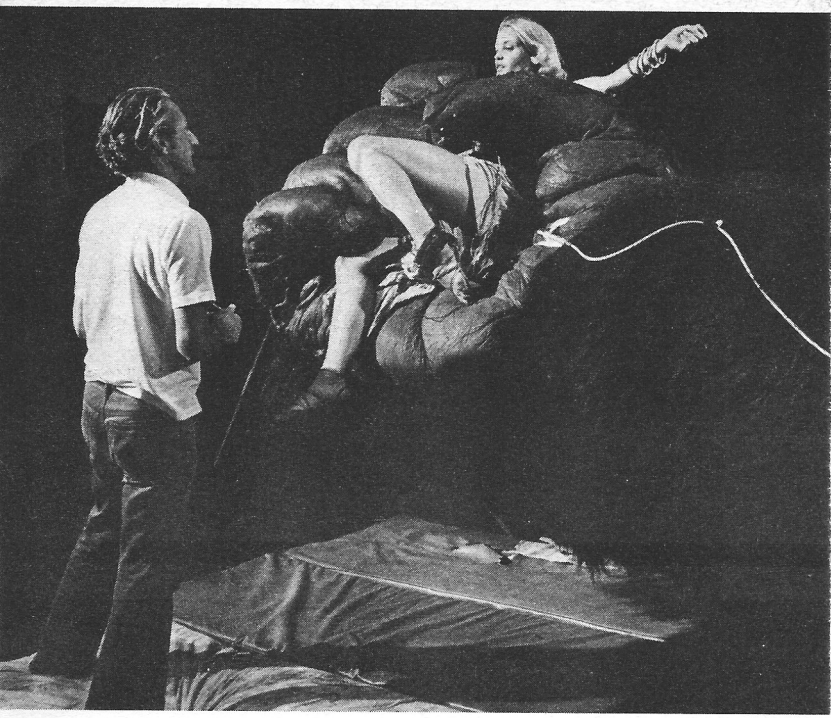
Guillermin thinks the hand should come down faster.

"That's it, boys. Quicker."

The motion is not perceptibly quicker.

"Jess," he says, "once the hand stops over you, wait a beat and then look up."

The scene is rehearsed one more time. Jessica is dis-



Jessica Lange rehearses with Kong's right hand under Guillermin's direction.

pleased with the way it is being staged and rather boldly makes it known, surprising some of the crew with her rather testy display of independence.

"Shouldn't I be crawling away from it, John, rather than toward it?" she asks, making a valid point. But it would take another hour to move the hand to a different position and rearrange the lights. Also, the cave entrance, built on a raised platform, is fairly close to the edge of the jungle set, leaving the camera, Jessica, and the hand very little room in which to operate. A kind of compromise is reached. Jessica will seem to be crawling while actually moving in place and looking up as the hand closes over her.



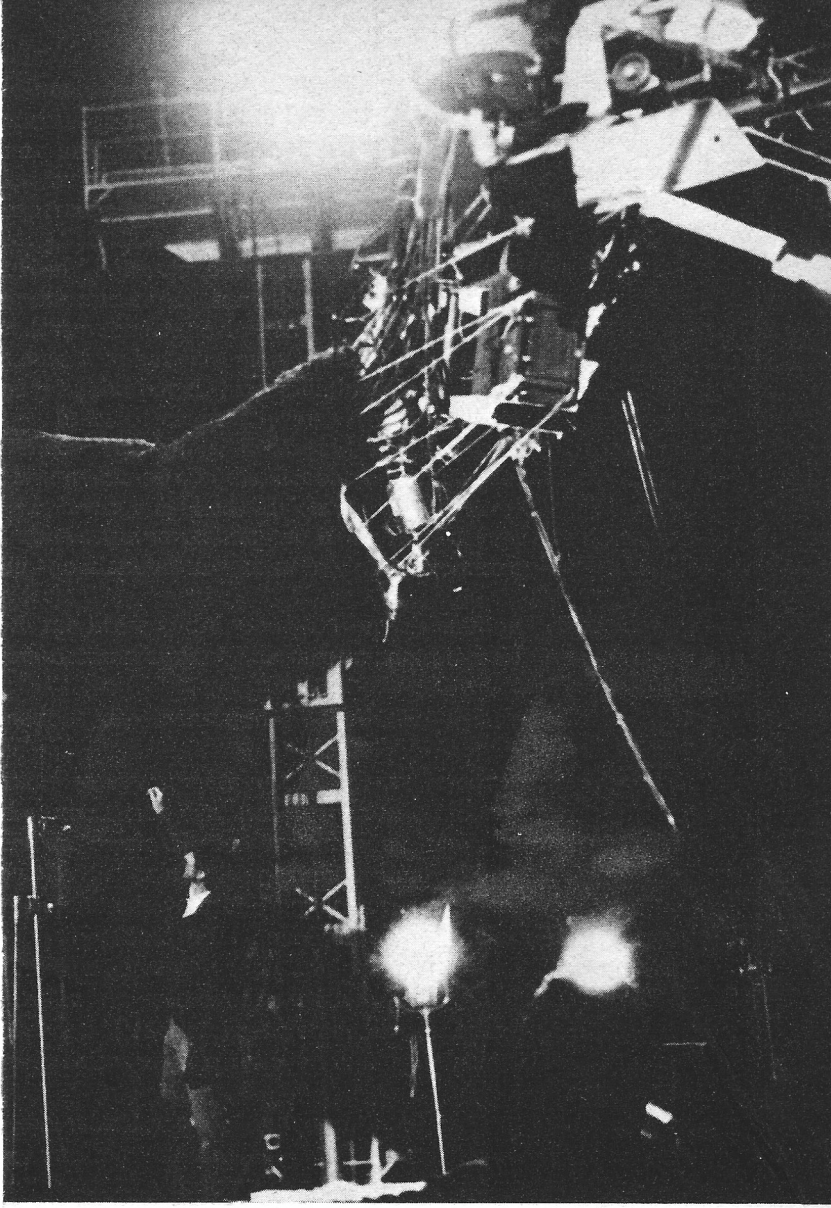
"That's as good as we can do," John Guillermin says, an obvious note of resignation in his voice.

De Laurentiis enters the sound stage. His presence is felt almost before he is seen. The crew react, whispering in conspiratorial fashion. He stands by the crane, and when it is lowered offers his hand to Guillermin to help him get out of his narrow seat.

The two men huddle, heads close together, Guillermin's eyes directed down and away from De Laurentiis, who is talking excitedly. They are reviewing the problems posed by Kong's hand while a man with a brush sits in the ape's palm touching up spots where the paint has peeled.



The huge mechanical Kong arm seizes Jessica Lange off the Skull Island natives' sacrificial altar.



Off by herself, Jessica is thinking, "If that hand's off target when it comes down, it's the end of me."

Before the end of the day the zipper on Kong's horsehair coat breaks. Men strip off the coat, exposing an unattractive skeleton of cables and metal, and repair the zipper as quickly as possible. Yet time has been lost. When the hand is zipped back up, it is put through a series of limbering exercises. The crew, still fascinated by it, stand hypnotized, observing the fingers at play.

Finally, on May 10, Jessica is ready to go up in the hand. In this scene, Dwan will be picked up by the hand, held for a moment at the level of the treetops, then brought to Kong's chest.

Now Jessica is in the ape's clutches, her semi-naked body encircled by his fingers. Soon the hand will lift her high in the air, ten feet above the jungle set. She is obviously apprehensive; her eyes are darting nervously from place to place, and she is chewing gum.

"Don't worry, kid," someone calls from the circle of darkness beyond the cameras and lights. "He ain't gonna squeeze you to death. He's got them bolts in his fingers." The words are hardly reassuring.

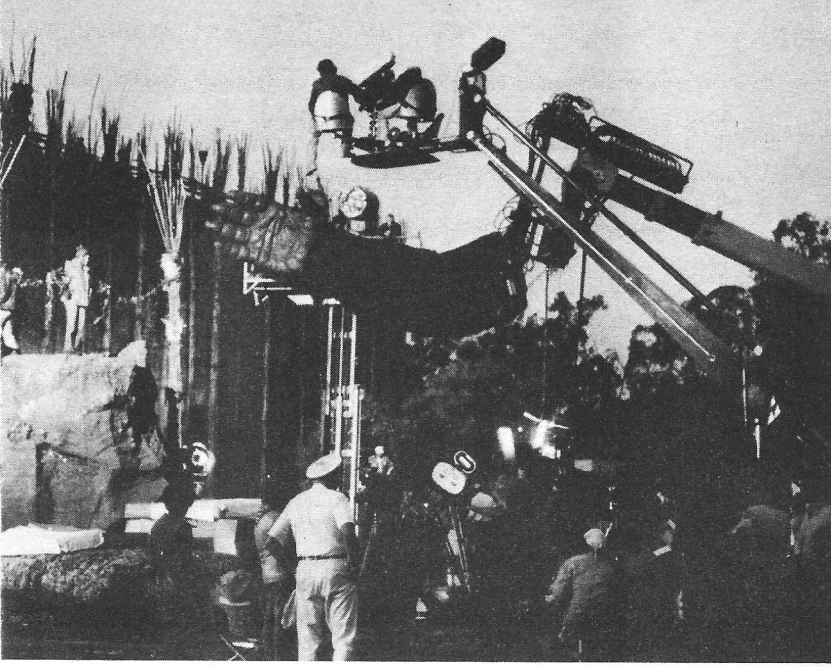
Jessica has been standing inside the fist while the fingers open and close, and she adjusts her body to the motion, trying to find the best position for her ride in space.

"All right, let's go for one," Guillermin says.

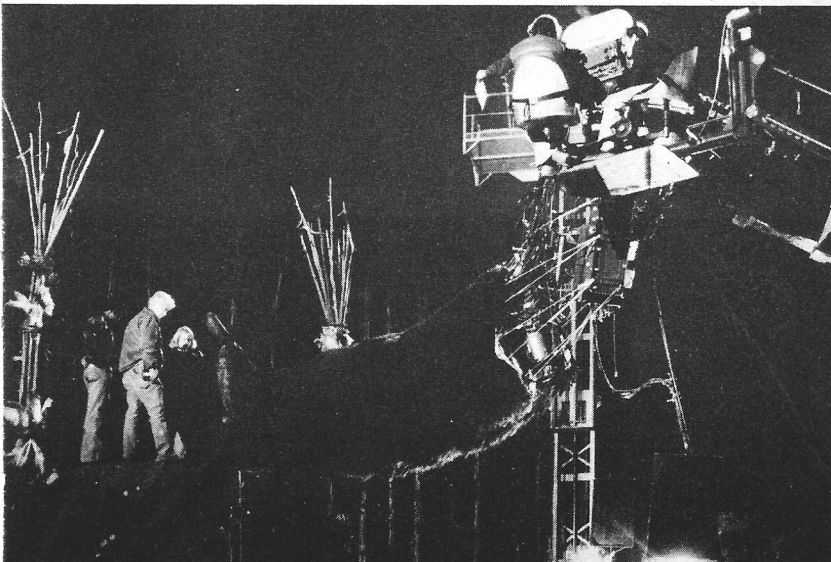
Jessica goes to her trailer parked in the street outside the sound stage for a last-minute touch-up of her costume, hair, and makeup.

The stunt girl, Sunny Woods, goes into the hand for one last technical run-through. Tall, blonde, and pretty, she has Jessica's Nordic good looks. She seems almost too delicate for the job, but standing inside Kong's fingers she is relaxed, chatting with the crew. Sunny is an experienced stunt girl.

Guillermin nods. The young men at the panel manipulate the hydraulic jacks. The fingers slowly bend around her body. It is a test for the men at the panel; Guillermin already has the scene blocked out in his mind.



On the Wall set on Metro's Lot 2, the crew busy themselves setting up the scene in which Jessica Lange will be nabbed from the altar by the giant mechanical arm. The scene is later actually shot at night.



A man moves a jack, and the hand lifts off, carrying Sunny vertically into the air. Secure inside Kong's grasp, she rests her elbows on the top fingers and leans forward, so that she is riding half-out, almost like a child peering over the safety bar in a Ferris wheel. Kong's hand looks even larger with the girl, a tiny, inconsequential object, in it.

There is no warning—no sharp snap, no grinding of gears. But suddenly the wrist goes limp and plunges downward. Sunny, who has been in a vertical position, finds herself parallel to the floor. Intuitively she relaxes her body, knowing from years of experience that if she stiffens up, she is more likely to get hurt. From her limp posture it seems that she has fainted—or that the fingers are crushing her. For a moment everyone is too startled to react; then, compensating for the seconds of paralysis, the men rush to her.

"Get her out of there!" It is a collective cry.

She blinks open her eyes and indicates she is all right.

The hand is obviously broken at the wrist, but the safety bolts in the knuckles have worked. Someone pushes another jack, and the hand lowers the rest of the way. The men pry open the fingers and release Sunny. She stands up and shakes herself briskly, snapping herself out of the temporary daze, and sits down in a chair.

Throughout the commotion, Guillermin, slumping farther down in his seat, puffs furiously on his pipe. There is an expression of unbearable pain on Neumann's face.

The young men slam their fists on the wood panel. What went wrong?

"Now we got a limp-wristed Kong," someone sneers.

The hand is unworkable, flopping at the wrist.

There are nasty recriminations; it is in the basic design; the Americans are to blame; the Italians are at fault; "I knew there was going to be trouble." "It's got to be that damn cable."

The cable inside the hand is three-quarters of an inch wide and in theory is supposed to be able to hold over



Dwan, in Kong's grasp, screams—and screams and screams—for help.

three thousand pounds, a special-effects man says. His educated guess about cable trouble proves to be correct when the arm is taken back to the construction shop.

"We knew there was a structural weakness in the cable that controls the hand when it turns. We just didn't have time to perfect it."

"We made a mistake in the design," Glen Robinson says. "That's all."

It takes two weeks to replace the cable and modify the design.

De Laurentiis, who is in his office when the accident occurs, is not immediately notified. He learns about it hours later, by chance, and is justifiably furious.

When Jessica returns in proper costume, prepared to go up in the hand, the turmoil is over; it has been replaced by a quiet anger and despair. She sees the hand and the stunned expression still on Sunny's face.

"What happened?" she asks, unable to conceal her mounting anxiety.

Sunny explains the problem to her, insisting that the hand is safe; the fingers locked in place without squeezing her, didn't they?

Steered by a crane, the broken hand moves down the street from Sound Stage 26 to the construction shop. It is a forlorn object, a symbol of the recurring technical difficulties besetting the film. The adverse newspaper comments are receding and studio publicity keeps proclaiming the certainty of getting 2,500 prints out by Christmas, 1,500 of them to be distributed by Paramount in the United States and Canada. Those who repeat the deadline do it now by rote, without being defensive. Only the crew, away from the press, keep saying it is impossible—and it's not just because they want to keep their jobs by having the film go over schedule.

While the hand is repaired, filming goes on on the full-sized jungle set where Jessica falls into a mud hole.

In her trailer, a Gothic novel open on her dresser, a cigarette burning in the ashtray, Jessica submits to the

brush of Jo McCarthy and the eyebrow pencil of Del Acevedo.

She talks around the ministrations to her face. "When I first started to play to Kong, or what I thought he looked like, not just to his hand, it was quite difficult for me. I didn't really have a clear idea of how he looked. How do you play to a huge ape who is romantically attached to you? After all, Kong isn't your average leading man. I had to do some substitution and personalization." In the language of the Method, taught at the Actors Studio, this means recalling something from the past to approximate the emotional response needed in the scene to be shot. "I had to think of him as my potential lover."

Jo runs a comb through Jessica's hair, creating a disheveled effect for the chase through the jungle glen. The hair style has to look exactly as it did in the scene when Kong picks her up the morning after her capture. Jo consults a Polaroid photo.

When they finish with her, Jessica lights another cigarette and goes back to her reading. Jo and Del, with noplace to go, linger on the steps of the trailer.

"Actresses have pretty definite ideas about the hair style they want for a picture, and then can get temperamental about it. But I've been lucky with Jessica. She's one of the easier ones to get along with."

Del concurs with the assessment. "Jessica is always pleasant. I've never seen her moody. Part of this job," he continues, "is to know when to say good morning and when to just keep still. You try to gain their confidence by convincing them you're only trying to make them look good."

"They do get chatty when you're working on them," Jo says, "but it's not too ethical to repeat what they tell you about their personal lives. I usually have some say about the hair style to be worn in a film," she goes on. "And I did show John Guillermin several styles. But what we're using in the film is basically John's idea. Because her role is so physical, a lot of the time spent

running away from Kong, she has her hair on the short side."

Jake comes out from under the chair where he has been sleeping and rolls over on his stomach. He seems oblivious to the noise the crew are making as they practice running the camera over wooden tracks for the dolly shot of Dwan's flight.

"It takes me thirty to forty minutes to do Jessica's makeup," Del says, "and only about fifteen for Jeff's, since his face is covered with so much hair, and then maybe twenty to thirty minutes for Chuck's—he's fussy about how he looks."

Del Acevedo was born in Detroit, too young for World War II but still part of a generation that considered military service something a young man had to do before settling down to a job. It was as a seaman in the U.S. Navy that Del first came to California.

Jo came later, from West Virginia, where her father was in the coal business. When her family moved to California, she found people so obsessed with looking good and keeping young that it was almost natural to go to beauty school; there were so many willing, paying customers around town.

Del had taken a course in cosmetology in Detroit. But after getting out of the Navy, he did secretarial work in Los Angeles for a while before deciding to take up beauty culture again, in 1955.

Both Del and Jo decided to go into movie work just when movie-industry employment was falling off and the unions were restricting membership as a means of cutting down on unemployment. Jo was working in a beauty shop when someone suggested that she ought to do hair styling in films. Unlike many people in the industry, she got into the union on her own—not through friends or relatives already in it. She went to the studio for an interview just when the union was opening up new memberships for hair stylists for the first time in fifteen years.

Jo was married then and had started her family. The work was steady—first in television, then in feature films. After twelve years in the business, she still remembers West Virginia and the East, and she sometimes gets restless.

Del was selected by Bud Westmore for a three-year makeup apprenticeship at Universal. His first feature was *Pollyanna.* From the start he accepted his job for what it was: something that provided him with good money, a way to meet people, and an opportunity to travel. He'd gotten used to traveling in his Navy days, and kept it up through fifty features, which took him to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Hawaii, Europe, Mexico, the West Indies—and home long enough to marry and have two sons. He became a favorite of Steve McQueen's and George C. Scott's; during the shooting of *King Kong* he left for several months to work with Scott in England on—of all things—*Beauty and the Beast.* During makeup sessions stars behave very differently; Scott jokes, while McQueen wants his coffee.

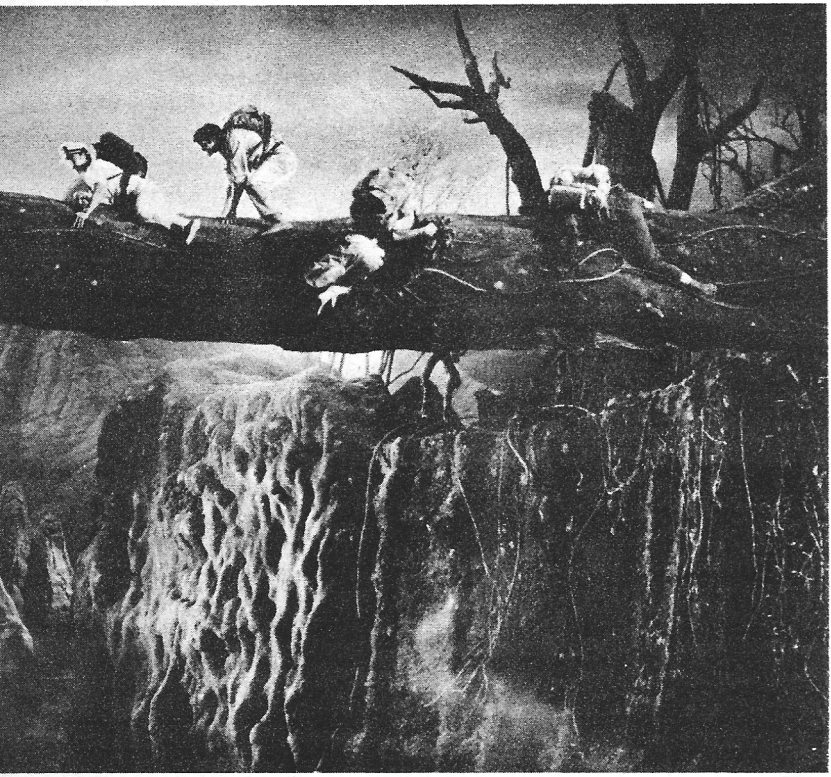
During Del's years in the business, the art of makeup has changed radically. With the introduction of better lighting and faster film, makeup has had to become more subtle; it cannot be packed on. The greatest compliment anyone can pay the makeup artist is to say that his client does not look made up.

Del's reputation is secure. While working with Scott in Hawaii on *Islands in the Stream,* he was approached to do the makeup on Kong. When he was told the hair stylist they had considered was not able to do the film, Del suggested Jo—he had worked with her before and he recognized her as an up-and-coming talent.

What is business for but to help friends get jobs?

Jake rolls over again. Del yawns. Jo flips through a paperback. The delays on *King Kong* are turning everyone into avid readers.

"Men are most vain about their hair when they find out they are losing it," Jo says. "For men with thinning hair I can pencil in a hairline or use a substance called



The men from the *Petrox Explorer* pursue Kong across a treacherous jungle set. Charles Grodin is in the lead.

Top Cover to make them look like they have more than they do. Anyway," she adds, "so many of the top stars wear toupees on screen."

The shop talk continues until Kurt Neumann tells Jessica it is time.

"Where will I bruise now?" she wonders. Her body bears mementos of the rougher scenes: a pinched nerve in her back from the time Kong's finger pressed too hard on her head, a bruise on her back from the scene in which his hand pressed her into the ground, and an assortment of minor cuts and bruises from other small accidents. Black and blue, cut and scraped, she often goes home from the studio feeling as if she's been through a war.

The crane speeds once more over the wooden tracks, carrying the camera over the entire length of the sound stage. The path through the jungle glen is relatively clear to the point where it reaches a small embankment and a mud puddle several feet deep. There will be no stunt girl used here, and Jessica has to tumble down the slight slope and land in the murky water on her hands and knees.

The take is called for; Jessica gulps twice.

"Ready, Jess?"

The familiar nod and wan smile.

"Go!"

She dashes ahead, pushing aside the pliable branches, and goes over the edge of the embankment with professional skill, making a big splash when she lands. The idea is for her to get as muddy as possible because Kong, when he recaptures her and sees her condition, takes her to the waterfall for a bath. No sooner is she on her hands and knees than she rolls over in the muck and is covered with wet mud.

"Cut!"

Someone wraps Jessica in a towel. Del and Jo inspect her makeup and hair. Another take is called and Jessica returns to the trailer to shower and put on the back-up costume.

The next take is flawless; she has perfected her mud

bath. Lunch break is called, but with neither the time nor a third costume available for a shower and change of clothes, she has to stay on the set in her muddy rags for the closeup that will be shot immediately after lunch. She obliges, but grudgingly: her *Photoplay* fantasies about moviemaking are a thing of the past. Looking down at her knees, she notices that both are scraped and bleeding and she feels ready to scream—which is a good thing, since that's exactly what will be called for when shooting resumes after lunch.

If Fay Wray is remembered for anything in the original *King Kong* it is her scream, which she emits every time Kong has her in hand. The scream is used more judiciously in De Laurentiis' version, a decision Jessica backs, reasoning that it would be rather silly for Dwan to keep up the constant yelling after she realizes Kong is in love with her and will not harm her.

Jessica screams well, almost melodically, the piercing voice coming in sharp segments.

"Again."

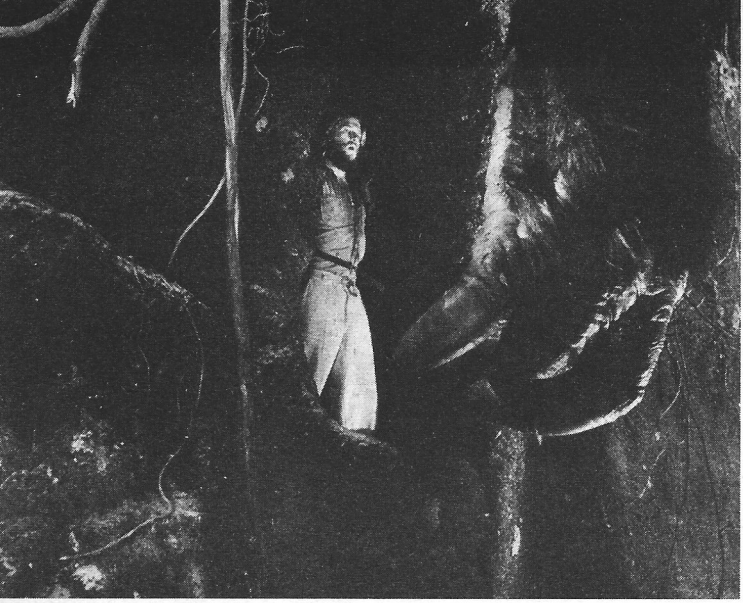
"Heeeellllp!" Then, *"Eeeeeeeck!"* Pause for breath. And again, *"Heeeellllp!"*

Jessica has also screamed at the Wall, in the scene in which Kong snatches her from the altar to the cheers of hundreds of natives. For this scene, the extras get to see at least part of the monster—his mechanical arm, which has finally arrived from Sound Stage 26 after traveling at a crawl across Overland, tying up traffic, and then lumbering down through Lot 2 to the far end of the studio.

The special-effects department and Sunny Woods have spent hours testing the arm, and, to almost everyone's surprise, it is working perfectly, though perhaps somewhat more slowly than Guillermin would like. To assure the greatest possible safety for the star, mats have been stacked in front of the altar, just in case Kong lets go. But that's doubtful, since Jessica has been riding well in the hand since its return from the construction shop.



Dwan, having fallen into a mud puddle while trying to escape from Kong, is bathed by the gigantic ape.





Jeff Bridges encounters Kong in the jungle, and . . .
the *Petrox Explorer* party comes face to face with Kong.

Jessica takes her place on the altar and looks up as the fingers stretch and ripple, as if practicing a scale on the piano. Dwan flinches dramatically; Jessica sighs with resignation. How many times has she been picked up by these fingers? There'll be more than a hundred shots of her in that hand before the film is over, many of them taken before a blue screen. She had just been discussing Dorothy Parker and Willa Cather in her dressing room —and now this reality is being laid on her.

The natives cheer when Kong picks Dwan up. Then a take is called, followed by the scream: *"Heeeellllp!"* This is music to the extras' ears; it's what they've been waiting for.

"Hey, leave her alone, Kong."

"That's it, girl. Don't take that shit from the old man."

"Fight, girl—fight!"

Guillermin is dissatisfied with the way Jessica is surrendering to the hand. She looks as if she is anticipating its motion, knowing how it will go.

"Wait till the fingers get around you before you fall into his hand, Jess," the director instructs her.

Another take. The fall into the hand is better. And another take. The fall is even better.

"Scream, Jess."

"Heeeellllp!"

"Good! Again."

"Heeeellllp!"

The hand has her well off the altar; she is terrified, looking beyond the extended arm into nothing but the night. The girl in the hand she is and will be for many more days and nights.

THE MAN IN THE MONKEY SUIT

April—August, 1976

The day is April 26, the place Sound Stage 25, and the subject a monstrous face, just inches away from the camera.

Even in repose it is a fierce, determined face: smouldering eyes set close above the pug nose, hairline low on the furrowed brow. But curiously, the more one stares at it, the less hideous it becomes. And when it expresses anguish or bewilderment, it arouses pity, not terror or revulsion. It is Kong's face.

But the face is just a mask and the body a hairy suit. Months of careful planning and every available ounce of talent and expertise have gone into this creation. The final result may well be what determines whether *King Kong* is a record-setting success or a multimillion-dollar flop.

Inside the monkey suit is a young man who will be Kong in some of the scenes shown in the movie. He is Hollywood makeup man Rick Baker, and for the rest of the filming he will be acting in front of the camera (though often with the second unit) as much as any of the stars. On the set he is a Kafkaesque hero; off the set no one will ever know he exists.

This is the first day of shooting for the man in the monkey suit. Kong's performance is certainly a collaboration. There is Baker inside the suit. He can move

Kong's body but controls only the upward and downward movements of the head. The face is moved by cables running out of the back of his neck, and these are controlled by an off-camera panel of levers, which are in turn operated by some of the Italians on Rambaldi's staff.

Directing Kong is a schizoid experience for Guillermin. To get the ape to do something, he must speak through an interpreter to the Italians at the panel, and directly to Baker, who has extremely limited mobility.

For the men at the panel, manipulating Kong's face is like running a set of electric trains. And for Baker this role is sheer frustration; he would like to form Kong's expressions himself, but is incapable of doing so. Each time the lever is pulled, Baker's own skin involuntarily follows the stretching of Kong's mask. At these moments he is acutely aware of having lost control over his own face.

"More with the brow and upper lip, like he's sniffing her," Guillermin commands. "The movements are still too slow."

His instructions are translated by Federico to the Italians at the panel.

Rick is trying to say something. A worker removes Kong's hand so that Rick can use his own to clean out the nostrils of the mask. He has been having difficulty breathing, despite the air that is constantly pumped into the suit through a hose beyond the camera's range. Also, it is unbearably hot, and tests have shown that Rick can only stay inside for about three hours. When Kong is off camera, a fan is played over his body.

During this break Federico is sketching an ape's face for the Italians. This is the expression Guillermin wants for Kong.

"Do they understand now?" Guillermin inquires.

Federico assures him that they do.

Guillermin repeats, "A little more definite."

In Italian Federico reviews the requested facial expression. Before the take, Kong is brushed down and

Dick Kline holds the light meter over his head to get an accurate reading.

The take goes slowly. The face moves too slowly for the director. "Make the brow come down earlier. Please. He *must* look fierce."

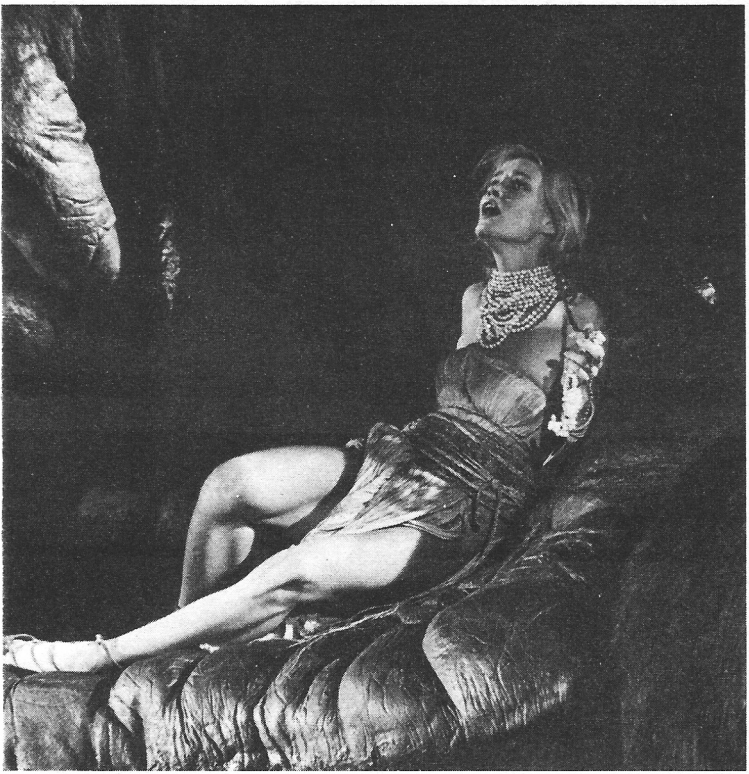
After the second take Kline simply gives a disappointed shrug. Guillermin is visibly displeased, too. Baker registers no response; he is gulping the oxygen being pumped into his suit.

When the actual making of the forty-foot mechanical Kong was turned over to Glen Robinson and his construction staff, Rambaldi went ahead with perfecting the monkey suit and face. He had arrived from Rome in October of 1975, and during his first month in the United States he spent most of his time studying the script and old gorilla films. After making the initial design for the big Kong, which was modified in the construction shop, Rambaldi and Chiari worked on designing Kong's face. Many sketches were rejected until the right one was found and approved by De Laurentiis and Guillermin.

"I had designed gorillas for Italian movies, but I had never had to do one with the sophistication or the star status that Kong has," Rambaldi explains through an interpreter. "It is important that the suit make the man inside it invisible. We wanted to get a very human ape, manlike, and we had to change the anatomical differences between ape and man to reflect Kong's basic nature."

The monkey suit is made from six bearskins, each weighing fifteen pounds. The hair has been trimmed and colored to match the horsehair on the big Kong.

While the designing was proceeding with some difficulty on the Kong suit and face, Rick Baker and two other men were hired to act inside the suit. In the end, Baker stayed on while the other two were dropped. It wasn't that they were incompetent, but all three men were of different heights and only Baker was the right size—five feet, six inches—to be in the same proportion



Dwan, being held by Kong, at first is terrified but eventually comes to realize that he will not harm her.

to the miniature sets as the full-sized Kong is to the large ones.

Baker, twenty-five years old at the time he was hired, has been fascinated since childhood by gorillas and by the way appearances can be changed with makeup. He had been fooling around making monkey suits and faces off and on for ten years, and he soon found himself working with Rambaldi, making invaluable suggestions.

A life mask was made of Baker's face to make sure that Kong's mask would fit over its contours. It was a tight fit; in fact, space was so limited that there wasn't room for all the mechanics that might have been used. "We did it very simply, by wiring the cables to Kong's jaw."

Fifteen people worked on making the skins for both the monkey suit and the big Kong, using three bear hairs to every one horse hair. The hair was woven into net, and then the net had to be attached to foam rubber. Originally one big piece was to be used, but when it was tested everyone noticed that the skin did not move naturally, nor did it lend itself to the physique of an ape. The impression of separate muscles had to be conveyed, and this was done by shaping the chest with separate packs of foam rubber. When air is pumped into the chest, pushing out the skin, it creates the very realistic effect of breathing.

Still, the chest muscles were not sufficiently defined. Then someone came up with the novel idea of inflating twelve condoms with water and placing six, arranged vertically within a net, on each side of the chest. It worked, and Kong had his muscle ridges.

Next, the arms on Kong's suit had to be made longer than Rick's, since a gorilla's arms are proportionately much longer than a human's. This was done by building finger extensions, which are connected to Rick's hands by rings. In some scenes Kong holds a miniature Dwan doll. It is attached to the artificial hands, which can move the doll into four positions.

The basic problem with the latex mask is that, like any rubber material, it will tear if stretched too far. This

is exactly what happened in the first tests on Kong's mask.

Rambaldi came up with the idea of having five separate masks, each with a different expression. For instance, the one used when Kong roars already has the beginnings of a roar: lips raised to bare gums, teeth showing, the corners of the mouth stretching outward.

One head is used for all normal expressions; a second is for menacing looks, the beginnings of anger; a third is for the big roar; a fourth is for when Kong blows on Dwan to dry her off; and the fifth is for a refinement of the first head—it has a slightly more sophisticated expression.

To get dressed, Rick puts on leotards, a dark T-shirt, and a hood. Then he drapes the sacks of foam rubber and inflated condoms over his torso. These give him a fat behind and a huge chest, and, before donning the skin, he looks like a plump animated firefly in a Walt Disney cartoon.

After the suit comes the mask. To prepare for it, Rick first darkens the skin around his eyes so that no white will show through the openings, and then inserts contact lenses. When he started wearing them for any length of time, he suffered blurred vision. He went to a doctor, who said his eyes were being irritated by the lack of oxygen reaching them. Different lenses were used for shorter periods of time, and this reduced the irritation, especially after someone came up with the idea of making holes in the centers of the ape's eyes to allow air in.

The back-up man in the monkey suit is actor-writer Bill Shephard, who applied for the job without having any special interest in apes; he just wanted to work in a big picture, and his agent sent him over. The contacts have an entirely different effect on him, a more pleasant one—they create a shimmering halo around his visual field. Bill doesn't complain. He thinks it's a "real trip."

The first miniature set used with the man-monkey is the Wall, built on an elevated platform in a sound stage. In constructing the mini-Wall, Dale Hennesy worried about keeping it in scale with the big Wall and still giving

the camera room to move in. The scale of the miniature to the full-sized wall is one-sixth.

"Normally, the scale would be one-seventh, but sometimes we have trouble communicating with the Italians because of the language barrier," Hennesy says with a grin.

In the first scenes, Rick walks to the altar and makes off with the Dwan doll. These are shot concurrently with the work on the big Wall, which is part of the long-range plan of shooting a sequence in miniature and full size at the same time, if possible.

Kronick does the initial direction of the miniature Wall scenes, but then Guillermin, working half day, half night, begins to take over on them.

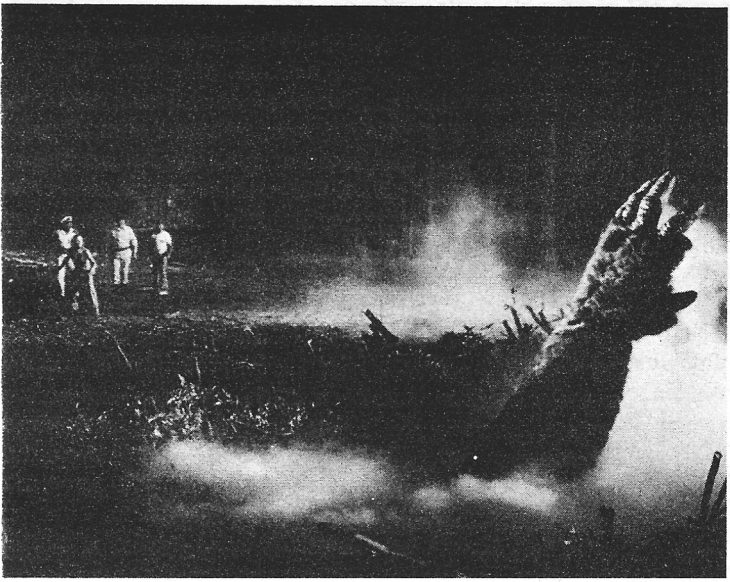
Rick responds immediately to Guillermin as a director, finding, as Jessica had, that he gives the actor, even one covered by hair, the freedom to create the role.

"It was difficult at first when John asked me to show compassion through the eyes," Rick says, "and here I could barely see anything with the contacts. All I heard was cables squeaking in my head, all kinds of crazy noises."

The doctor suggested that Rick stay in the monkey suit for only an hour at a time; Rick is now averaging, he says, two and a half hours, and has been in it for up to four hours. "It gets unbearably hot in the suit, and I can drop five pounds a day working in it." Sometimes he sweats so profusely that he soaks through the rubber and netting to the fur. And every time he exhales in the suit, the bad air stays in there.

The most difficult scene for him is breaking through the Wall and falling into the pit to be chloroformed. He does it, but Guillermin wants it redone so he'll have a back-up should a mistake occur when the original is being processed. Bill Shephard is used for the retake, but Rick isn't jealous. It's fine with him if Bill gets to do "the more dangerous stuff."

The breakthrough is done in two takes; an extra gate



In a scene shot on a miniature set with a man in an ape suit, Kong has crashed through the Wall and tumbled into a pit filled with chloroform. Now, in a scene using the full-sized set and the giant mechanical arm, Kong struggles briefly before passing out.

is ready to be attached when the first take is finished. Once through the gate, Bill falls into a four-foot hole with a mattress on the bottom. The Wall is made of balsam. When Bill smashes his fist through the gate, there is just enough resistance to make it look as if it is made of heavy logs.

In the first take, Bill trips and twists around, landing on his back in the pit. The second take is better. He goes into the pit as if he really didn't see it and lands face down.

Kong tries to get up but is overcome by gas fumes and falls back. In the big pit on the back lot the mechanical hand is used to show how Kong tries to rise before collapsing. In the smaller pit on the sound stage,

the escaping fumes are created by blowing dry ice and vaporized oil with a fog-making machine.

"I had to hold my breath for about forty-five seconds down in the pit," Bill says. "I didn't want to breathe in any of that crap."

Though Rick now does most of the Kong acting, Bill works again in the miniature set of the supertanker hull where Kong jumps up and down, trying to escape. The two men have slightly different ways of moving, but the substitution is not detectable on screen.

Much of Rick's work is posing for the matte shots with Jessica in the hand.

"It's difficult to understand, to *react* to a girl who's not there," he says while four men dress him in the monkey suit. "I never really talked over any of the scenes with Jessica, since we never act together, but after a while I noticed she would stop on the set to watch me work. I really appreciated it. She was giving me encouragement."

Rick met De Laurentiis in the early stages of production and briefly discussed building the suit with him. De Laurentiis said that he thought of Kong not as a mean gorilla but as an animal with the powers of a gorilla and the mind of a man.

A major part in making Kong look good on screen is played by the lighting, and the responsibility for this belongs to cinematographer Dick Kline. Kline has gone from the lyrical romanticism of *Camelot* to the brutal realism of *Mandingo,* and he must now light up the darkest corners of Kong's face.

"Everyone knows the monster is the star of this picture," Kline says, "and you have to trust Kong, just like any other actor. In truth, Kong's story is told through his eyes and mouth. His true emotions, especially his feelings toward the girl, are in his facial expressions. And Kong is neither gorilla nor man. He's our creation, done in this studio, an enormously proud being who is sometimes royal, sometimes savage."

Since the monster's face is worth pages of dialogue

in advancing the story line, every set-up requires a balancing of camera angles and lights, a decision on whether to go for the closeup or use the long lens. To put Kong in the best light, Kline turned to a combination of muted filters and indirect lighting. Each change in Kong's expression requires a different light level.

Kline demonstrates the complexity of getting the proper light by trying out various levels of brightness on Kong's face with a small hand-held light. When the camera goes in for a closeup of Kong roaring, Kline is right beside the lens with his light, his trademark on every film.

When asked how this film differs from all his others, which include *The Boston Strangler* and *Gaily, Gaily,* he answers, "I'm getting much less sleep." Then, in a more serious tone, he adds, "Well, it's the variety of photography in this film, going from high-fashion to spooky, moody—the whole gamut."

Kline is a second-generation cameraman. He's a native of Los Angeles, though his basic erudition makes one suspect that he comes from some other part of the country where literacy is held in higher esteem. He has a reputation for working whenever possible with natural lighting, which makes him partial to outdoor photography and invites the criticism that he sometimes makes scenes too dark.

And dark Kong is. Most of the scenes take place at night, whether shot on location or in the studio. To prevent Kong's face and body from fading off into the darkness, Kline etches him with backlighting in the night scenes.

A cinematographer's prime duty is the lighting, but if his relationship with the director is good, and based on artistic trust, he will also work with the director on blocking out camera angles. Such cooperation is essential in a film of Kong's magnitude, and Kline and Guillermin seem to have established the necessary rapport.

"John is very thorough and precise," Kline com-

ments. "He knows before each shot what he wants. This makes my job much easier."

Before the start of principal photography, Kline sat down with Guillermin and went over every sequence. These ritual meetings have continued through the production, and they are held on the set and also, on Saturday mornings, in De Laurentiis' office.

Because of the size of the monster and the cramped sets, lighting Kong has been a continuous problem.

"There is not one easy shot to light in this picture," Kline says emphatically.

An easier job is lighting Jessica. "She's extremely photogenic, an experienced model who handles herself with natural professionalism in front of the camera."

Correct lighting is crucial for the make-it-or-break-it work that goes on in the optical department.

"Composite photography is a very important part of this film," says Frank Van Der Veer, supervisor of photographic effects, in what is possibly the understatement of the year. Without these optical effects, Kong could end up a travelogue on Hawaii and New York.

"The challenge for us," Van Der Veer says, "is not to duplicate what was done in the original *King Kong,* which remains a remarkable piece of work. The movie public today expects techniques to be more novel and sophisticated."

Film is illusion and fantasy, and to achieve this in Kong, many different optical techniques are used and intercut so that the audience will not think any of the film is fake, so that they *will* think a forty-foot ape exists.

One of the processes Van Der Veer expected to use was front-screen projection. But dark scenes did not reproduce well by that method; they looked murky and washed-out on the screen. So the process was discarded.

One process that does work is rear-screen projection, notably in the scene where Jessica is asleep in the cave. This is first shot on the full-sized jungle set. Next, on the miniature jungle set, the film from this shooting is projected onto a screen in the cave entrance. And finally, the monkey-suited Kong is shot walking up to the en-

trance and staring at the scaled-down form of Jessica waking up. The combined footage looks like the real thing.

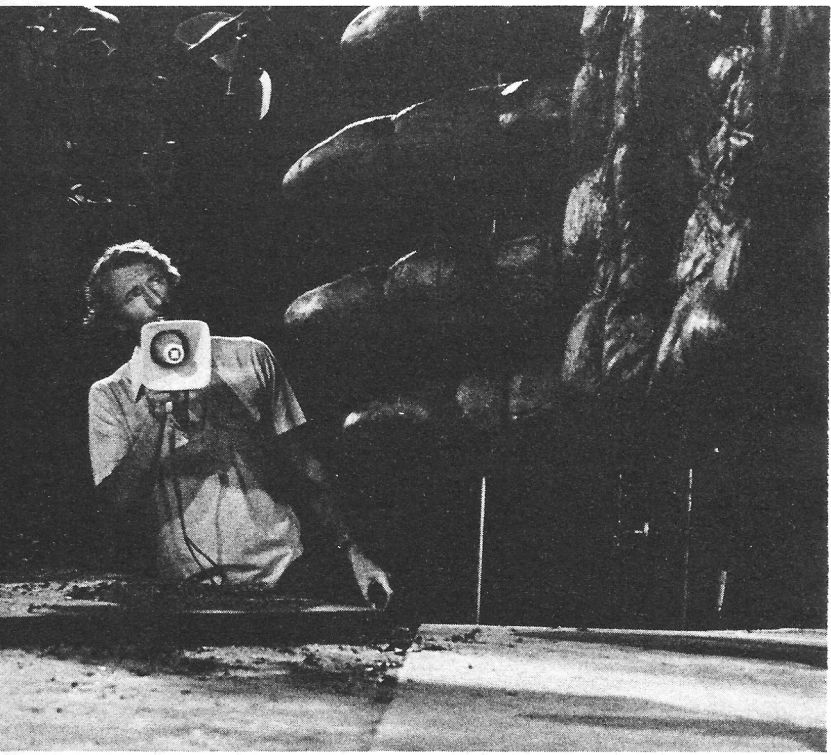
Matte painting is used, too. An example is the long-range scene of the Wall. On the back lot the camera cannot pull very far back without photographing telephone poles and television antennas of the houses across the street. So to put the Wall in the right location, it is painted on footage of the real Hawaiian landscape. Matte painting is also used for the scenes of Kong in the supertanker and at the ravine (where he wipes out half the *Petrox Explorer* crew), as well as for the New York skyline.

There is also that old standby, split screen, employed in scenes of Kong approaching the altar while the natives cheer him on top of the Wall, and as the hand reaches down for Dwan when she is in the pond.

But the most important technique is blue screening. There are at least 180 blue-screen shots in the film. So often is Jessica up in the fist in front of the gigantic field of blue on Sound Stage 27 that she's afraid she'll turn blue herself. This process is agonizingly slow, so slow that it gives Jessica a chance to read a whole novel between takes.

"Blue screen, which is relatively new to movies, is similar to the television technique called chroma-key." Van Der Veer explains. "What you do is place your people in front of the screen, making sure there is no blue in their makeup or costumes. Then you shoot the action against the screen. You take this footage to the laboratory, and, with a plate, which is the picture you want in the background, you line up the action scene frame by frame with the blue-screen footage, and make one negative of both."

The lining up is critical. If it isn't done properly, it creates the sensation that the action in the foreground is separated by a mile from what is happening in the background. There are twenty-four frames to one second of film, and turning the two negatives into one is as painstaking as assembling the most delicate Swiss



Guillermin, his pipe out of his mouth for the moment, uses a bullhorn to direct the movement of Kong's hand.

watch. It takes seven to ten days to get the final, single negative of the blue screen and plate.

The blue screen can be as small as an inch or two, as it is in the miniature ravine set, where Kong twists a log and sends the *Petrox Explorer* crewmen to their death. Here, Kong is photographed walking to the edge of the ravine. Just below the edge, on the side of the ravine, is an empty patch of blue on the otherwise drab brown surface. In the final print, the audience will see a scaled-down Jeff Bridges cringing in that spot, which is now a cave, as Kong rampages above him.

Van Der Veer uses video tape while blue screening is going on in the miniature sets to get an idea of how well the plate and blue-screen footage will line up in the laboratory. The plate is already photographed on the tape, and the scene being shot on the miniature set is then taped over it. This process helps Van Der Veer balance the lighting and synchronize the action.

Blue screening continues through mid-October, long after the principal photography has ended. The process seems as endless as the waves rolling up on the shore of Kauai.

Apparently, the major goal of a good optical-effects man is to have his skill go undetected. Van Der Veer candidly admits that he doesn't want the public to know what he's done. Ideally, he believes, even the experts will be fooled.

"We want those critics who know about optics to finally give up trying to figure out what we did and just enjoy *King Kong* for what it is: a splendid fantasy."

To achieve this end, Van Der Veer states, "You vary the techniques and intermingle them, so that if a person tries to analyze it, you're already into the next shot."

The secret is quick cutting away from an optical scene to prevent the audience from seeing the process shots. This is done in the editing room. By the end of principal photography on *King Kong,* 396,080 feet of film will have been edited by Ralph Winters and the people in his department, and scored by John Barry.



Pipe securely between his teeth once again, Guillermin gestures to his actors. The crew who operate the giant mechanical Kong look on with varying degrees of concern.

Of this, only 253,740 feet will be printed. And much less will make its way into the final film.

The scene that taxes everyone's credulity is the one in which Kong wrestles a huge snake in the miniature crater set. As depicted in the storyboard, this is a sensational scene, showing Kong with his superhuman strength ripping open the jaw of the snake while saving his lady love.

Glen Robinson's men came up with several snakes. One, nonfunctional, is propelled on a track into the crater; another, built with hydraulic lifts, winds itself around Kong for what it hopes is a fatal squeeze.

Somehow, the snake turns out to be anything but menacing. It moves on its track with all the vitality of

some ancient person creaking along in a wheelchair; the jaw clanks open and shut mechanically, like a puppet's mouth.

Rick Baker, who usually jokes and exchanges a few choice curse words he has learned from the Italians, is rather quiet getting into the monkey suit for yet another try at wrestling the snake with some conviction. Because of the arm extensions in the suit, Rick struggles to grab hold of the snake and finds it almost impossible. The snake wrapped around him is not mechanized and weighs eighty pounds. His monkey suit adds another thirty pounds to the conflict, and Rick can hardly get the hands around the snake's neck, let alone make the fight seem real.

De Laurentiis sees the rushes of the snake fight and beats a path to the sound stage. He is very angry, and when De Laurentiis is upset there is movement. Soon the chiefs—Robinson, Hennesy, Rambaldi, Carr, Grossberg, and Van Der Veer—collect on the sound stage. De Laurentiis talks with them individually, then in groups, and the confrontations are extremely tense.

The snake wrinkles when he coils around Kong, and you can see it clearly on the film, he says.

The word is passed: the snake looks fake.

One solution is to cut the scene. But won't the audience miss it? In the original movie, Kong fights an assortment of prehistoric reptiles. Another idea is to take the snake back to the construction shop and work on his skin. Probably the most imaginative suggestion comes from Frank Van Der Veer. Why not get a real snake and let it wrap itself around a midget in a monkey suit? The company has done everything else; why not buy a baby boa constrictor?

The final decision is to chop up the snake and photograph only pieces of him around Kong, using closeups. While it is not the perfect solution, it is an improvement on the earlier rushes.

"Come on, guys. How is anyone going to duplicate mechanically how a snake moves?" Baker asks, half out of his monkey suit, the water-filled condoms hold-

ing firm in their nets, the pieces of foam rubber sagging about his body.

"This is bad enough," he adds, "but it was even worse when I was walking in place without a treadmill, holding Jessica. Now, have you ever tried walking in place in anything like this?"

He says something in Italian and smiles. "I only learned the bad words from my Italian friends."

The suit is peeled off him, and the foam rubber drops to his feet. The leotards and sweat shirt are soaked through. No longer Kong, he is a hot, tired young man yearning to rest.

KONG MEETS NEW YORK

June 7—July 4, 1976

"The most important thing is getting the picture done. All the rest is bullshit!" shouts Jack Grossberg, unconsciously uttering one of the great truths of moviemaking, denuding the industry of its artistic pretensions, reducing it to its money-making essence.

Grossberg is in his office on the upper floor of the Sheraton Moton Inn, where most of the Kong production staff and crew will be quartered for the New York shooting. Telephones ring shrilly, each bringing the threat of another disaster. Where can we shoot? Do we have the elevated subway in Queens for next week? How many extra union men do we have to put on? What about the park on the East River? The cops . . . the muggers . . . the prostitutes working by the location . . . Jesus . . . help!

Next to Grossberg's office is the central headquarters, where Lori, his secretary, and George Goodman, the New York unit manager, have their desks—and where the teamsters stand around when they're not working, their presence as ominous as their weekly paychecks are awesome. (These paychecks average more than $900 a man. By the end of the picture, the cost of the teamsters on both coasts and in Hawaii will come to approximately $900,000.) These drivers tend to have burly, corpulent bodies and sullen expressions—even when they are being polite.

But on the eve of shooting, it is the electricians, not the teamsters, who are threatening to shut down production because of a jurisdictional dispute with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the World Trade Center.

"Hell," Grossberg says, "the New York unions are trouble. But at least they're up front. You can settle the disputes on the sidewalk—it's not like in Hollywood, where everything goes to arbitration and takes time."

Getting the production to New York has been a long and exasperating experience for Grossberg. There were months of negotiations with the Port Authority for use of the World Trade Center; then deals had to be worked out with the union, and the police, and the fire department; and finally, street locations had to be secured in Manhattan and Queens.

"Everyone wants a handout," Grossberg complains, not too loudly and definitely not in front of any union bosses.

But then, the movie company, too, is out to get what it can at the most advantageous price.

The communications between the Port Authority and the Kong production are phrased like old-fashioned diplomatic communiqués, the words obscuring the issue —which, Grossberg believes, is: who gets the muscle? Who gets control of the production here in New York? Under contention are the number of security guards to be used during the shooting, and who pays for them; the size of the crowd to be allowed on the World Trade Center plaza—the fear being that an excess number of people combined with tons of equipment will cause the plaza to collapse; and who bears the cost of lighting the twin towers for the night shooting.

In the spring, when the talks between the production and the Port Authority were at their most acrimonious, the movie company threatened to go to the Empire State Building, where everything but the moon and the key to the city had been promised. The owners even had men dressed in monkey suits parading on the observa-

tion deck to protest the transfer of the Kong filming to the World Trade Center. This generated more free national publicity, confirming the obvious: that the publicity for *King Kong* had become self-perpetuating without much effort from the paid publicists.

Grossberg argued for the Empire State Building, while Barry Diller, Paramount's chairman, held out for the World Trade Center; it was Paramount's poster that had put Kong there, anyway. This uncertainty about Kong's ultimate destination made it impossible to pinpoint the departure date for New York. Early June had been proposed and then discarded. The company had to be out of the hotel by the Fourth of July weekend, when millions of visitors were expected in the city for the New York Bicentennial festivities.

What would happen if the production ran over into the Bicentennial celebration and, a week later, the Democratic National Convention? Would the crew have to camp out in Central Park? Late August was next proposed, and it remained the proposed working date until late May, when suddenly a pact was confirmed with the Port Authority—Grossberg proclaimed that the Port Authority had capitulated on all the major points (probably after being prodded by Diller). The company was notified to be ready to go to New York on June 1.

This sent Sally Perle up her casting wall. She had made a deal through her old New York contacts to get the National Guard for extras in the scene where Kong is trapped at the World Trade Center. But when the August date was established, the guard was excused from movie duty. Now called up again by Hollywood, the guard politely declined, saying it could not rearrange its summer encampment schedule. Sally now had to find other military units, and, almost in desperation, she started scouting military schools—even though many of the cadets at these schools weren't even old enough to shave.

Sally's casting couch is a single, twin-bedded room down the hotel corridor from the production offices, and she holds court amid her despair and open racks of clothes in a corner, framed by a dirty-streaked window with a view of the pollution-hazed sky and the empty docks along the Hudson River. She has received portfolios from practically every unemployed extra in New York. She finally has to slam the door and leave a note instructing the actors and actresses to drop their photographs and resumes at the main office.

Sally finally does recruit her movie army, a contingent of several hundred: mostly men, though there are a few women to satisfy the feminists. The forces include off-duty cops; firemen; soldiers, among them a sizeable number of army, navy, and marine recruiters, willing to work double duty at night; and seventeen teenagers from a local military school, their youth well disguised by helmets and olive-green military garb. Sally's troops stand impressively against the walls of the buildings leading to the plaza, guns held ready, eyes directed to the top of the twin towers, where spotlights are trained.

Kong is not there, but Guillermin, Kline, first assistant director David McGiffert—he replaced Kurt Neumann, who left the picture before the company moved to New York—and the camera crew are. At 4 A.M. they are in a most precarious position on a makeshift wooden platform without railings that extends over the building's edge so that the camera will have an unobstructed view of the plaza one hundred ten stories below.

Kline, wearing a safety belt, is farthest out on the platform, peering over the edge, asking Guillermin, who is next to him, what the hell they're doing there, risking their lives—for what?

From this height the array of military manpower and hardware in the plaza is formidable; there are Jeeps, trucks, tanks, police cars, fire engines, ambulances, guns, men and women, all assembled for the single purpose of killing the star of the picture. But he is not yet ready to be killed; he is in ten separate pieces, being moved

across the country in three vans, along with a convoy of other trucks loaded with essential equipment. Joe Sawyer and his men, responsible for his safe arrival, are driving all night, stopping only for meals, traveling more than nine hundred miles a day to get the forty-foot styrofoam model to New York on time for his death scene.

Already in New York awaiting Kong's arrival is Michael Dino, the man who has clothed the model with panels of horsehair back in the studio, a laborious task that has taken weeks. He is now in charge of re-forming the model on the plaza floor.

The first night's shooting is necessary but hardly central to the picture; it amounts to atmospheric glimpses of the military preparation, which on the screen will probably run only a few seconds, being intercut with scenes of the monster on the roof.



Workmen paint the vans in which the model of Kong to be used in New York will be taken across the country from Hollywood. A total of three vans carried Kong's body—in ten pieces.

Everyone is remarkably relaxed. Jessica has moved into her old apartment with her husband, a photographer of Spanish ancestry. Having at first said she is single, she now admits to being married, though the state of her marriage is not clear. Jeff is also in the city, staying at a midtown hotel, already being photographed at the "in" parties.

While unhappy about the street noise in the morning when he is trying to sleep after working all night, Guillermin seems at his most relaxed now, taking time out during the midnight supper breaks to explore with his associates some of the better small restaurants in lower Manhattan.

Though she is not scheduled to work in these early scenes, Jessica and her husband visit with the crew at the plaza. She is affectionate with those she has come to know well over the months, hugging and kissing them even though they have been separated for only a few days. The reunion between female star and director takes place at the barricades, already set up for the night crowd scenes to be shot the following week, and is equally warm, without revealing anything intimate.

Jeff is the first to work in New York, riding a bicycle across the empty plaza; then he's in an elevator—crowded with director, cinematographer, and camera crew—going up and down one hundred seven floors in a continuation of the scene in which he dashes across Manhattan to get to the top of the World Trade Center and rescue Dwan from Kong.

Jeff takes to New York in his usual low-key fashion, going to the theater and the good restaurants, responding to these experiences in the same laconic style that typifies his discussion on a book he is reading or why he likes the mountains. This is not from any indifference to the subject; rather it is from an innate shyness, an insecurity about his ability to verbalize his reactions.

At the end of the first week of shooting in New York, Jeff and Jessica work together in a scene on a residential street in Queens. Kong has broken loose from his chains at his presentation to the New York public, and he is

after Dwan, who has been rescued from the crowd by Prescott. In this scene, Dwan and Prescott are running down the deserted street trying to find a car with a key in the ignition.

"Can't you do a hot wire?" Dwan asks. Behind her, in the sky, there is smoke and a flashing light. Kong is stomping on a power station, and sparks are flying. This light effect is created by turning a spotlight on and off behind a smoke-making machine.

"Sorry," Prescott replies.

"Man, you are really uneducated," she answers.

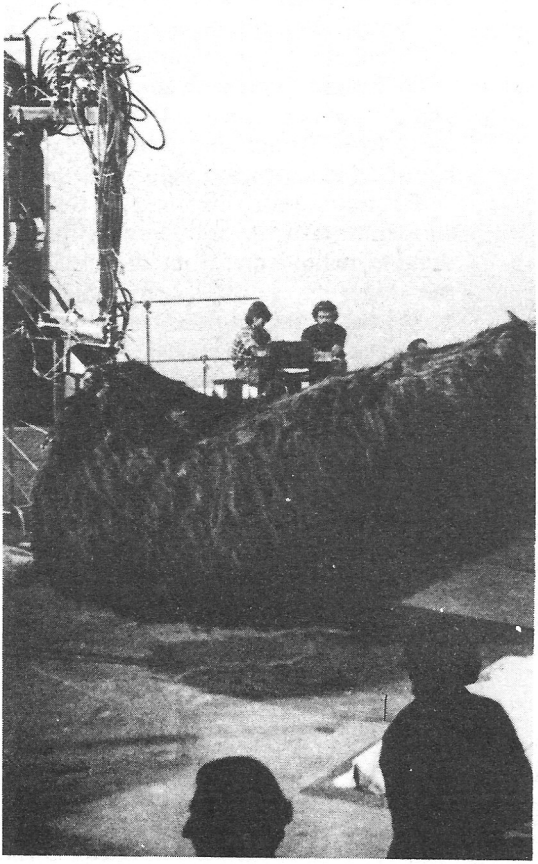
Halftracks filled with soldiers rumble past the couple, and the soldiers stare at them. They begin to run again, away from Kong, she rather unsteadily because of her high-heeled shoes and tight silver gown.

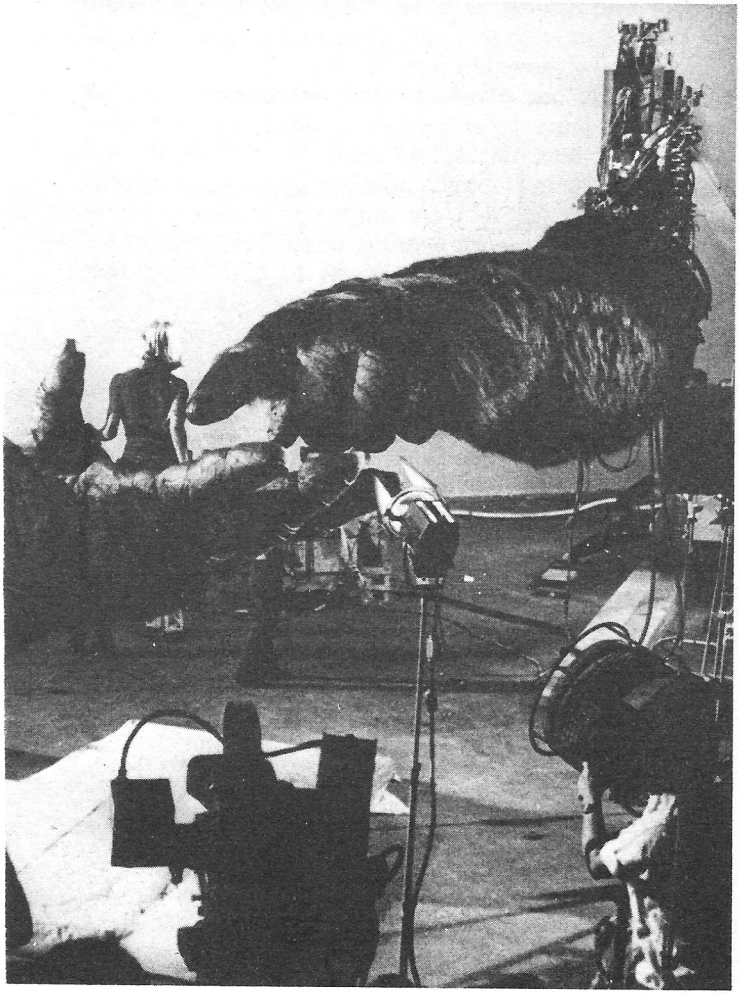
To prepare for this scene, it was necessary to get the cooperation of the residents on the block, and the production team fanned out during the day, talking to all the residents, getting permission from some to install bright backlights in their front rooms to give the illusion of places hastily evacuated.

Setting up the scene is an arduous task. The street has to be blocked off, private cars removed and replaced by movie cars, the camera arranged, the angle worked out among Guillermin, his actors, and the camera people. It will be a tracking shot, with the camera moving swiftly down the sidewalk, parallel to the two stars as they run in the street.

The first shot is recorded at 11:30 P.M. It is not a good take. Jeff's long hair keeps falling over his face. It has to be pinned back before the scene can be re-shot. On the next take John Guillermin worries that Jeff and Jessica have not reacted properly to the spectacle of the power station exploding in the background. They should look over their shoulders and register some alarm.

The artistic success of these scenes is not important to the neighborhood residents. They applaud boisterously after each take. Between takes they surround Jeff to get his autograph, crowding in on him until he is





On the sound stage, Jessica Lange does still another bit of heavy emoting with Kong's arms.

totally mobbed and the production aides are obliged to get ready to push their way into the ball of humanity to extract that valued and highly perishable item: one handsome young movie star. One aide does get to Bridges and asks if he needs help. But Bridges could not be happier with this adulation, and he goes on signing everything shoved in front of him.

To appear out of breath and distraught, both Jeff and Jessica jump up and down, shaking out their arms and tossing their hair before each take. Their Method approach to acting is much admired by the Queens residents, who feel that they are gaining professional insight into how a performance is prepared for the screen.

After the third take, Jeff insists to Guillermin that his timing is still a bit off. But the crowd, led by a man in a T-shirt with a can of beer in his hand, cheers Jeff anyway.

"Aren't these people great?" McGiffert exclaims. He is not yet aware that at the end of the block, where the caterers have set up food tables for the company, the young toughs of the neighborhood are already ripping off heaping plates of sliced beef and potatoes. Nobody is brave enough to tell a New York street kid to stop what he will do anyway, since any resistance could result in mugging or knifing. People in New York are afraid.

A young female production aide, hired just for the New York shooting, vainly tries to check the food line to weed out the uninvited, noncompany diners.

"Hey, you there. Are you with the company?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"Where's your identification?"

"My what?"

"The badge."

"I gave it to a friend." His surliness seems very much a part of the street, with its scattered debris, its dingy bars sporting neon beer signs in the windows, and its weary people walking slowly down the stairs from the elevated subway.

"Then you can't eat here."

"Who says?"

The young girl looks behind her, hoping to see a big, tough teamster. There are only the backs of the people in the food line.

"What can I do?" she asks rhetorically, her despair sincere, since she has already been taken to task for failing to keep people behind the barricades when the scene was being shot.

"Just cool it, lady. There's enough for everybody here. It's only going to go to waste if we don't eat it."

Back up the street the fourth take goes well. "That's real good . . . excellent," Guillermin says.

Jessica returns to her dressing trailer. Jeff continues to sign autographs. Guillermin disappears into the milling crowd at the food tables.

Several blocks away, pedestrians, seeing the light and smoke in the sky, fear the worst and begin pulling the levers in the fire boxes. Soon the local fire house is swamped with false alarms.

When the shooting resumes after the break, most of the residents have gone to bed, promising not to peer out their windows at any inopportune moment, such as in the middle of a shot. Among the few who remain is the man with his beer can. He belches contentedly.

Night shooting is a drag. An hour is never so long as it is at 3 A.M., when the body is rebelling against being up, being forced to move unnaturally against the basic impulse to stretch out and go to sleep on any available surface. Light arrives quickly on these early summer mornings, but the air is still weighted with oppressive humidity, which has remained through the night; it is an omen of another uncomfortable day. Through this sultry atmosphere of bad weather and rotting city the movie people walk like puppets on strings pulled by the director and his assistants. Guillermin, McGiffert, and the others must stay alert; the hope is that their forced vitality will be contagious, that it will keep the crew going for a few more hours.

McGiffert seems to work well with Guillermin. He

is younger than Neumann, perhaps more flexible, and this is his premiere as first assistant director on a major feature. In moments of crisis he is even more placid than Guillermin, and this is a valuable asset; appearance is worth a dozen words at these times.

"Okay. We're ready," McGiffert says, coming away from a huddle with the director.

Jeff and Jessica are at the bottom of the stairs leading to the elevated subway platform, where the camera is now located. The stars lurch forward without moving from their positions, like marathon runners waiting for the gun to go off.

"Now," Guillermin says.

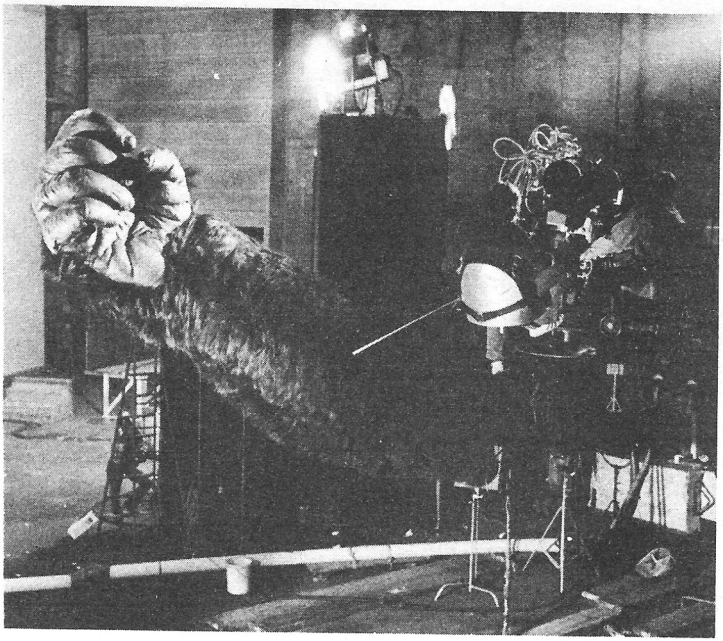
Jeff, pulling Jessica with him, rounds the corner, and the two take the stairs in big strides.

McGiffert has retreated outside the circle of the main action. He is temporarily a spectator in what is now the director's show. His work is done until the next scene.

"My biggest problem is keeping John calm," McGiffert says. "He tends to rush a bit with the shooting when he is dealing with crowd scenes. He rarely goes beyond two or three takes with them. And I must absorb the negative news and give him only the best."

A first assistant director works more closely with the director than almost any other person, except perhaps the cinematographer. He is the director's alter ego; he must think for him. It is his job to establish what his boss wants in front of the camera before the director steps in to do the scene. The good assistant directors are like members of a royal procession: they know how to walk two steps behind the king and to be at his side when he stops. The bad ones go to television.

McGiffert exists professionally on a very crowded plateau, inhabited by men in their late twenties and early thirties who are waiting to move up the ladder and become directors on feature films. The big pictures are still what moviemaking is all about, not the product that escapes on television and is called "Movie of the Week." These pictures get shown twice, the second time as



Amidst an awesome array of electrical equipment, cameramen prepare to shoot a scene with a piece of the forty-foot "leading man."

summer reruns, and are never seen again unless they are resurrected by chance as late-late shows.

A New Yorker by birth, McGiffert came naturally to the industry. His father directed and produced shows for the intellectually prestigious Camera Three. McGiffert knew he was destined to go into the business; how far he goes depends on how well he plays the game.

"What gets you is the cold-bloodedness of management," McGiffert complains. "This business is a flat-out money-making arrangement. There's no heart in filmmaking anymore."

If there ever was any personal warmth in the business, McGiffert believes it was at a time prior to his entrance into it, back when he was in the army, a clerk in counter-

intelligence. He stayed in the army longer than he should have, working his way toward open rebellion against the system before getting out and landing in Hollywood.

His six years in the business before coming on *King Kong* gave him exposure to all aspects of filmmaking; he hired on as assistant director on five low-budget independent pictures.

In November he was brought into the Kong operation to scout locations along the California coast at Big Sur. He spent five days in that beautiful country when its majestic beaches and mountains were being considered as an alternative to location shooting on Kauai. He was kept on the picture as a second assistant director on the second unit, moving over to the first unit for the Wall sequence. Guillermin observed how well he did with the crowd scenes, and when Neumann left, the director chose McGiffert for first assistant director.

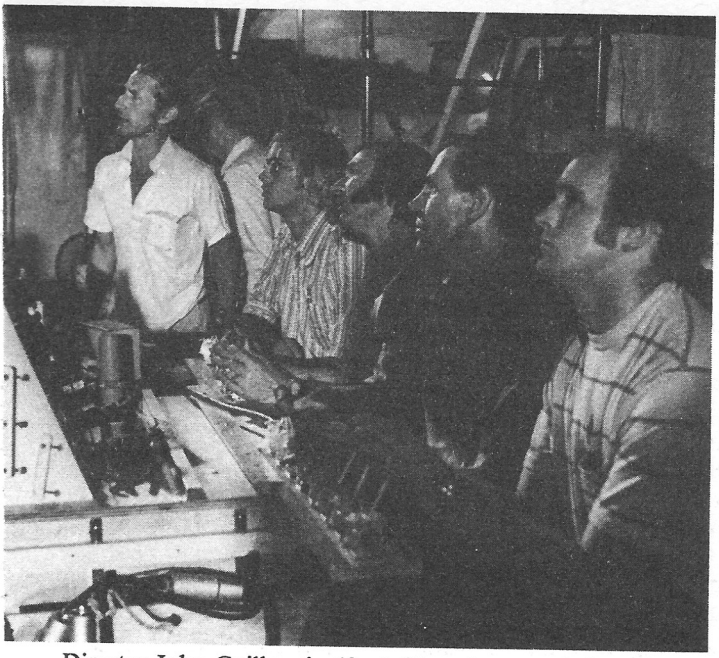
Now a member of the Screen Directors Guild, McGiffert says Kong is his first union picture.

"Sure, I want to direct, but not the kind of pictures coming out today. I want to do pictures with real dialogue and real people, like the films of the 1940s with Tracy and Hepburn."

According to McGiffert, *King Kong* is a throwback to the old way of making movies, and he approves of the fantasy, romance, and creative imagination. But he realizes that on a John Guillermin film he will be only second banana.

"John wants to do all the scenes himself, even those scheduled for the second unit. John's role for me now is teacher."

During the first weekend in New York there is a conflict between Paramount and the production over how to treat Kong's public debut: whether to seek publicity or cool it. Everyone is in agreement that during production the film will get maximum publicity in New York. After all, it's the communications center of the nation, with the headquarters of the television networks



Director John Guillermin (far left) and some of the men who manipulate the giant Kong's limbs

and most of the editorial offices of the major news magazines located here. But some Paramount officials are afraid of the kind of reception the film will get if a model and not the big mechanical Kong is brought to New York. No one at Paramount has yet seen it in one piece, but the studio worries that the model will be disappointing, an obvious fake, and will bring an outpouring of adverse, mocking criticism.

For the production staff a principal concern is getting enough people to do the night crowd scenes in the plaza, where Kong lies dying. About five thousand persons are needed, but with the film's budget soaring now to more than twenty million dollars, no one wants to pay the SAG rate of $47 per person per day for five thousand extras. Something must be devised to bring

out people who will be willing to stay long enough to perform in the crowd scenes—for free. Publicity would help.

But Paramount doesn't want to invite newspaper and television coverage—though of course if representatives of the media do show up, they cannot be barred from the set or treated rudely.

To get the crowds, it is finally decided that ads will be taken out in *The New York Times,* the *Daily News,* and the *Post* and in the *Newark Star Ledger,* inviting the public to attend the shooting of *King Kong* at the World Trade Center on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, June 21, 22, and 23, from 9 P.M. to an indefinite hour. The ad is cleverly worded, inviting the public to participate in the filming, but nowhere saying that the people will be paid.

The copy for the proposed advertisement is composed in Grossberg's office, with a very anxious John Guillermin carefully reading over it. He knows that for the New York scenes to be successful on film, there must be a huge throng in the plaza for the master shots. He also knows that if a crowd shows up—and no one is certain how New Yorkers will respond to the ad—it won't be easy to keep people there until midnight once they see how boring moviemaking can become during the multitude of idle minutes. Repeatedly Guillermin expresses his fear that few will show up. Grossberg is more optimistic: he has faith that the Big Apple still belongs to Kong and that public interest in this favorite monster will be overwhelming.

But if the required number of people show up, will they expect to see Kong on top of the Trade Center, straddling the twin towers as the Paramount poster has promised? If the public really thought about it, how could they expect a six-and-a-half-ton, forty-foot monster, automated by a crane, to be lifted to that height, let alone function when it got there? It would be easier to envision the whole contraption falling through the roof.

In fact, no one ever intended to bring the huge mechanical ape to New York. But then, no one said Kong would *not* be there, either. A story is sent out to the trade papers that the Port Authority has denied permission to put Kong on the World Trade Center for reasons of public safety. The story is apparently bought. There are no further questions from the press. Then, acting on the advice of Fred Sidewater, the truth is sent to the papers: Kong's stand-in, the styrofoam model, will be used. To everyone's surprise, there are no complaints from the press or from the public.

Sunday is a day of rest. It has been an exhausting week for the crew. Still, some have partied after the night's shooting and are sleeping late. A few go to see the hit black musical *Bubbling Brown Sugar,* which gives Sunday matinees and evening performances. Doris Grau visits yet another museum, meticulously checking off each one as she works her way uptown. Guillermin goes over the next day's shooting schedule with his staff. Tension gives an edge to the weekend production meetings.

Then it is Monday, and panic stands waiting behind the World Trade Center. It is a gloomy, restless day, one best endured in an air-conditioned bar or movie house. Across the water Staten Island shimmers behind a humid, chalk-white haze; a ferry crosses the water, barely leaving a wake. The long-range weather forecast is for thunderstorms.

The production office is set up in a suite in the North Tower of the World Trade Center. In early afternoon it has yet to come alive with the tempo and expectation of the night's shooting. There are many empty offices in the building—tenants have hardly broken down the doors to occupy them—and the rooms of the Kong production have an air of impermanence about them, as if they could be cleared out and returned to their barren natural state in a few minutes' time.

The outer rooms, bare-walled and chairless, are filled with racks of army clothing. The paid extras, those who will stand near the stricken Kong in the close-ups, will dress here behind waist-high wood partitions. The single

front rooms facing the plaza are for Jessica, Jeff, and Guillermin. In each is a bed and a chair, and they are as homey as cells in solitary confinement. In the corner room there is a desk with several phones on it. One lights up repeatedly. No one is yet in the office. It is still too early for the solitary young office worker to have arrived. Most business is still being conducted in the production office at the Sheraton Motor Inn. Here, at the World Trade Center, the coffee in the unplugged urn is cold; beside it, half-eaten doughnuts have flies crawling unbothered over them.

Down below, in the plaza, Michael Dino and his team finish putting Kong together, a task they started on Saturday. The operation has gone unnoticed over the weekend. The invited public is not to come until Monday, and only a small number of early-summer tourists were at the World Trade Center to see the men piecing together huge slabs of fur-covered styrofoam, going up ladders, crawling over the furry expanse to reach Kong's bald chest.

Once horsehair was accepted to cover Kong, Michael Dino had to wait months for his shipment of horse tails from Argentina. Four thousand pounds were needed—two thousand each for the mechanical Kong and the model—a fact that conjures up visions of the horses of Argentina running tailless on the pampas.

Not all the hair was the same color. Some had to be bleached, some tinted, until the colors matched. After that, the panels of hair had to be sewn into netting, which was then attached to latex strips. Finally the strips were glued to the mold. For the model alone, it took ten people, working overtime in the studio, to sew fifteen hundred panels of this hair into three hundred yards of netting. The scanty wisps of hair on Kong's otherwise nude chest and face had to be punched into place, each strand individually and by hand.

It was a rough cross-country trip for Kong. He arrived with his hair greatly disheveled. Some panels had fallen off and had to be reglued.

At mid-afternoon on Monday, Michael Dino, supported by several workers, is still crawling over Kong, combing his hair, checking out his exposed gums and teeth. People come and go, stopping to gawk. Kong rests on his back, surrounded by pieces of lightweight synthetic material that, on the screen, will resemble concrete smashed by the ape's weight. Since the model's back will never be seen it has been left bare. A worker sits on his chest, smoking a cigarette. Michael Dino comes off Kong and resumes signing autographs. By the end of the day he will have scrawled his name on one hundred fifty pieces of paper.

Proudly admiring the accomplishment in front of him, Dino says with awe, "It took us seventy-seven hours to do his face alone."

"Hey, are you somebody?" The strident, youthful voice causes Michael's head to snap around.

"Well . . ." Michael demurs.

"How about an autograph?"

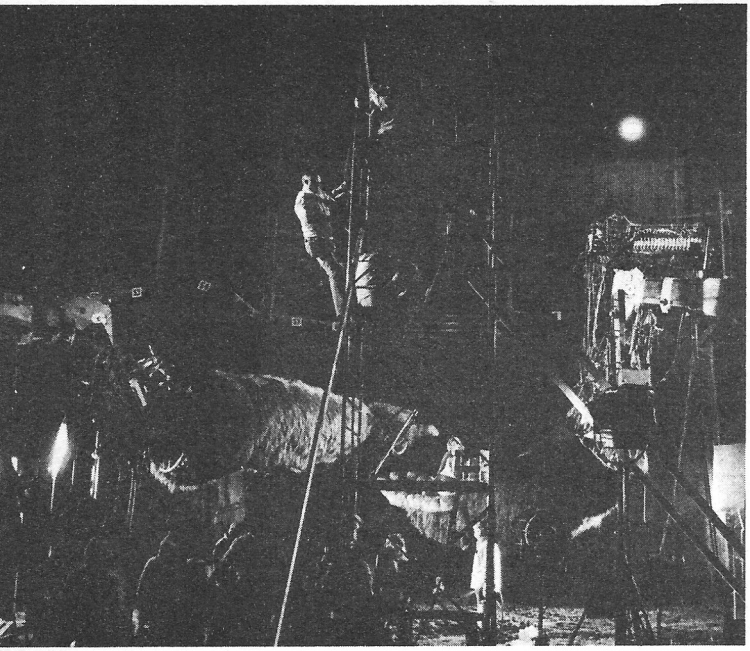
He signs another.

Kong's eyes are open. There is an expression of pain and anguish on his rubber face.

Back upstairs, in the office, one of the first arrivals is Dino De Laurentiis. He has called a production staff meeting. Already waiting for him is production designer Dale Hennesy. Remembering what was essentially a fruitless trip to Kauai, he again asks, with some amazement, "What am I doing here?"

The advance word is that De Laurentiis now wants the picture done by August 15.

"Ha!" Hennesy scoffs. He has been accompanied on the transcontinental flight by production manager Terry Carr, who seems excited and slightly stunned to be in New York. He'll be here less than forty-eight hours; he won't even have a chance to explore the Greenwich Village jazz clubs. Carr's chief job now is weekly revision of the shooting schedule and consultation of the storyboards to determine which scenes can be eliminated without crippling the final product; production has



Crew members check cameras and lights as Dwan sits in Kong's hand on the sound stage.

to be speeded up, and he is in New York to give his advice on the scene-pruning process. Hennesy, his face set in a scowl, will give his dire report on why it will be impossible to finish the sets by De Laurentiis' unrealistic deadlines.

De Laurentiis does not now need negative reports. The rumor is that the film is so far over budget that he has started investing his own money in it; this can be interpreted as either a vote of confidence in the project or an act of desperation. But he is all smiles on his arrival, nodding personally to each of his staff before he picks up the phone and dials Barry Diller.

"Barry . . ." The pause is filled with the cordiality of De Laurentiis' greeting.

As if the person on the other end has not heard him,

he repeats, "Barry . . ." The way he says it means he wants something. "Now, about the press . . ."

De Laurentiis is thrilled by Kong's appearance, and he wants Paramount to relinquish its ban on television coverage.

"But, Barry . . ."

The issue is obviously not resolved; it is left to be resolved by indecision. De Laurentiis gives no instructions, and his publicists knowingly wait until he is out of the room before systematically beginning to call the television stations and newspaper city desks. Gordon Armstrong, while with Twentieth Century-Fox in New York, worked with the man he is now calling, and if anyone can get the reporters out on such a short notice, it is Armstrong.

What Armstrong and his assistant have failed to remember—though it was something they had talked about endlessly in Hollywood—is that New York is Kong's town, and there is no way the press could be kept away from the shooting. What the public knows, the fourth estate knows, and reporters would have been there even without the calls.

"Still, who will show?" Guillermin asks again, as if expecting the wrong answer. "Do you have any idea how many will come tonight? Do you think many people saw the ad?"

Everyone wants to reassure him, but nobody knows what to expect.

Kong is stretched out near the North Tower. Midway across the plaza is a mobile statue of minimal artistic distinction, and beside it are the barricades security has put up to restrain the viewers. There is not much space between the monster and the public. The people begin filing into the plaza well before dusk, and they bring with them a carnival atmosphere. The crew has never really seen Kong before, and they stand around him, gaping, commenting on how good he looks. Then they turn their attention to the crowd.

"Do you see the crowd out there?" someone asks. "Every junkie in New York's got to be in it."

"But there are a lot of people with their kids," one of the others counters.

"Catch those two foxes by the door. Wonder what they'd do to get into pictures!" Pause. Sigh. "Hey, girls, you ought to be in pictures." Laugh.

"I've been too tired to do anything."

"I hate New York."

"California sucks."

"Eastern chauvinist."

Jeff and Jessica, in street clothes, are with the crew, admiring Kong.

"Does anyone know what we're doing?" Jessica asks. She has become all too familiar with the constantly changing shooting schedule, which makes the chain of command more fiction than fact.

"You're supposed to be dressed."

"Nobody told us anything!" she snaps back. She has also learned there are times to be testy, as well as times to acquiesce.

The stars' dressing trailers are parked just off the plaza, on the sidewalk, and Jessica and Jeff go to them to change. It's just as well that they don't have to dress in their North Tower cells; that might have had a depressing effect on their performances.

When it is time to shoot the first scene, the crowd is estimated at three thousand, which is probably an exaggeration. It looks more like two thousand—and it's not building. Bullhorn in hand, Jack Grossberg stands under the camera crane and bellows instructions to the crowd. He explains the scene, telling them that on the director's cue they are to rush toward Kong and the girl but stop just in front of her. The paid extras will be in front of the crowd, playing soldiers and press people.

Jessica, a robe over her beautiful silver gown, leaves the trailer and goes to Kong's head. She is rightfully apprehensive. Having been mauled by a mechanical hand for several months—only recently did her pinched nerve relax—she must now confront the charge of sev-

eral hundred untutored, unpaid New Yorkers who, for all she knows, may just live up to their stereotyped reputation for being "pushy."

"Ready."

The clap-stick is snapped. The red light comes on the four cameras, directed on Kong and the crowd. The brass from Paramount—Barry Diller, Gordon Weaver, Jeff Katzenberg—lean forward expectantly.

"Go!"

The people pour through the barricades like water tumbling over Niagara Falls. Flashbulbs pop. People impersonating reporters, dressed as reporters never are in real life, lead the charge. Kong is circled quickly; the space between the girl and the mob narrows in seconds. Jessica's response is pure survival instinct; she throws her hands up in front of her face.

"Cut!"

The crowd lunges ahead; it is now just inches from Jessica.

Fern Weber's reaction is totally, automatically professional. She pushes her way through the crowd to get to Jessica. Her sternness and persistence open a path in the mass of humanity.

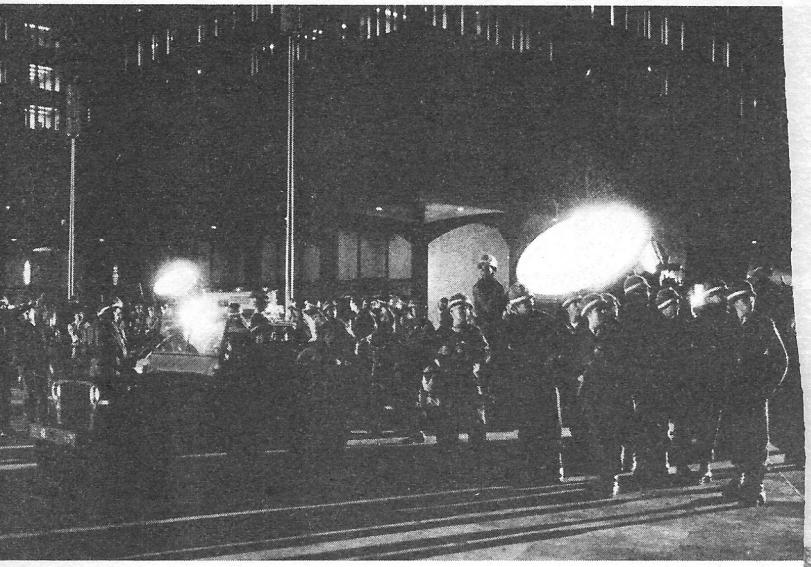
"Cut!" The voice is practically hysterical. The sound system is not working properly and the command does not come out of the speakers. Only the bullhorn works —and that not very well.

Without even looking at her, people run past Jessica, reach Kong, and begin to pull out his hair for souvenirs.

"Stop that! Get off him! Get back!"

When a person becomes part of a crowd, he surrenders something of himself. Finally, as the words reach the throng, they begin to move back, receding, like the surf on a huge beach. Fern puts a housecoat over Jessica's shoulders and hustles her back to the dressing trailer.

Off camera, Sally Perle tries to separate her extras from the people in the crowd. She has opened a path in the barricade for her SAGs and waivers, but now the mob is pouring through.



Extras in military uniform, with Jeeps, rifles, helmets—and spotlights—wait for their scene to begin in the World Trade Center plaza in New York.

"If you do not have a voucher, you must go," she says. Her voice is authentically New York, but it falls on deaf ears.

"Hey, over there." An assistant director points. About fifteen teenagers are crawling under the barricade and dashing toward Kong. They are headed off by security guards.

"There is a lost child at the entrance to the plaza, by the Avis truck," Grossberg announces through the bullhorn. "If anyone is missing a child, please go there." From his position on a tall ladder, Grossberg can see the truck in the distance, and beside it a teamster is guarding the child. But nobody is heading toward her.

"Anybody want a kid?" Grossberg cracks.

Another take is called by Guillermin. The crowd still pushes too close to Kong and Jessica.

"Cut!" Grossberg calls.

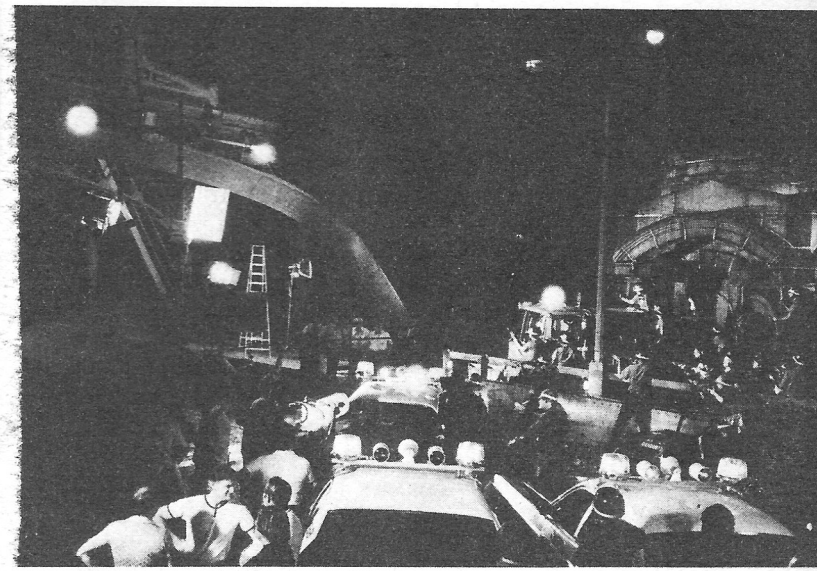
Guillermin leans over to Grossberg and says, "We cut it a long time ago."

There is another lost child. "It's a boy this time," Grossberg says. "If you want to claim him he is up here by the camera crane."

"What are we going to do?" Sally moans. "Everyone is mingling out there with our extras."

"You can't stop New Yorkers," Grossberg replies.

During the breaks, reporters get their interviews with the stars. Even Dino De Laurentiis agrees to sidewalk press conferences. The questions are legitimate; these are real newspaper people out to get a story. A quick head count shows a remarkable turnout: the three major television networks, the three daily New York newspapers, the wire services, and a good representation of out-of-town papers, including the *Newark Star Ledger*



The crew prepares to shoot a scene on a bridge that New York policemen and National Guardsmen are trying to defend against Kong.

and the *Washington Post*. It is much better than anticipated, and since Kong looks great, even in his inert state, everyone from Paramount is pleased by the coverage.

Grossberg climbs up his ladder and puts the bullhorn to his lips. "A brown carry-all case has been stolen from up here, near the camera. It contains papers that are very valuable to the production. We would like it returned."

"How much you want to give for it?" someone calls up to Grossberg.

It is not returned immediately, but as mysteriously as it disappeared the case returns, pushed up next to the camera by an anonymous hand.

Well before midnight—but, fortunately, long after the master shot is put on film, the crowd begins to disperse. However, until it is developed and shown at rushes the next day, there will be no way of knowing if there were enough people in the plaza.

The extras will be used for the close-up of Dwan with Kong as she looks into his tear-filled eyes. Jeff, knowing how important these scenes are to Dwan's character—they are her most dramatic moments—stands off camera in the crowd to give Jessica support. He is not required to be there; he simply wants to help.

"Now, Mr. De Laurentiis. What kind of picture is this?" a reporter asks the producer.

"A romantic fantasy."

The dressing trailer is air-conditioned, and while Jessica is being interviewed in the rear, behind a drawn curtain, Fern, Jo, and Del sit in the front, discussing the size and reaction of the crowd. They are somewhat astonished by how mannerly it was, especially considering what a field day narcotics agents could have had in it.

Jessica, picking at the food brought her by one of the grips, is getting rather expert in the art of giving interviews. She seems to be saying a great deal about herself, and she says it with wit, leaving the impression

that she is revealing more about herself than she intends to.

Jessica, new to the publicity game, goes along with almost every interview request. In this respect, she is very different from some of the more difficult veteran stars, who are adamant against interviews, leaving it to the unit publicist to interpret what precisely they want. (Often their negative responses mean that the stars desperately wish to be interviewed.)

If Jessica balks at any interview, after a suitable period of reflection (usually lasting a day or two) she customarily relents. Being pretty and clever, she sometimes lets herself in for more than just talk. One young man from a leading overseas newspaper wanted his interview to continue over dinner the following week. Jessica declined.

The present interview is overly familiar; everyone seems to ask the same questions. How did she get the role, since she had no movie experience? And what's it like having an ape for her first leading man? Jessica manages to rearrange the wording to her answers, making it sound as if she's coming up with something new.

When the three people in the front of the van stop talking, they can hear the interview without really listening to it. Occasionally, one of them will push aside the curtain. They know by a wink or a roll of the eyes that Jessica wants them to step in and extricate her from the interview, to tell her that she's needed on the set. The code between Jessica and her friends has been worked out before the reporters' arrival. But it is unusual for Jessica to end an interview before it winds itself down to a natural end.

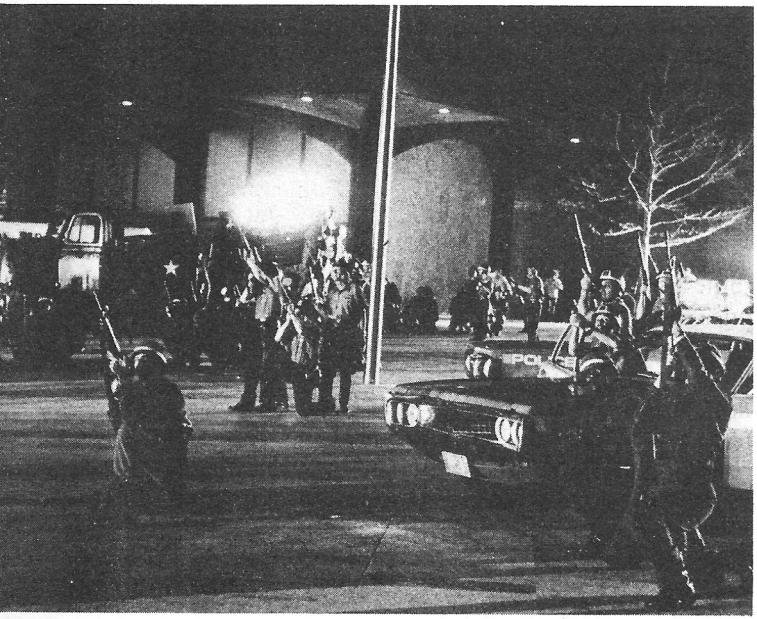
"You know," Fern Weber says, "Jessica is an absolute doll." Jo and Del nod agreement without bothering to comment on what they consider is a statement of the obvious. "Diane Keaton was the best to me, but Jessica is even easier to get along with. She has great self-discipline, probably because of her ballet training and her modeling. She has a very professional attitude toward her work. The average star just wouldn't sit by for

forty minutes to an hour while she gets sewed into her costume."

Jessica's laugh comes sharp and high until she arrests it with a choking sound. The reporter's answering chuckle is low and inhibited.

"Yes . . . an absolute doll."

Fern Weber originally came to California not to get into the movie business but to be as close as possible to her husband, who was stationed in Okinawa during World War II. As she waited for him, she grew accustomed to the warm climate and the sea, and when he finally came back, there didn't seem to be any good reason for them to go home to Syracuse, where she had attended college.



In New York, extras dressed as cops and National Guardsmen prepare to shoot Kong off the top of the 110-story World Trade Center.

She had originally come from Texas, and she had an aunt there who worked as a cutter and fitter for Nieman-Marcus, so it didn't surprise Fern that she wanted to do something with her hands. With the war ended and her husband back, she opened a dress shop in Hollywood.

Hollywood is a company town, though a very small percentage of its population is directly involved in the movies. Eventually most of its residents get to visit a movie studio, and some never return to civilian life. That's exactly what happened to Fern after her first visit. For her it was a homecoming, and she applied for membership with the local costumers' union. On Good Friday she was called by the union to report to Universal the next day.

Conditions at the studio were not much different from those in the back room of her own dress shop. It was hot, and making costumes did get tedious. Wanting to become more closely associated with movies, she asked to be a costumer with a film on location. Her first feature was *The Ten Commandments,* directed by Cecil B. DeMille.

"DeMille was such a perfectionist," she recalls. "The money he'd spend on costumes! And you'd see them only a few seconds in the finished film. On that picture he didn't like the tiger skins used for some of the costumes, so he sent a plane to India to pick up some new ones."

On some films she designs the wardrobe; on others, like *King Kong,* she dresses the stars in a wardrobe by another designer. Fern loves to do research on costumes for a film.

"But the movie industry has changed since I came into it twenty-five years ago," she says. "The dollar is so much more important now. They sure don't spend money as frivolously as they used to."

At the end of the night's shooting, just before dawn, there is lightning in the western sky. When grips begin laying plastic over Kong to protect him from rain, they

discover that the eager souvenir hunters have made off with big patches of hair and a fingertip.

The stories in the newspapers and on television are sensational, starting with the coverage on the eleven o'clock news shows. There are great photographs in the centerfold of the *Daily News*. The *Post* has a picture on the front page. The *Times* has an article with a photograph on the entertainment page. Both *Newsweek* and *Time* use photos. The *Newark Star Ledger* gives three-quarters of a page to a feature story and pictures. The wire services break stories and photographs in major papers in Chicago, Boston, Detroit, San Francicso, Houston, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. The local disc jockeys have a field day kidding Kong.

Frank I. Davis, vice-president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, later comments that no picture in recent memory has received so much publicity.

There is no way of estimating how the coverage will affect attendance on the second night of crowd scenes. The rushes of the previous night's shooting are somewhat disappointing, and Guillermin hopes enough people will show up to try for another master shot of the horde pressing in on Dwan and Kong. The crowd on the previous night was energetic and demonstrative without becoming really unruly. A larger crowd with the same attitude would be a real boon.

Crowd control has always been a factor in planning for the New York shooting, and Christian Ferry carries with him a detailed sketch of the security arrangements for the plaza, showing in blue and red lines the stations of guards provided by the Port Authority and of those hired by the production.

Tonight wooden barricades will be placed around the outer edges of the plaza, increasing the distance between the public and Kong. A few more hands on his body and Kong will be naked.

There is some suspicion by late afternoon, even before the offices in the World Trade Center empty out, that the crowd will be larger. By 5 P.M. there are at



Guillermin shoots the crowd scene in which thousands of New Yorkers surge toward the fallen Kong—who, in reality, has been lying on the pavement all along. The crowd is full of authentic New Yorkers; only a few are played by paid extras.

least a thousand spectators waiting in front of the banks on the Church Street side of the World Trade Center. These early arrivals bring the same carnival atmosphere; they are expectant, exuberant, and decidedly friendly. Again there are many children along with their parents.

Because everything went so well the first night, Dino De Laurentiis plans to go to the theater. The Paramount officials take the night off. The publicity has already been amassed and distributed.

Michael Dino and his crew make last-minute repairs on Kong's body, reweaving the bald spots, trying to cover up the missing fingertip. Michael is now so expert at signing autographs that he can do it with one hand while continuing with his work on Kong's pelt.

In the twelfth-floor production office, Gordon Armstrong goes to the window and looks down on the empty plaza. "I've got a feeling it's going to be big tonight," he says. "I just took a look out on Church Street, and there must be thousands waiting to get in." At the time his estimate is taken as an example of a publicist's penchant for hyperbole.

The actors playing guardsmen are suiting up—some in the outer offices, the more modest ones behind the clothes racks—hopping on one foot while trying to step into the green, sharply creased pants, then blousing them in the correct military fashion over the tops of their boots.

Sally Perle stands at the counter checking off the waivered extras, handing out vouchers. The total number of extras, waivered and union, comes to about four hundred fifty.

Guillermin and his crew go over the placement of the cameras on the Chapman crane and the fork lifts. Three will be used tonight for another attempt at the master shot. Jessica is dressed early and waiting in her trailer with Fern and Jo. She has agreed to meet with more reporters between takes.

A production assistant checks the subway station under the World Trade Center and reports that long,

steady lines of people are coming up the escalators. They remind him of the crowds going to Shea Stadium to see the Mets. Some of the children clutch pictures of Kong as if they are banners for the home team.

The crowds on Church Street have in fact swelled to the thousands, spilling out into the street and blocking traffic. Many have been there for hours and are almost overcome by the stench from the portable toilets along the curb near the barricades.

"We're in for a night," Armstrong says.

At dusk, one of the wooden barricades is removed, and what has been a rather orderly throng, considering its size, becomes a mob—pushing, screaming, running to get into the plaza, and, once there, stopping short, like cattle in a stockyard, seeing they are trapped, staring dumbly. Kong is over on the other side of the plaza; they will not get near him. Their little cameras are useless, but they press against the barricades, snapping pictures.

The first ones begin edging the barricades closer to Kong. David McGiffert stands at Kong's feet with a bullhorn, telling the crowd to keep back.

People continue to enter the plaza, funneled through the Church Street entrance.

There is an attempt to achieve some sort of order in the placement of the extras. The waivers, who will be unidentified spectators in the scene—as opposed to newsmen and police, who are played by the SAG members—are bunched at Kong's head. But kids off the street sneak under the barricades and mingle with the authorized extras. Some even manage to get vouchers, which assure them of a meal at midnight. The extras do not concern the production at the moment. They can be expected to respond as professionals to the director's instructions. It is the public that worries the company; the crowd is beginning to act in a very menacing manner.

Grossberg is pacing nervously. "I think our friends are getting restless."

"They're getting angry," McGiffert replies. "They've been waiting for hours, and they want to see something. They've already started throwing things at us."

The sight in front of them is incredible. Every inch of the plaza outside the barricades is filled. The first crowd estimates are fifteen to twenty thousand. An hour later a New York policeman says it is more like thirty thousand. Whatever its size, the crowd could suddenly become an instrument of terror.

An attempt is made to get the first shot. The crowd is told, in both Spanish and English, to please stand back. And still the area between Kong and the horde is shrinking.

"They're just pushing in the barricades. Nobody's stopping them," McGiffert says anxiously.

"Get the shot, goddamn it, or they'll be all over us!"

"Look at those mothers! They're animals."

"Are you crazy?" Jessica shouts. "I'm not going out there. They tried to tear my clothes off *last* night. What do you think they'll do *tonight?"*

Fern Weber stands next to Jessica almost defiantly, her arm around the young woman's shoulders. Her stance says she won't let Jessica go without adequate protection.

Guillermin, plunked in his seat on the Chapman crane, is lifted above the crowd. There are so many people in the plaza that the sound from the speakers is lost. No one can hear the instructions being transmitted by Grossberg.

From above, in the production office, the masses swirling closer to Kong resemble whitecaps churning on the surface of a stormy sea. Someone begins to pound a bongo drum. There is a scream, unrelated to any accident. People laugh. Prop men climb Kong's chest and squirt dried-syrup blood into the corners of his mouth. The crowd cheers.

The front-line defense is provided by the extras, playing national guardsmen, and a smattering of real New York cops, totaling no more than fifty. Upstairs in the dressing rooms other extras are being pressed into ser-

vice for crowd control. They are given real, though unloaded, guns, and hustled to the elevators.

A young actor, squeezed among a dozen others in their make-believe military costumes, mutters, "What the hell am I doing here? I'm no cop. I didn't sign on to do this."

Around the corner of the North Tower, from the direction of West Street, comes a squad of New York's finest, marching in convincing formation, fanning out around Kong. The reinforcements are here. The cavalry has arrived, just like in the old westerns.

Jessica does as she is told and stands by Kong. Fern is at her side. Jessica waits. The crew waits. Nothing happens. Activity around Kong is reduced to a standstill. Only the crowd keeps reacting.

At the barricades a cop stares at the crowd and takes five steps back. "They're *scary!*" he says with feeling.

An assistant director stands on Kong and commands the crowd to move back. The people press forward.

De Laurentiis arrives at the plaza, summoned from the theater. Serious trouble is stirring. The problem is not what the crowd has done but what it has the potential of doing: breaking windows, stealing equipment, tearing Kong apart, going on a rampage. All of this could happen when an agitated crowd is transformed into an uncontrollable mob.

Port Authority officials, fearing the worst, contend that the security force is not adequate for the size of the throng. Anticipating that the combined weight of people and equipment may buckle the plaza, they demand that filming be stopped. The next few minutes are crucial for the continuation of any cordial relationship between the production and the Port Authority. Mutual recriminations are already beginning. Christian Ferry unfolds his map and argues that the company has lived up to its side of the agreement.

De Laurentiis paces, tapping his lips with a finger, scowling darkly.

"They want us off." Grossberg shrugs. Indifference is his defense against anxiety. It is not very convincing.

"There's no way of stopping them from doing whatever they want if the barricades go," a grip says.

"Let's go home," Fern says.

Dazed junkies stumble through the crowd, muttering incoherently, their presence infuriating the straight people. Some in the crowd shout obscenities, words that other people still do not appreciate hearing. And some gripe and taunt the production; they feel cheated because they are unable to get any closer to Kong. This is really the worst, though. There may have been a moment when all hell could have broken loose, but that moment never comes.

No one is injured by the missiles being thrown. Kong is unmolested. No props are stolen. Later, when it is over, people connected with the production say that things would never have gotten out of hand. But this assurance comes only in retrospect. Fear is there that night, pervasive and unsettling. It stays to the end.

What may have saved the evening is that even when all sense of order seemed up for grabs, Guillermin, unbeknownst to the crowd and to even most of the crew, had three cameras running. On film he had the spontaneous action of thousands of people, something that would have been impossible to capture if the people were rehearsed. Since he has what he wants, there is no need to keep the crowd any longer. Suddenly, perhaps just in the nick of time, Grossberg is standing on a ladder, thanking the crowd for showing up. The people are unaware of having done anything except stare at a big dummy ape.

"Don't shove, now. Please leave quietly. Move out carefully. You people have been super-nice," Grossberg says.

Maybe it is the late hour or the tedium, but at any rate, the people obey—slowly at first, many refusing to go until they have moved up and gotten a closer look at Kong. But the police, pushing back the barricades, gradually expanding the space around Kong, soon clear the plaza—without incident.

Guillermin is now ready to bring his cameras in for the close-up of Jessica and the paid extras at Kong's head. But the Port Authority is unrelenting. Go! The company protests, even though it is the Port Authority's property.

The midnight break arrives, with the departure issue still unresolved. Any door-locking decision will come after the horse has been stolen. The thousands of spectators are now a handful of diehards, people who would stay up all night anyway; they lean on the barricades at the street entrances to the plaza, jeering at the strangers from Hollywood. If there was a legitimate reason to cease filming, it came hours ago, when there was an actual threat from the crowd. Now the Port Authority officials are left with an unreasonable stand. But they will not alter it, for fear of losing face.

And everything has been going so well in New York! The company is ahead of schedule. Now this! If it weren't for these scenes at the World Trade Center, the New York footage could have been done in the studio, saving the million dollars it cost to bring thirty cast and crew members from Hollywood, feed the company ($27,000), and transport army Jeeps, command cars, and ambulances from the Coast. All of the army equipment will be needed back in California for scenes to be shot in the studio.

At this late hour, New York lives up to the very worst expectations of the crew and cast. Though the streets are empty, the city seems to be a dirty, ill-kempt haven for muggers, drug pushers, and maniacs of every description. It makes no difference to the crew that the crime rate per capita is higher in Los Angeles.

"We'll get back here even if we have to sneak the shot," Grossberg says.

Sally Perle is in a tearful rage—and not because the company is being unceremoniously kicked off the plaza. Her national guardsmen have been promised hot food upstairs, where the company is being fed. Instead, unattractively packaged box lunches are being shoved into their hands—and downstairs, too, on the plaza. Sally



Dwan, no longer afraid of Kong, lets the giant ape get a good whiff of her.

protests, rattling off a list of real and alleged grievances of the extras against company policy.

With hours of darkness left and no immediate chance of rain, Guillermin wants to keep the night from being a total loss by doing a scene of Bridges pedaling his bicycle down a deserted street. It is unclear whether permission from the police department is required (or obtained). The momentum now is to gather up the equipment and get out.

Dino De Laurentiis asks his publicists to call the radio and television stations and say the shooting went so well that it will not be necessary to come back to the plaza for a third night. An advertisement will later be placed in the newspapers, thanking the people of New York for their splendid cooperation.

New York, New York, is a helluva town, but not too great now as the crew push the cameras and lights toward the trucks parked on Church Street. The Port

Authority, not much in evidence earlier in the evening, now exert themselves, prodding the company to move out more swiftly.

There is no visible damage to the plaza or the surrounding buildings, though someone reports that the mob broke a bank window on Church Street. A Port Authority cop claims the crowd tore the ivy and plants out of the sidewalk divider leading into the plaza from Church Street.

At 1:30 A.M., the plaza is empty. Kong lies alone as the last of the crew pulls the plastic cover over him.

The company is permitted to return to the plaza for one more night, Sunday, June 27, after promising the Port Authority there will be no publicity about the pending return. The shooting is scheduled for Sunday as an extra precaution—few people are likely to be attracted, since downtown Manhattan is hardly jammed on summer weekends. Still, the word does get out, making its way into Earl Wilson's newspaper column. He informs his readers accurately of the time and day of Kong's return to the World Trade Center plaza.

Actually, Kong has never left. He lies there, under his plastic blanket, all week, and when he is uncovered on Sunday, though he was supposedly afforded protection, an eye and a tooth are missing. He now resembles a drunk, one-eyed, hairy fighter with denture problems. A light bulb is painted and inserted into his eye socket, and a paper tooth is cut and put into the hole in his bridgework.

Christian Ferry, the perennial troubleshooter for the company, arrives early to calm the fears of the Port Authority, which now realizes it may have reacted too impetuously before but is still wary. Ferry stands under the twin towers, looking up, feeling the awesome power of the World Trade Center's sterile design, the wall of a thousand windows rising to dizzying heights.

Commenting on the emptiness of the World Trade Center, he says, "It's a good place for Kong to be dead."

Nothing comes easy shooting in New York. Just when

everything seems to be going right—no crowds in the plaza, extras in place, beautiful weather—a person renting one of the generators insists on getting paid right now. He threatens to take his machine away. The asking price is $26,000. Without lights there will be no shooting.

"Shakedown," Grossberg mutters.

A check is written. When the bank first opens the next morning, payment on the check is stopped. A lawsuit is filed; it is one of several rising out of production disputes.

With the generator working, Jessica goes up to Kong. It is their big scene. Dwan stands by her doomed friend, crying. In the crowd, Prescott, jumping up and down, tries to get to her but is held back by the police.

After months of performing to only the hand of her leading man, Jessica now has the whole body to play to, and the tears come easily, flowing freely for what has happened to Kong. The fiction of his life becomes tormentingly real to her, showing her how cruel people can become when they're corrupted by greed.

"She's actually crying," a visitor to the set says admiringly.

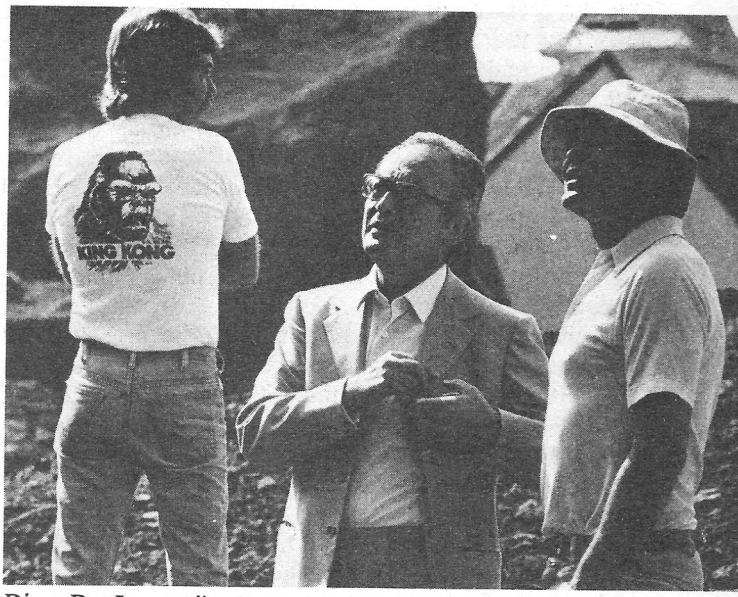
"It no longer was an abstract beast, a mechanical hand coming at me," she says later in her dressing trailer. "It was Kong, and he was dying."

After each take, Jessica stands by herself under the Chapman crane, her arms folded in front of her, her head down. Jeff breaks through the reverie without speaking by just putting his arm around her shoulders and giving her a hug. She finds it difficult to get out of the scene. There are still tears in her eyes when she looks up to Bridges. Her smile is wan and ill-formed, an abstract expression. Behind her, the prop people keep working on Kong's face, squirting blood around his mouth. His face is more defined at the moment; his final agony is wrenching and human. She goes back to his head and stares down at him for one more take.

The next night the company shoots at Hanover Square. The scene is of Jeff and Jessica running down a

side street, entering the square, talking briefly before entering a basement restaurant. The square is representative of what New York once was, and of what it has become, as well. Some of the buildings are stylishly old, remnants of a more elegant era when men and women in formal dress came home to their fashionable apartments in horse-drawn carriages, and people strolled in the lush triangular park on hot summer evenings.

The aristocratic buildings remain, but they have been overwhelmed by the bland anonymity of the newer, larger buildings and by the tall glass-and-steel office buildings a few blocks over, on the East River. The park, obscenely littered with garbage now, is populated by drunks and panhandlers, their eyes reflecting a defeat that goes beyond despair. A few blocks uptown, whole streets have been abandoned, and the deserted buildings,



Dino De Laurentiis (center) with Chapman crane operator Pat Walker in a King Kong T-shirt and director of photography Dick Kline

with broken windows and crumbling walls, resemble London during the Blitz.

The movie work goes slowly; the scene is rehearsed endlessly. Dick Kline says one of the problems is that the street light is washing out Jessica's face. When the lighting has been corrected, the mike taped to her thigh goes out and she returns to her dressing trailer to have it repaired, hiking her silver gown up over a very shapely leg.

In the street, Jeff keeps running in circles to stay physically "in the scene." He stops, props himself against a parked car, and looks up at the lightning that makes jagged lines in the black sky. He barely flinches when big drops of rain put craters in the dust on the car.

Cooperative as ever, he continues to give interviews during breaks in the shooting. He says acting is not everything in his life, though he remembers taping an interview with his mother when he was eight years old and saying he wanted to be an actor.

"I would also like to direct, produce, play guitar, compose songs, paint, sculpt. . . ."

"Are we getting the sound?" Guillermin asks when shooting resumes.

Taking the microphone plugs out of his ears, Jack Solomon cocks his head and says, "We could do it better."

"Again."

Jessica, holding on to a light pole, her head turned away from its pale light, says, "How about buying me a drink?"

"Come on—only ten blocks more and we've got the key to a great apartment," Prescott replies.

"What's the hurry? We've put a river between us. Bridges are mined and apes don't swim—your own book said so. Buy me a drink. There—" She points to the basement restaurant, and they trot to the stairs.

"Try to look more worried," Guillermin says to the performers. "You must be out of breath, too."

The lightning is now accompanied by kettledrum

rumblings of thunder. The raindrops are big but sporadic, not coming with enough intensity to stop the shooting. Still, some of the drunks turn up the collars of their soiled shirts and stagger to the shelter of doorways.

It is no more than a threat, and when the storm passes, the humidity is even greater than before.

The next day many of the crew begin packing for home, set to depart on Tuesday-night or early-Wednesday-morning flights. Sally disbands her hundred-man army, put together on two days' notice with M–16s brought in from Virginia and uniforms from New York costumers. Jack Grossberg issues his final New York communiqué:

> Cameras, sound equipment, and wardrobe necessary for shooting in Los Angeles the first week of our return will be shipped on Wednesday morning via air and will be in Los Angeles that evening. It will be picked up by our transportation department in L.A. Items not essential for the first week's photography will be shipped via our trucks and should be packed, clearly marked, and secured with locks. These canisters will be picked up on Tuesday. Please contact Joe Sawyer regarding the above.

A second unit is scheduled to remain in New York, getting crowd scenes in Central Park and along the Battery. These will be inserted into Kong's presentation scene. Lori Imbler stays on until the end of the week, closing out the production office, answering the last irate phone calls. Bob Kocourek, who is from New York and had dreams of nights free to visit friends, dine at great restaurants, and go to the theater, has spent most of his time at a desk in his office at the Sheraton Motor Inn, and, writing out the last checks, realizes that New York has not been much fun for him. Maybe Los Angeles is really his home now.

Kong is disassembled and repacked into the three trucks to be taken back across country. Nobody knows quite what to do with him, since he is not needed in any more scenes. Paramount had wanted to put a model Kong, somewhat smaller than forty feet, on a building in New York's Times Square throughout the Bicentennial summer, but that plan was rejected by the city government.

Kong leaves New York its reigning champ. He has created headlines in the Big Apple and across America. He has been photographed from every conceivable angle, by amateur and professional alike. He has been pawed and petted by a thousand hands. He remains an enduring symbol of the greatest city in the United States, and he is still fresh in the collective memory of the city the following weekend when, up the Hudson River, through a summer haze, comes an armada of tall ships to celebrate the beginning of America's third century.

THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

July 7, 1976

Two months have been spent on building the full-sized ravine at a cost of $60,000, and it remains unfinished. The mechanical snake Kong will battle still isn't functioning too well; with its rubbery skin and plaster jaw, the snake would hardly scare a child, let alone King Kong. The miniature New York sets remain unconstructed at Culver Studios on the other side of town.

The King Kong crew has experienced a new round of layoffs—forty-six people, mostly electricians and grips, have been let go. The saving in weekly salaries is $21,000; the people were released just before the company went to New York. There have also been a few firings, but the survival rate of such a huge company—it employs four hundred—is astonishing.

The lengthy shooting schedule is making many of the crew restless—the more talented among them are getting good offers. Since moviemakers are gypsies at heart, going on to another film in Peru, the South Seas, or Russia is very intriguing. Under these conditions, work lags, attention spans diminish, concentration is limited. Pressure must be exerted on those building the sets and working on special effects to get the picture finished.

"We will be done by the end of August," Fred Sidewater says emphatically—even if it means dropping some important scenes from the shooting schedule, he

adds. "We're going to stop production on August twenty-seventh, take stock of what's been shot, and if more scenes are needed, we'll come back in September with a much smaller crew."

Christian Ferry says, "Believing that this picture will be ready by Christmas involves an implicit act of faith." But his Gallic skepticism is neither harsh nor cynical.

Beth Voiku, Guillermin's secretary, who did not accompany the production to New York, says her boss has returned in an extremely calm frame of mind. "He has seen some of the action process shots in the rushes and he knows they work." But, she adds, he isn't pleased with the second-unit crowd scenes from New York. "He didn't think they were dramatic enough. They were too static."

On Sound Stage 27, Michael Dino and his people now begin putting hair on the forty-foot mechanical Kong. "We should be done with the old boy by August first," he says, supervising the stitching of hair panels into the latex skin covering.

July 9, 1976

Metro's Main Street is filled with men and women dressed for a formal dance in *New York, New York,* which is being shot on a sound stage around the corner from Kong's jungle ravine. The extras stop in their tracks when the overhead door on Stage 27 is rolled up and the crane carrying Kong's big hand backs out. Gawking, they pay almost no attention to the young assistant director barking commands at them.

"All right, everyone report back to the set. And remember, boys have to dance with girls!"

July 13, 1976

Jessica is annoyed. She had an early morning call and then spent most of the day sitting in her dressing room

doing crossword puzzles or watching her dog Jake play with toys. The pinched nerve in her neck has been aggravated by a too-passionate caress from Kong's finger. Talking to the crew, she has learned about meal penalties and figures the company owes her more money. Although she has the security of a seven-year contract with Dino De Laurentiis, she has decided she is not getting paid enough, what with the physical risks she is taking. "I'm doing most of my own stunts!" she says.

She is asked about her role and how she plays to Kong. Her answers are terse and fitful. She finally says, "Not today," flops on the couch, crosses her legs under her, and resumes working on her puzzle.

Jake comes out from under the chair and turns over on his stomach to sleep, his paws bent rigidly on his chest.

"Looks like Kong at the World Trade Center," Jessica says of him.

July 14, 1976

On the beach at Santa Monica, the boat-landing scene continues; it began shooting farther north at Zuma Beach, resumed in Kauai, and now picks up again on a few grains of sand south of Muscle Beach. The night people are out in force; weird in dress and manners, their minds seem miles away—they lend only their bizarre physical presence to the proceedings.

The character actors—Julius Harris, Jorge Moreno, Jack O'Halloran, Mario Gallo, and Ed Lauter—have not worked for weeks. Now they are called in to do the boat scene—to motor to shore and rescue Dwan from the natives.

As usual, the waves are indifferent to moviemaking. The lights are again banked too near the surf; when one giant wave breaks dangerously close, the electricians rush over to put the lights in a semicircle farther up on the beach.

While rehearsing a scene in which the boats head out to the open sea, one of the workers falls off a boat. The water is only waist deep and he half crawls, half stumbles to shore. But the night is chilly, and a blanket is quickly wrapped around him.

The actors gather around the dressing trailers. Since Jeff Bridges and Julius Harris will be seen running through the surf in this scene, the two men put on wet suits under their clothes. The talk resembles conversation at a class reunion: old friends catching up on what has happened, trading jokes and racy stories.

Jorge Moreno says he's been away from the picture so long that anticipation made him develop insomnia the previous night; he kept his wife awake by rolling around in bed until dawn. He yawns repeatedly during the telling of the story.

Jack O'Halloran says he has his next film lined up, something about the foreign legion that will be shot in Spain in the fall. "I've got to learn a Russian accent for it." Someone suggests he contact a language teacher at UCLA.

The Chapman crane driver announces it is his last day on the film. "I'm not making enough to stay here to the end, whenever that will be. Besides, it doesn't make much difference who stays or goes. This picture has its own momentum and can go on by itself."

Guillermin has the actors and cameramen huddle on the shore; he is in the middle, a coach getting his team worked up for the second half of the big game. A wave breaks and cascades toward them. To a man they race back up the beach as the water laps at their heels.

Dick Kline had guessed it would only take until 10 P.M. to get this shot. The scene is still being rehearsed at eleven.

The actors are loaded on the boat. They are apprehensive, remembering the boat rides in Kauai. Stand-ins are used for Rene Auberjonois and John Randolph. Only Bridges and Harris will be in the close-up; the other actors will all be in the background.

Jeff is in the lead boat. He crouches tensely in the bow, a heavy pack on his back, a gun in his hand. The boat smacks head on into a wave and is lifted and held aloft precariously for a few seconds before slamming back onto the water. The actors clutch the side of the craft.

The three boats are now beyond the waves, circling into position, readying the run to shore. The motor in one conks out. The two others must keep circling until this engine is repaired.

Guillermin warns the spectators not to use flashbulbs during the take. "I will have the beach cleared," he says.

The boats turn and come to shore, slicing through the waves, riding them as cleanly and as expertly as a good body surfer until their bottoms scrape over shells and sand. Jeff and Julius lead the charge past the cameras and lights to where the night people stand, open-mouthed.

July 15, 1976

It's the Biltmore again for the confrontation scene between Dwan and Prescott on the night Kong goes public in New York. Cables run the length of the corridor into the eleventh-floor suite, which has been redecorated and arranged by John Franco. As before, there is a funereal scent from the baskets of flowers stashed around the room.

It's a nice change of pace for Jessica, a romantic scene she can play in an upright position. During the previous day's shooting she was put into a harness concealed by her clothes and dropped four feet as she fell into Kong's arms on the supertanker. "It's been a crazy week," she said. "One day I'm in a bar doing a love scene with Jeff, then I'm up in this thing [the harness], and tomorrow we go back to the Biltmore to get the scene that was scheduled there months ago. I'm so tired I don't know if I'm coming or going."

Now, in the hotel suite, she is serene, composed, and

looks truly beautiful in the silver gown that exposes one of her best features—a strikingly sexy, smooth back.

Next to her *Deep Throat* speech early in the film, this is Jessica's longest sustained scene; it's one of the few points in the movie at which she has to talk rather than struggle with or run away from Kong. Guillermin takes time with the scene, working patiently with his performers, soothing them with his softly spoken words of encouragement.

Perhaps this scene would not have gone as well if it had been shot when it was first scheduled to be. Jessica has gained experience over the months, along with a realization that she has an instinct for filmmaking. She is a good student, quickly learning how to place herself in the best possible position before the camera. She is becoming a pro sooner than could have been expected.

The camera moves in on Jeff, Jessica, and Grodin.

"I was wrong," Jeff Bridges, as Prescott, says. "It's a tragedy." (Rediscovering his conscience, Prescott will not go through with Kong's exploitation.)

"Why, you little nobody," Grodin—in his movie role of Wilson—snaps. "We'll sue you until you don't know fat meat from grease! You signed with us!"

"Here's my advance back," Prescott says, shoving an envelope at him. "I'm joining the campaign to have Kong taken from you and returned to his home. . . ."

He turns to Dwan. She rushes to him, throws her arms around his neck.

"Don't leave me tonight. Please! My horoscope says I'll . . ."

"Dwan, shut up. I love you," Prescott says. "Come with me right away. Now."

"Go ahead!" Wilson shouts. "Except I promise you, you'll never get a booking in your life! You won't even tap dance at a Weight Watchers' reunion party!"

Dwan, torn by her need to be a celebrity, realizes she can't go back. "Don't you understand?" she pleads with Prescott.

He backs off, out of her arms. "Yes. I'm sorry. Stay well."

She does not move to stop him. Her eyes glisten with tears. Behind her Wilson supplies the epitaph for the scene. "It's the old story. When you go up, baby, there's always some guy who can't cut it that you have to leave at the bottom of the stairs. There'll be lots of them."

Dwan's (and perhaps Jessica's) reaction is a bitter, knowing half-smile.

July 16, 1976

Sound Stage 27 is alive with activity and filled with pieces of the big Kong. His gigantic head, a complacent expression on the face, is encircled by scaffolding; three people are industriously covering his forehead with fur. His mechanical hand pokes from a yellow crane parked across the sound stage. In the rear his bodyless legs are bent in a sitting position on the floor of the supertanker set.

Kong dies again today, this time in miniature; Rick Baker will supply the emotion the mechanical model was unable to project back in New York. Baker is in his monkey suit, stretched out on a small platform near Jessica's dressing trailer. Guillermin stands over Baker's body and peers into his ape's face. Rick gives the rubber skin life by rolling his eyes upward, slowly, providing the last gasping moments of life for Kong. Under his body are small pieces of styrofoam, representing the smashed bits of concrete from the plaza of the World Trade Center.

The special-effects man is poised behind the camera, his hands over the lever, waiting for the director's order.

Rick rolls his eyes again.

"Do you have the feeling he's really dying?" Guillermin says, intently staring into the eyes, only a few inches separating his face from the ape's. On reflection, he asks, "But then, how do we know how an ape dies?"

A plastic air tube is stuck into Rick's mouth, and will remain there until the scene is shot. An audible sigh of appreciation comes from the hairy mouth.

Del Acevedo straddles the ape's body and, with a small, thin brush, begins painting blood on the ape's teeth and lips. Behind him Julius Harris and Jorge Moreno are being fitted for harness belts, to be used soon for another scene—the one in which most of the *Petrox Explorer* crew, crossing a log over the ravine, are tossed to their deaths by Kong.

Julius is lifted off the ground and swings in harness, a big, black Peter Pan. His laugh is at first nervous, then hearty as he childishly gets on with the treat of flying.

"Quiet, boys," Guillermin says. The red light appears on the camera.

Rick can only move his eyes. Mobility over the rest of his face is at the mercy of the man at the lever. Rick rolls his eyes and permits a pathetic moan to escape from his lips. The eyelids are slowly lowered. Kong is dead.

Jessica has come out of her trailer, and she stands behind Guillermin, giving his leg a reassuring squeeze.

July 19, 1976

Everyone would like to have muscle on a movie, the power to impose his or her way. Jessica is beginning to show some muscle. She is able to get an offensive line of dialogue dropped from a scene she is doing with the mechanical hand. It is an audacious stand for her, since it is one of De Laurentiis' favorite lines. Jessica presents her arguments patiently to Guillermin, telling him why she thinks the scene doesn't work. Later, when De Laurentiis sees the rushes, he asks Guillermin about the missing line, an explicit reference to Kong's bigness, the sexual implication intended. Guillermin reports Jessica's reasons for not saying it. Surprisingly, De Laurentiis goes along with her decision, the expense of redoing the scene clearly on his mind.

Today, Jessica is balking again, this time about being

in harness as she falls through the air-shaft grill to Kong's cage.

"They're crazy if they think I'm going to do that," she says. "I wasn't fitted properly the last time I went up in one of those things and it hurt." She is not even certain she will climb a ladder leading to a narrow plank walkway that connects to the air shaft.

Guillermin tries diplomacy, chatting about everything but the scene. Off-handedly, he mentions his plan, sounding as if the idea struck him while they were talking. He suggests that she climb up with him to see what a marvelous set has been constructed on the sound stage below.

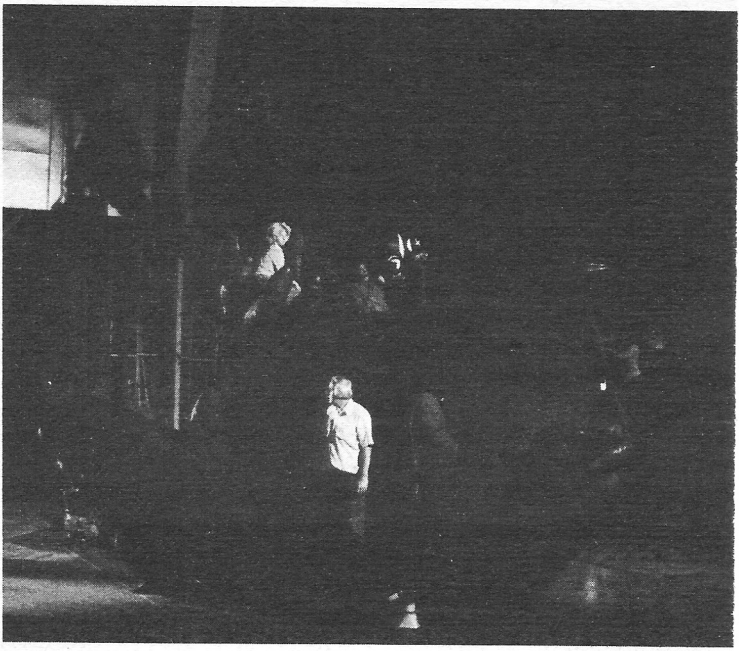
It is marvelous indeed, as well as a hair-raising experience for some of the construction workers. Gary Martin, construction coordinator and Dale Hennesy's right hand, says four men fell off the grill on four separate occasions and were saved only because they could hold on until others pulled them back. The air-shaft structure is made entirely of wood painted to look like metal, and is supported with aluminum bracing. The platform behind it measures sixty-two by fifty-four feet—it's broad enough to hold cameras and about thirty people. The set is suspended by chains hanging thirty feet from the ceiling.

Jessica agrees to climb up with Guillermin, scaling the ladder with assurance, walking the plank without looking down until she reaches the edge of the air shaft. Then she peers over at the foam rubber mats and inflated air mattress stacked under the lattice-shaped grill.

Now that he has her high up, Guillermin slyly proposes that they may as well do the scene up there, at least the part when she looks over the edge of the ship's cage and calls to Kong. She is cooperative. Guillermin pushes his luck a bit. Now he suggests that, wearing the safety belt, she crawl out on the excruciatingly narrow grill plank. (The actual fall into the ape's cage will be done by a stunt girl.)

"No!"

"Jess?" It is more a subtle plea than a direct request.



Jessica Lange's stand-in, Tanis Van Kirk, tries out the monster's hand as camera angles and lights are set up. The thoughtful gentleman standing between Kong's legs is key grip Robert Sordal.

"No, John," she says firmly.

"Perhaps tomorrow."

The shake of her head is negative.

The floor camera is directed upwards. Jessica takes her position. She will continue a scene they started shooting on the supertanker at sea. She has already consulted a videotape of the scene to refresh her memory of how she had positioned herself.

"Hey, big boy . . . you dumb ugly ape. Kong!"

Another take is called, and before it starts Jessica fluffs her hair to give it a wind-blown look.

"Hey, big boy . . ."

Beth Nufer, a stunt girl, is used for the fall into

Kong's iron prison. Only in the blonde hair and good body does she resemble Jessica. When assembled in the editing room, this scene will be intercut so quickly that few in the audience will detect two women playing the same role.

Beth does her thing the next day without a harness belt, plunging fifty feet into the safety padding, expertly doubling her legs at the last minute to help prevent injury. She lands perfectly. She is given a thousand-dollar bonus for doing the jump. Less taxes, it comes to $827.50.

July 21, 1976

Dale Hennesy pauses outside the sound stage housing his latest creation, the full-sized ravine. It took a long time to get it from a rickety wooden structure to what it is now—an arid, desolate ravine made of polyurethane foam with fiberglass sprayed over the top to harden the surface. The log lying across the ravine is made of aluminum, and the drop from it to the pit below is about thirty feet.

"The ravine is the worst set I've had to contend with. There's not enough stage space to get the shots called for in the storyboard. We should be on Stage 27, not 30, to get more height. We had to make the ravine deep enough for the blue-screen process that shows the men falling, yet leave some room for the camera to move about."

He looks into the sound stage at the men swarming over the ravine. They are part of the sixty-man crew that built it. "It's so cramped," Hennesy says, shaking his head. "But it's the only sound stage with a deep enough well."

Underneath the log, out of camera range, is a platform. When the actors are tossed off the log, they will fall only a few feet and land on a mattress. The stunt men will fall the full distance to the floor without harnesses. Fused with a scene showing a real ravine, on

screen the men will appear to be falling from a great height, spinning dizzily.

Hennesy has received his next assignment: redecorate the Wall to make it look like a New York stadium where the forty-foot Kong will be presented to five thousand spectators.

Using the old set is everyone's second choice, but there are few options. Shea and Anaheim Stadiums are not available and/or are too expensive. The latest choice, the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, is also out because the company can't get permission to shoot there beyond midnight.

The projected cost of renovating the Wall is about $100,000. The crew begin the alteration by stripping off the eucalyptus-tree siding and gluing on silver foam-board panels.

Hennesy is gloomy about the prospects of finishing the job by the mid-August deadline. "Dino makes up his mind to do something, then he can't understand why it can't be done. We're going like crazy, and still we don't have enough time."

Gary Martin concurs. "Six days a week, twelve hours a day! You get tired."

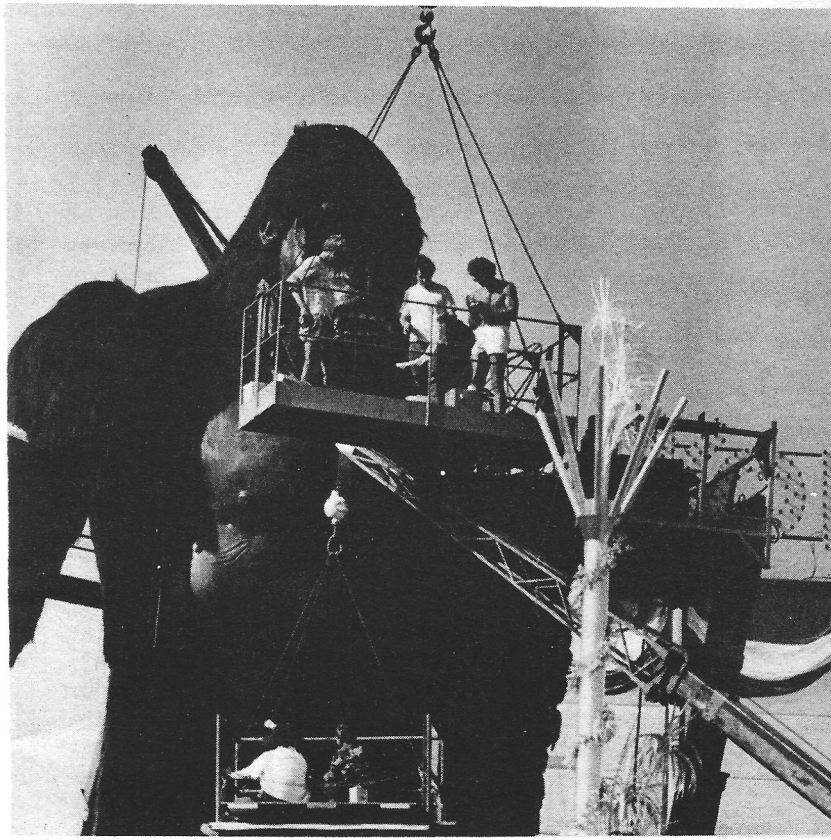
Hennesy started out in films as an illustrator, painting on the side, gathering fourteen awards for his water colors.

He did *Logan's Run* before *King Kong,* and the carousel set he designed is still on the sound stage next to Kong's ravine. "This picture makes *Logan's Run* look like a TV show. It's my most difficult undertaking," he says.

July 23, 1976

The shooting is now divided between day and night —half of it at the ravine, half on the mountain sitting on the back lot.

At the ravine, the stunt man for Julius Harris slips



Workmen cover the forty-foot mechanical Kong with horsehair and adjust his bridgework.

off the log and lands heavily on concrete. David McGiffert, certain the man is seriously injured, runs to a telephone to dial for an ambulance. He stops only when he hears someone says the man is all right.

Across the street, work progresses well on the miniature ravine. Rick Baker lumbers up to the tiny log and twists it, roaring his lungs out. Guillermin wants the ape to strike a fierce pose. Baker is reluctant. "Kong is not wild and mean. He doesn't twist the log to intentionally kill the men. He's almost playing with them." Guillermin wins. Kong looks mean.

Below the log, unit photographer Elliott Marks is on his back, looking up, taking pictures of Kong wrenching at the log. It falls, but instead of landing on a mattress it strikes Marks' hand. After lunch Marks returns with a bandaged palm.

Work on the back lot involves the cliff-jumping scene done by Jeff and Jessica. The jumping is done from the fake mountain built to the right of the Wall. This scene will be shot on three locations in the back lot: here, at the mountain top; on a miniature cliff from which Jeff and Jessica will jump three feet into air mattresses; and at the top of the Wall, where two stunt people will leap fifty feet to another pile of safety mattresses.

The action focuses on Jeff and Jessica fleeing Kong through the jungle. They run up to the ledge, and he grabs hold of her arm and swings her around to prevent her from stumbling over the edge. It is rehearsed carefully, and all goes well. But in one of the first takes Jessica lets out a scream that's not in the script. Jeff, grabbing hold, accidentally yanks open her blouse.

This scene goes rapidly compared to the time it takes for a good take showing the two jumping off the miniature cliff. The main problem is Jessica. When she stops at the edge of the cliff, she must say some rather difficult lines about having won a silver medal at the Y for diving. This is an obvious attempt to duplicate the humor in the famous cliff-jumping scene in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. To make that scene work, William Goldman, the screenwriter, had Robert Red-

ford simply say, "I can't swim," to bring down the house. Jessica is asked to deliver a much more complicated sentence, one without a terse punch line. She gamely reads the line for six takes, getting giddy when she flubs it and finally says, "I got on at the Y . . ."

The jump itself is more convincing—until Jessica lands on top of Jeff, smacking squarely into his groin. He doubles up in pain.

Recovered, Jeff remains uncomfortable for the rest of the scene. He frets that his long hair is hiding his face, which it is, and he keeps brushing it off his forehead. He has Jessica rehearse with him repeatedly, doing the scene over and again.

Guillermin is not happy with any of the takes, so he calls for one without dialogue. It works fine. "It was a lousy line anyway," Jessica says.

The company now moves to the other side of the Wall for the fifty-foot jump by the stunt people, Sunny Woods and Bill Couch.

Guillermin's attitude toward publicity has changed noticeably since the start of production. He was never rude to a visiting reporter; he just did not want to talk with any during shooting. Remembering how he was nudged out of the publicity on *The Towering Inferno,* he is less of a recluse with the press now, chatting with *Variety* columnist Army Archard when he visits the set, exchanging a few words with Bernie Drew of the Gannett papers. Walking the few yards to the next set-up, Guillermin now talks amiably with two Japanese reporters. They are given royal treatment, for Japan is an enormous market for American films. One of the reporters represents a Tokyo paper that named Guillermin the best director of 1975 for *The Towering Inferno.*

"It's a Gothic romance," he says through a Japanese interpreter. "*King Kong* incorporates all our terrors."

Sunny and Couch are on a platform that is lifted to the top of the Wall by a crane. They walk the narrow

ledge along the top to the end. Couch leans over and directs the adjustment of the mattresses below. He has them pushed nearer to the wall, then shoved back a bit.

Sunny, a striking blonde, well-coiffured, stands calmly next to Couch. She is coolly unruffled, as if she is preparing to go to a cocktail party in Bel Air.

"Take your time," Guillermin calls up to them through a bullhorn.

"We're as ready as we'll ever be," Couch calls back.

The jump is all wrong. Holding hands to duplicate the way Jeff and Jessica leaped, Sunny and Couch plunge straight down from the Wall. The fall is so swift they don't have time to double their legs before the impact, knifing straight into the inflated air bags atop the mattresses. On impact Sunny falls back into the space between the bags and the Wall. Couch disappears there too.

Everyone freezes. "My God! They've been killed!"

People begin running toward the mattresses.

"Get an ambulance."

A grip runs through the gate in the Wall, hops into a station wagon and spins through the dirt, braking just before the air bags.

Those frightened by blood back off into the shadows and turn their eyes away, hearts thumping.

Guillermin is immobile, the ever-present pipe in his mouth and the knit ski cap pulled to ear level.

Sunny is the first to come around, her hair looking as if it has gone through a cake mixer. Her legs are wobbly, but she brushes aside offers of assistance.

Couch is helped out next. He has had the wind knocked out of him. He is concerned that the jump was so bad Guillermin will be unable to use it.

The director suggests they should have jumped toward the middle of the mattresses. Couch explains that holding hands had hindered them from swinging out wider.

"It's a wrap," Guillermin says.

The jump will not be tried again.

August 2, 1976

Jessica is getting ready to take her own dive, another in her endless encounters with the mechanical hand.

She is in her skimpy sacrifice costume, bejeweled and feathered, mud splashed all over her body by Del Acevedo. This scene had also started months earlier; it shows Jessica running away from Kong in the jungle glen, and falling into the mud. Now, riding in the mechanical hand, she will be dropped into a waterfall pool constructed on the sound stage.

The pool is eleven feet deep and she is assured the water is warm.

It is the 140th production day, and there's still no end in sight. Reporters keep showing up, though. Today an elderly gentleman is persistently asking questions Jessica finds embarrassing; he wants to know if she has a roommate of the opposite sex, and also wants her measurements, hinting they may have been tampered with.

An attempt is made to distract the reporter. Del starts dabbing more mud on Jessica's face so she will be unable to answer the loaded inquiries. The reporter won't give up. He pays no attention to Jessica's stand-in as she is delivered to the pool by Kong's hand. The stand-in sits upright, holding herself ready in case Kong's fingers accidentally release her into the water.

Dick Kline watches Del's ministrations to Jessica's body. "Here's mud in your eye, kid," he says.

Eventually Kong's hand will have to reach into the waterfall when it puts Dwan under it. There is concern that the rubber of the hand may split when it gets wet.

Jessica gets in the hand and squirts water over her body from a plastic bottle. Supposedly she is still wet from rolling around in the mud and water of the jungle.

The hand begins to move, activated by a motorized crane. The camera is on a track next to the crane, and both must move together, arriving simultaneously at the



Federico De Laurentiis, arms spread wide, with his father, Dino; Jack Grossberg (far left), the executive in charge of production; and Terry Carr (near left), production manager. They are standing on Lot 2 at MGM, where the Wall is being converted into a stadium set for Kong's presentation to the people of New York.

pool. The first race is not synchronized. The hand wins by several finger lengths.

"We're a bit late," Guillermin says.

The reporter has finally left. Someone told him the freeways get jammed at 3 P.M., and he has a cocktail party to attend.

The hand pushes Jessica into the waterfall, then tilts to slide her off the palm. She falls effortlessly ten feet into the water, slicing into it without making a big splash.

The crew applauds the scene.

"That was good, a very good look to her," Guillermin says to Kline.

Jessica emerges, a latter-day Dorothy Lamour, her soaked gown even more revealing than usual.

Kong's rubber fingers do get wet, but the hair from the wrist up is dry, and the material does not tear.

"Excellent! Print it, Doris," Guillermin says to his script supervisor.

He looks up to the platform where the special-effects men have been operating the levers for the hand, and gives them his approval as well, forming a big "O" with the two fingers of his right hand.

"Cheers!"

August 5, 1976

Jeff is balancing himself on the aluminum log. There is only bare concrete below him, with no safety mattress. He's in a risky scene, but then it has been a very physical picture for the young actor.

Jeff is crossing the log. He stops midway, turns to the *Petrox Explorer* crew behind him on the other side of the ravine, says the pathway is safe. Then he returns and slips, wavering as if about to fall before righting himself and reaching the other side.

There is danger in what he's doing—he could easily fall. But the odds are with him. He's got a good body; he was not noticeably overweight at the beginning of production, and he's now stabilized at a sturdy 180 pounds with a fat-free waist. A nonathlete with the natural grace of a gymnast, Bridges moves like a tightrope walker to the middle of the log once more, falters, turns, and dashes to safey. He does each take flawlessly.

At twenty-six, Bridges is the right age for a movie actor. He gets most of the roles that call for a young man between the ages of eighteen and thirty. His only competition is Richard Thomas, and perhaps Timothy Bottoms; but no one else in his age group has had his artistic success, with two Academy Award nominations already.

When he talks about his role in *King Kong* he strives to give the character significance. "I see Prescott as a knight who sets off to fight a dragon. Prescott likes to think he has purer motives than he really does. The fact is, he can be as ambitious as the next guy, and he is tempted to exploit Kong like the rest of them. However, his personal moral code, which he forgets easily in the

picture, takes over toward the end, and he will have no part of Kong's final degradation."

He plays Prescott as "a straight hero, like Errol Flynn or the Lone Ranger." And what is Prescott's attitude toward Kong? "Sometimes he thinks the ape's big and scary, but at the end of the film Prescott sees him as a Christ-like symbol of the pure, moral being done in by greedy, unprincipled men."

Still, Prescott is not the most dramatically taxing role Jeff Bridges has had to play on the screen. Why did he agree to do it—other than for the money?

"I could see myself when I was eighty years old looking at a batch of stills from this picture and knowing I'd had something to do with what surely will be a landmark film in the history of Hollywood."

The picture has gone on much longer than Bridges had anticipated, and it is getting more and more difficult for him to concentrate on the part, especially since weeks pass when he does no work. This inactivity comes at the wrong point in his life.

When he is first asked to talk about himself, Bridges says what is expected of him. But when he starts to trust his interviewer, he loosens up and confesses he is having difficulty finding out who he really is. He may well be going through an identity crisis, a natural development in most young men, but one that can easily be dramatized in an actor. Bridges has resisted overplaying his uncertainty, keeping his internal confusions to himself, away from his work.

Helping him is the absence of any apparent sibling rivalry with his brother, Beau. "There's absolutely no jealousy between us. In fact, he's helped me a lot with my acting." Jeff has also benefited from the stability of his parents' marriage; it's been one of the longer and more successful ones in Hollywood.

"Through acting, and the roles I've elected to play on the screen, I've had the opportunity to explore myself," he says. "I would like to do *Hamlet*. I'd also like to do some stage work. I haven't done any since I was a kid and worked with my father in summer stock back east."

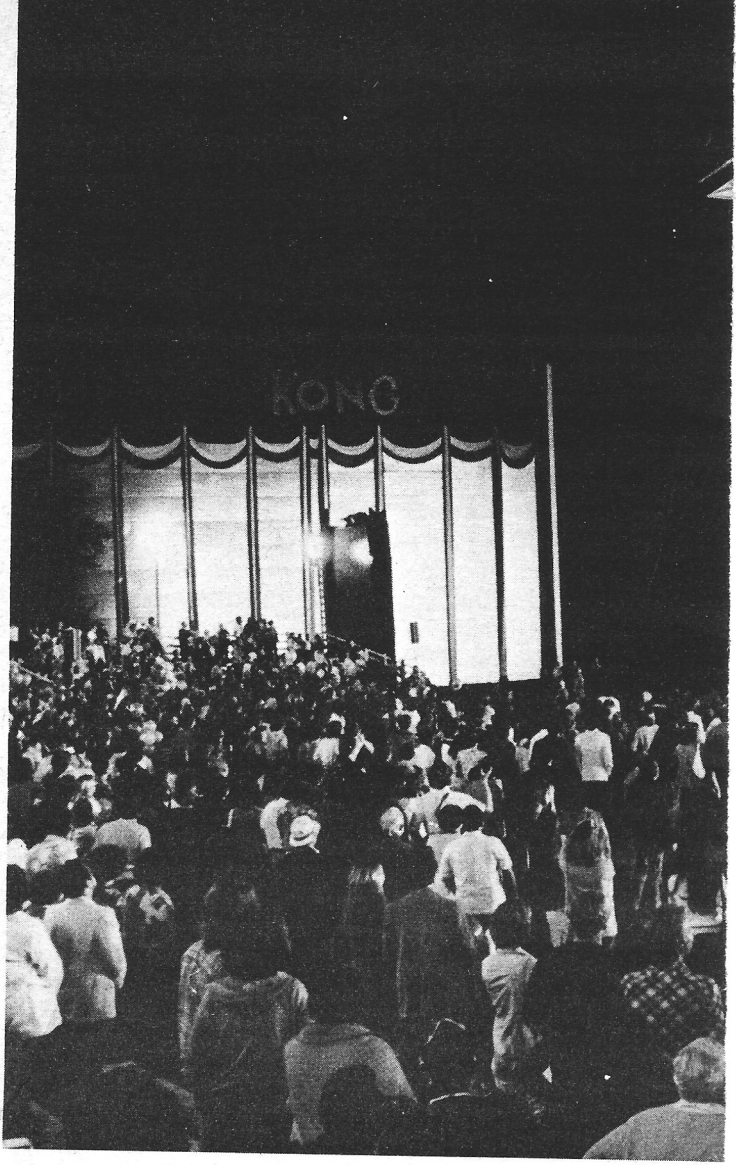
His introspection has made him "a pretty moody guy," he says; it's progressing concurrently with his self-education program, prompted by his desire to catch up on the reading he failed to get in high school. "I guess I was rebellious then, and I didn't want to have anything to do with a formal education. I felt you had to study only to please your parents with good grades."

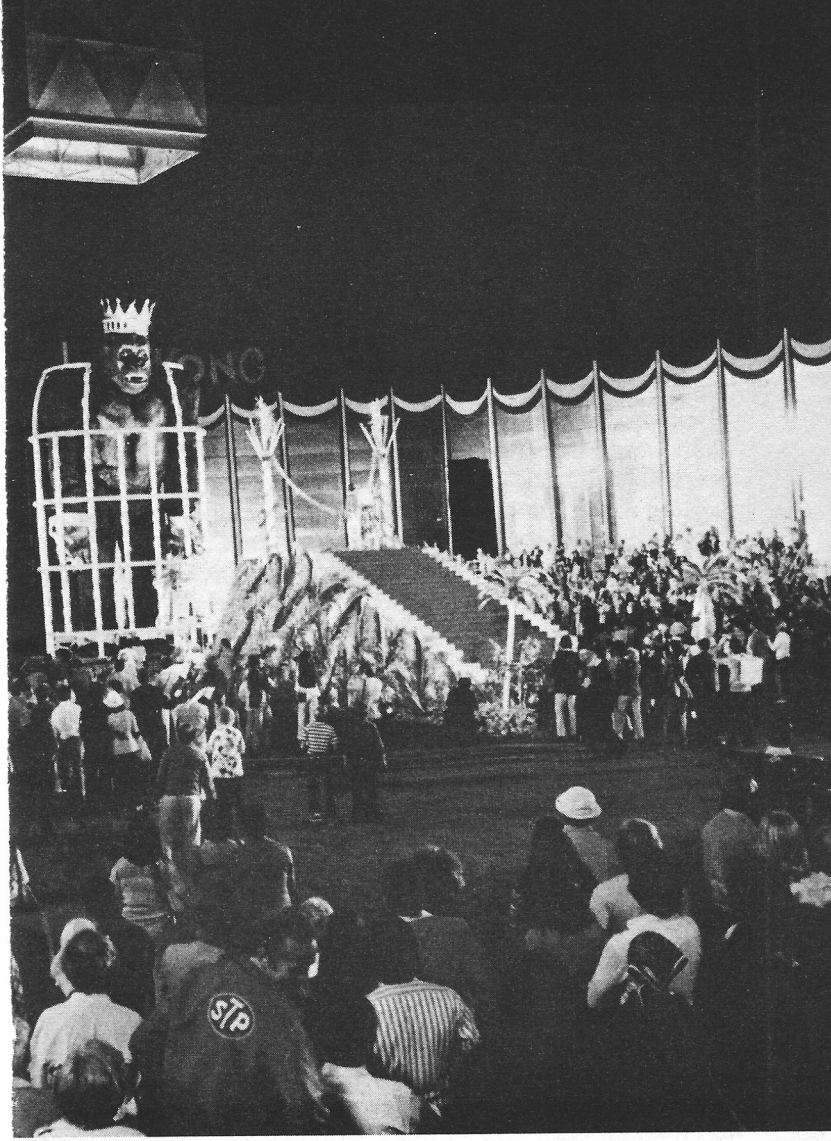
Bridges is a good listener, and asks people intelligent questions. One night, when he had hours of free time on the set, he was introduced to Nick Testa from Newark, New Jersey, who had recently moved to Hollywood to pursue a movie career. The young man had many things to ask Bridges, who effortlessly turned the conversation around and asked Nick about his hoped-for career, offering decent advice about breaking into the business, urging him to join one of the many acting groups working at small theater clubs in Hollywood. Only when he was outside, having thanked Bridges profusely for the lengthy visit, did Testa realize he had told more about himself than he learned about Bridges.

Jeff lives on a hillside in Malibu, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Interested in architectural design, he has subjected his stucco house to drastic renovations. "I've knocked down walls and added rooms," he says.

His closest friends are his high-school buddies, along with people he's worked with on other films. He no longer describes himself as a rebel, but his attitude toward living is reflective of today's young people. He has shared his house with a young woman not his wife, and maintains a generally free life-style.

"I'm at a stage when everything seems to be rapidly changing. One day I'm anxious to act and the next I want to take off to Montana. I still don't really know what I want to do. But whatever it is, I want to be myself, and not have to present myself as many different faces to the public."


KONG



Kong comes face to face with a crowd of New Yorkers—who are, actually, people from the Los Angeles area, since this scene is being shot on the back lot in Culver City.

It is a French restaurant of some distinction. The food is not buried under the sauce, the wine list is imaginative, and the prices are reasonable. It is this week's "in" French restaurant among those who worry about being current, and the customers are rubbernecking to see who's in attendance.

Guillermin and his lovely, bright wife—Maureen Connell, Irish-born and raised in Kenya—are seated at the best spot, the corner table. They engage in a lively discussion about the coming race war in South Africa. Both would be considered liberal on the issue, favoring black majority rule.

King Kong has left its mark on Guillermin's face. He has lost weight, around fifteen pounds since the start of production, and looks gaunt and preoccupied. Getting the film done and released by Christmas is a crusade to which he is a reluctant recruit.

"Why is it necessary to have it out by then? What is necessary is making it good."

He wants more time for shooting his scenes. He thinks the completed film should be previewed, then cut and adjusted to the audience's reaction, trying it out on the road as is customary with Broadway shows. Because he fears the film will not be edited properly before it is released, Guillermin is nervous about himself in relation to what has been shot.

But then, how could anyone feel secure in the mammoth presence of the *King Kong* operation? The fiscal dimensions alone are staggering. Dino De Laurentiis is announcing the final cost at twenty-four million dollars, of which an estimated three million will have been spent on Kong in his various forms: the forty-foot monster, the human-sized model, the mechanical limbs, the monkey suits. (More than $400,000 was spent for the monkey suit and the hands.) The construction and special effects come to four million. Other costs: $250,000 for studio rentals; $100,000 for draftsmen to

draw construction plans; $75,000 for the illustrators of the storyboards; $30,000 for pencils, pens, blueprints, and other office equipment; $40,000 for the telephone; $72,000 for catering in Los Angeles; and $33,000 for gasoline. Labor costs amount to 65 percent of the total.

"The picture will make back its money," Guillermin says. "It has the potential to go through the roof, to be another *Jaws*. We just have to find the audience."

Guillermin now faces the most crucial part of the shooting—the ending. Here he will be using his new star, the forty-foot Kong.

"We can't scrimp on the ending. Though the picture is basically not violent, Kong has to go wild and be violent at the end."

He and his wife have gourmets' tastes for French food, and approve of the lamb dishes they chose. When Guillermin finishes, he sits back and stares at the other diners.

"This is really a hard town to succeed in. It's so cutthroat and nasty, and there are so many directors looking for the next picture."

There are people in this very restaurant, at adjoining tables, waiting for *King Kong* to fail. It's that kind of town and Guillermin knows it.

THE BIG NIGHT

August 11—20, 1976

"Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to one of the most spectacular pictures ever made!"

In tuxedo, and with daytime game-show sincerity to his voice, Bob Hastings, an actor, has been hired by the company to entertain the crowd at the presentation scene—when Kong meets New York.

The Big Apple has been faithfully re-created on Lot 2 at MGM. Naturally, all the "New Yorkers" in the scene are from Los Angeles.

Dale Hennesy has come up with a slightly tacky park. He feels the basic vulgarity of it is representative of the kind of men who are exploiting Kong. The Wall has been transformed into an enormous backdrop of silver panels draped with red, white, and blue bunting. Bleachers, seating around three thousand, have been placed in front of it, forming a small oval stadium. Dwan's sacrificial altar from the jungle is now inside the stadium, newly painted in slightly bilious colors. There is red carpet on the stairs leading to the altar (to be used as a podium), with flowers and palm trees attached to its sides.

"I imported all the old palm trees from *The Ten Commandents,*" Franco says. "I used tons of miniature flower pom-poms, had them sprayed silver and dusted with five hundred pounds of glitter. And we used five thousand yards of fabric for the bunting on the Wall."

In the film, Kong is brought into the park in a cage, wheeled on a track through the gate in the Wall. He stops before Dwan, who's on the podium. This is supposed to make him feel more at home in an otherwise hostile city.

The mechanical ape finally exists, in his own special kind of grandeur. He is more than a technical achievement. He has a face and body that move and give him character. His animation gives him life. But he cannot function alone, even though he seems to move majestically all by himself.

Workers climb into Kong's back through a trap door, going over the hydraulic valves, inspecting the fluid levels. He is not scheduled to make an appearance tonight, but the company knows Kong must be seen if the crowd is to be kept in their seats at least until midnight, allowing Guillermin to get his master shot of Jessica and Grodin arriving by helicopter. It is decided to open the gate at twelve o'clock to give the crowd a quick glance at the monster before the doors are slammed tight again.

Kong is not at his best for this appearance. A wire has snapped and his head dangles forward, as if he had a broken neck. It will take more than this one night to repair him.

Throughout the afternoon, Kong stands on his track in front of the podium. His size and magnificence stun visitors when they see him for the first time. The special-effects men go over the control panel with its hydraulic jacks in a last-minute check. They don't get a chance to rehearse Kong's movements, but he doesn't have to work tonight.

"Thank God," Franco says.

To whip up the crowd's enthusiasm, banners and balloons are issued to the spectators. With luck, they will wave them on cue during the master shot, participating in the hoopla surrounding Kong's arrival in the park.

Once the decision was made to go to the back lot



The crowd assembled at the "stadium" where Kong meets society mixes it up for the cameras. The actors on the bunting-draped podium play Petrox Corporation officials and their wives and guests.

for the presentation scene, it became imperative to get a couple of thousand people to act as spectators for free. As in New York, a certain number of professional extras would be hired to play photographers and reporters, and several hundred waivered extras would also be used. But the bulk of the crowd, ranging between thirty-five hundred and five thousand people, would have to be recruited from the general public. The question: how to get them into the park without overly alarming Culver City officials? The place is hardly prepared for the onslaught of hordes after 9 P.M., when its sidewalks roll up automatically.

Grossberg comes up with the idea of getting the crowd into Culver City and still keeping it kosher. An advertisement runs in the *Los Angeles Times* and in some neighborhood newspapers inviting the public to attend Kong's screen debut. All the people have to do is fill out a coupon; there is a limit of four tickets per submission. The ad never mentions where the filming

will take place. Only when the tickets arrive will the participants learn the location of the shooting. (There is also a warning that, in accepting the tickets, people waive all rights to compensation if they are used in the film.)

The Kong production office handles the requests. The first mail brings in several hundred coupons—far fewer than anticipated. There is much consternation, everybody forgetting about the rottenly slow mail delivery. The next day brings an avalanche, and the tickets for the four nights of shooting are soon gone. Kong has a sell-out on his hands.

To placate Culver City, eight of its policemen are hired at one hundred dollars each. Overall security, however, is provided by a group of muscular young men, many of whom were most recently college football players, who work for National Events Service. Much of their usual business comes from rock concerts.

"Now you know the producer of this picture is Dino De Laurentiis!" Bob Hastings continues his spiel, reciting facts about the production he's culled from reading the official publicity releases. "He's America's most important independent producer."

Guillermin gets his first shot at 9:40 P.M. It is of the Long Beach High School Band, numbering one hundred ten bodies, marching into the park blasting out "That's Entertainment," an appropriate song to play on the MGM lot after the huge success the studio has had with its anthology of clips from its old musicals.

The crowd digs the music. As the band circles the park, the unrehearsed spectators stand, clap, and wave their banners.

This scene is shot from a platform suspended from a crane fifty feet above the ground. Guillermin is working with this camera. Three others are also used. Dick Kline is with the one on the arm of a fork-lift truck.

Among the waivered extras getting twenty-four dollars a night is Nick Testa, the young man from Newark who met Bridges some time ago. He has a job now

with Ben Scotti Promotion, one of the leading pop record promotion organizations in Los Angeles. When shooting ends each night—usually at dawn—Testa grabs a few hours' sleep and then heads for his office at 8 A.M.

The first night's crowd is disappointing in size. Grossberg puts the number at thirty-five hundred. A Culver City cop estimates two thousand. There are not enough people to fill the bleacher seats. David McGiffert is kept busy rearranging the spectators to get maximum use from them, filling up sections as they are photographed.

"What do you expect? It's Wednesday night. It's not a bad crowd," Grossberg says.

"There's not enough movement in the foreground when the band comes in," Guillermin calls down from the crane.

Hastings reinterprets that comment and says to the crowd: "The director thought it was so good, he wants you to do it again." Regrouping, the band marches in smartly. Guillermin turns to his camera operator and says, "Better."

Guillermin's wife is at tonight's shooting, impressed by the tawdriness of the scene. "Such a pathetic crowd," she says. "It's just right for Kong."

"I bet you never realized how long it takes to make a movie," the master of ceremonies says to the crowd. Some are not amused. They have come to see the big ape and he is still hidden behind the Wall.

The next shot is of Jessica and Grodin arriving by helicopter for the presentation. The copter is brought in at 10:15 P.M., isolated in the sky by a spotlight before it lands on a dirt site in front of the box where actors and actresses, playing Petrox officials and their wives and guests, are seated. Whirlwinds of dust are raised by the copter and shower down on the spectators.

Jessica and Grodin get back in the copter and lift off. There is another severe dust storm. "Keep your backs turned, please," McGiffert tells the crowd through a bullhorn. Most people have already turned away

from the copter. But the palm trees at the bottom of the podium are blown down.

Jeff Bridges, who is not in this scene, comes out of his dressing trailer, parked behind the Wall near the shadowy silhouette of a southern mansion. He goes to the park and casually starts signing autographs.

The lights begin to go out over the bleachers. If a baseball game was in progress it would have to be called because of darkness. The helicopter is circling the park—once, twice, three times.

"The generator has blown," Kline says. "They're trying to cool it off."

The helicopter continues its dizzy circling; it is restricted to a very compact flight pattern since it is cruising over a residential area.

The lights come on fifteen minutes later and the helicopter lands. Jessica staggers slightly, a film of sweat on her forehead and lips. She is extremely pale. The jerky motions of the helicopter, coupled with her dislike of flying, have made her slightly airsick.

"I had to ask the pilot to stop those tight turns and level out or he was going to have one sick passenger," she says.

The flight did not bother Grodin. He is busily signing autographs.

By midnight, after the helicopter landing has been repeated—with Jessica emerging and then climbing the stairs of the podium—more than half the crowd has departed for home. To induce the remainder to stay a bit longer, the gates are opened to reveal the mighty Kong. He emerges with his head bent forward, looking as if he were fast asleep.

By this time the Culver City police department has received one hundred fifty complaints.

The next night the public is not invited, and good work is done with the extras. After Kong has broken loose from his cage, they panic very realistically, running out of the park.

In take after take, Jeff and Jessica get manhandled by the shoving, pushing group. Once she is tripped and falls, with Jeff landing on top of her.

Nick Testa learns something about appearing in a crowd scene when stars are being used. The camera is in tight for close-ups of Jeff and Jessica, so Nick hovers near them during the takes.

"It's the only way I'll be seen in this movie," he says.

August 13, 1976

Finally Kong is in working order. A gigantic covering normally used to cover gas pumps is being lowered by a crane over his head. The long panel that controls him is being disconnected and carried around the Wall; it will be placed below the edge of the podium, out of camera range.

"There are three hydraulic jacks for every finger," the special-effects man says, striving to lift the panel with its fifty-four jacks. Each jack is marked with the part of Kong's body it controls: right ear, left ear, nose, lips, toes, fingers.

The trap door to Kong's back is open, a scaffolding next to it, and men crawl in and out of the dimly lit interior.

A big crowd is expected tonight: not only those who've filled out the coupons, but also friends of the people associated with the company, invited to see Kong's debut. Paramount's top brass are also there, including Bob Goodfried, the West Coast publicity director, who will help with the huge number of press people.

Kong has competition for the public's attention tonight. The press has also been invited to watch Katharine Hepburn fly by helicopter into the Hollywood Bowl for a scene in her latest movie. If anyone can upstage Hepburn, it is the mechanical monster.

As soon as the gates are opened, the bleacher seats are filled. But for the first hour, all the spectators can



On Lot 2 in Culver City, crew members operate some of the fifty-four jacks that make the forty-foot Kong roar, break out of his cage, stomp people in the crowd, and throw steel bars around.

see is the giant gas-pump covering slowly descending on the other side of the Wall, where Kong is hidden.

When the covering reaches Kong's eyes, panic sets in. The casing is much too narrow—the space between it and the ape's nose is barely an inch. Since the covering is being lowered by guide ropes held by two dozen men, it is almost impossible to keep it steady. Any sudden shifts can make Kong's nose poke through the material. They don't have a second covering, so if this one goes, they're stuck.

Guillermin stands under Kong. De Laurentiis is also there, silent and intense. Christian Ferry pitches in and grabs hold of a guide rope. There is a ripping sound and De Laurentiis winces.

"You've got his nose," Guillermin exclaims.

A crease appears on the surface of the covering. Kong's nose leaves a definite impression, but there is no tear.

"Relax the line a bit," Guillermin calls out. There is another wrenching sound. "Hold it," the director pleads.

Kong is wearing a ridiculous crown on his forehead for the scene. It is tilted slightly to one side; this, too, hinders the covering from fitting easily over his body.

The gas-pump covering drops another few inches, swaying as it moves. "We could lose the crown, the nose, the teeth," Guillermin says.

It is a good half hour of painstakingly slow work before the covering envelopes Kong.

"It's crazy. Just crazy," Guillermin says. "And we still haven't rehearsed the movements of his hand for this scene."

When the covering is lifted, Kong will be inside his cage. Tonight only his fingers, toes, and eyes will move. His arms and legs will be manacled.

It is 11:15 P.M. when Kong is moved, on the track, through the gate to his place before the podium. A man is lifted to the top of the covering, and he connects it to the crane that will take it off at the appropriate time.

"Let's go for one," Guillermin says.

The crowd is suddenly attentive, sitting forward on their uncomfortable wooden benches. A child lets go of a balloon and it drifts up, bouncing off the still-hidden ape.

The covering gets stuck at Kong's knees.

"Cut it!" Guillermin shouts, unable to hide the pain in his voice.

Still playing the master of ceremonies, Bob Hastings talks into the microphone. "We've got a little gremlin inside."

The covering descends over Kong once more. Jessica, who has been standing at the top of the podium, walks down the steps and puts on a robe handed her by Fern Weber.

Men peer under the covering to determine if, given

the shortage of space inside, it can be raised as quickly as Guillermin wants without tearing it. The decision—based on the lateness of the hour and the habit the spectators have of drifting off by midnight—is to lift it swiftly and take the risk of damaging it and Kong.

"Ready, boys?" Guillermin asks into his walkie-talkie.

The covering is lifted off without a hitch. There is Kong, eyes rolling, fingers and toes moving. An audible gasp of appreciation is heard, then a spontaneous cheer.

He works!

Jessica, thinking someone has yelled "Cut!" walks off the podium again. But the cameras are still rolling. This take is ruined. Later, De Laurentiis reminds her that she moved off too quickly, and she is hurt, feeling she has done more than has been asked of her throughout the long production.

"Isn't Kong cute," a teenage girl says.

His mouth opens for the roar that will be inserted on the sound track later. It will be a combination of different animal roars created by the sound department, which will also compose Kong's rumbling noise by reducing the decibel level of his roar.

"I buy it," says David Clennon, an actor visiting the set, marveling at the technical achievement.

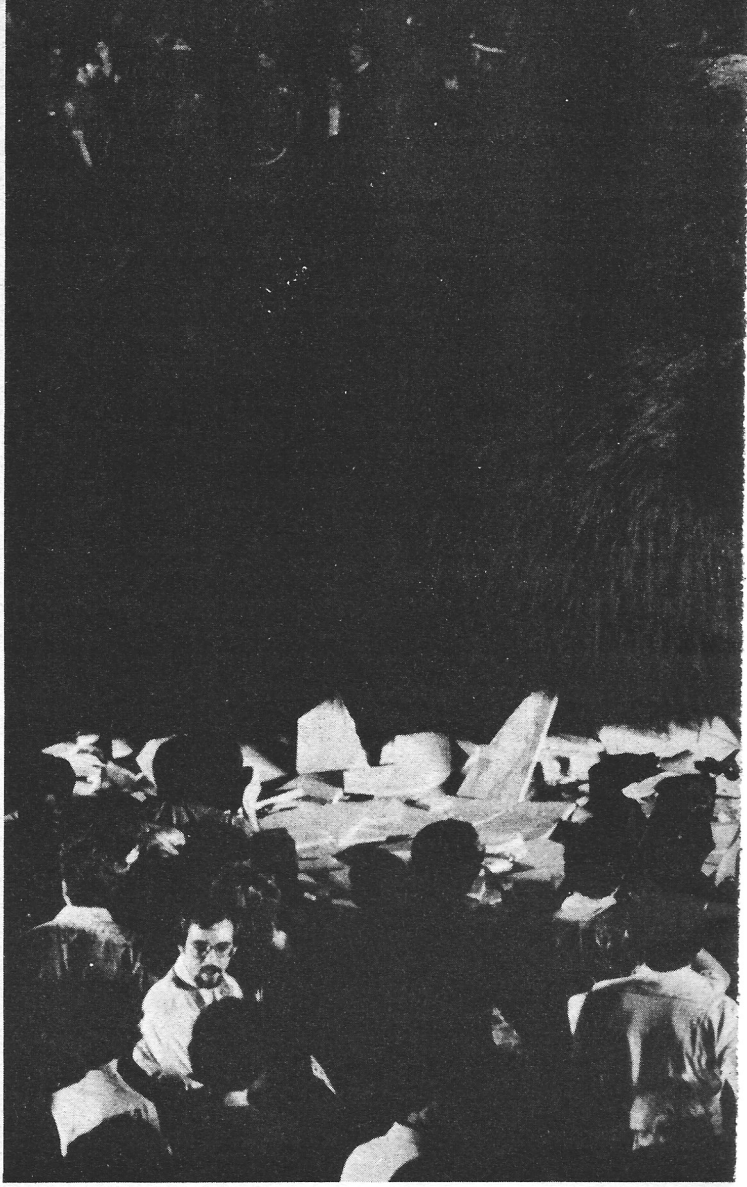
"Oh, my God! He's leaking."

A small river of hydraulic fluid is running down Kong's right leg.

"He just got excited seeing the girl."

Having seen Kong, and having responded to him with noisy admiration, the crowd starts filing out of the bleachers. Nothing can be done to keep them there, since they are not paid extras. Oblivious to them, Kong keeps performing, his eyes moving up and down, his mouth stretching wide. He's acting to a half-empty stadium. The fluid on his leg is now a trickle.

Next week Kong does more strenuous acting, although the actual break-out scene will be shot in miniature, with a man in the ape suit. When the crowd returns on Wednesday, August 17, the cage is on the



Between takes of the scene that comes at the end of the movie, Jeff Bridges and Jessica Lange stand by the dead Kong, who



lies on "smashed pavement"—in reality hunks of a lightweight synthetic material—in New York's World Trade Center plaza.

ground and Kong is holding pieces of it in his hand. In this scene, he will drop them.

The pieces are made of lightweight material, and they fall too slowly. Guillermin, at the panel, pleads with the special-effects men to have Kong drop his "steel" bars more swiftly. It is impossible. Guillermin is finding out that Kong moves slowly, making it very difficult to match his actions with what Baker is doing in the monkey suit.

Next time around, heavier material is used in the bars. The additional weight helps them reach the ground faster when they're released from Kong's hands, but it puts more stress on the ape's hydraulic system. The two special-effects men inside the monster bail out, fearing the whole interior structure might collapse. If Kong goes, it will be straight down, in pieces.

There's fresh trouble when the crowd scene is shot tonight. State law prohibits a person eighteen or under from being used in a scene where there might be any danger. There is plenty of danger here, with hundreds of people rushing out of the park, pushing and shoving, some even falling. Each night, David McGiffert tells the crowd that young people should not participate in the exodus scene, but they do anyway. Now the state of California is filing a complaint against the production for violation of one of its protection-of-youth laws. The sound track on which McGiffert is clearly heard issuing his warning will, it is hoped, prevent legal problems.

Jessica is now protected from the crowd by stunt people surrounding her. When she walks off the podium, she's swept up by a trained mob.

Kong, being asked to do more than he can, is malfunctioning once more. His arm is temporarily out of order; his jaw hangs unnaturally loose, showing signs of extreme wear. His leg gets banged up when it is disconnected from his body to stomp down on helpless onlookers in one particular scene in the film. The leg almost crushes Grodin as he—playing his role as Wilson —is getting fired for the entire fiasco. Grodin makes his exit on his hands and knees.



As the movie ends, Dwan (Jessica Lange) screams out her pain and fury at Kong's senseless death.

Jessica gets to ride the big Kong the next afternoon. It's not for a scene in the picture, but for some publicity shots. She is held by the already weakened hand some forty feet off the ground while the photographers click away. Directly under her is a platform covered with mattresses and held by a fork-lift truck. Bill Couch, the stunt man, is on the platform, ready to catch her if the hand breaks.

There is genuine concern for Jessica's safety. "They shouldn't keep her up there too long," Glen Robinson, Kong's builder, says. "The pump could run out of gas. If it does, the hand will drop."

Jessica is nervous and smiles only when the photographers take their pictures. She is glad to be helped out of the hand by Couch when the ordeal is over.

The principal photography on *King Kong* ends officially on August 27, a Friday. In the last week of shooting, Jeff and Jessica get roughed up in a model of a New York subway car. The train is yanked up at one end, spilling its occupants against the door at the other end of the car. When the scene is completed, Bridges is finished with the picture. Grodin's work ended on the night Kong's foot stomped him. Jessica will be called back in September to do some blue-screen shots in the hand. Shooting will resume on a sporadic schedule that same month for the man in the monkey suit; he'll be working with the New York miniatures at Culver Studio.

Kong never really ends; its shooting schedule just diminishes, fading into unnumbered days in September.

The wrap party is held on Monday, August 30, on Sound Stage 27. Kong's head and torso sit in front of the blue screen; a painted sheet has been hung over his shoulder, its sign proclaiming thanks to the crew for their work. There is food, drink, and a band. Paramount is represented by Barry Diller and David Picker. The atmosphere is friendly, the promises to keep in touch kept to a minimum. By 9 P.M. the party is over, though some stay on to dance and drink.

On December 17, when the film opens simultaneously in fifteen hundred theaters, the combined efforts and talents of cast and crew will finally be projected on the screen. It has been a long, fascinating haul for the hundreds of people—producer, director, actors, writer, special-effects men, cameramen, stunt people, grips, editors —who put *King Kong* together.

FILMS & TV

0352 Star

†For sale in Britain and Ireland only.
*Not for sale in Canada.

398043	**INGRID BERGMAN** Curtis F. Brown		75p
398175	**THE BLACK BIRD** Alexander Edwards		45p*
396792	**THE BIONIC WOMAN: DOUBLE IDENTITY** Maud Willis		50p
300663	**BRIEF ENCOUNTER** Alex Waugh		50p
398256	**CANNON: THE FALLING BLONDE** Paul Denver		50p*
398728	**CANNON: IT'S LONELY ON THE SIDEWALK**		50p*
397349	**COLUMBO: ANY OLD PORT IN A STORM** Henry Clement		50p*
398183	**COLUMBO: A CHRISTMAS KILLING** Alfred Lawrence		45p*
300795	**COLUMBO: THE DEAN'S DEATH**		40p*
300957	**CONDUCT UNBECOMING** Rupert Croft-Cooke	(illus)	50p
397489	**ESCAPE FROM THE DARK** Rosemary Anne Sisson		50p
398744	**GABLE AND LOMBARD** Joe Morella & Edward Z. Epstein		60p*
397160	**HARRY & WALTER GO TO NEW YORK** Sam Stewart		50p*
398493	**HAWAII 5-0: THE ANGRY BATTALION** Herbert Harris		50p*
300876	**HAWAII 5-0: SERPENTS IN PARADISE**		45p*
398477	**HUSTLE** Steven Shagan		60p*
398574	**INNOCENTS WITH DIRTY HANDS** Richard Neely		60p*
397500	**INSERTS** Anton Rimart		60p
397438	**KOJAK: GIRL IN THE RIVER** Victor B. Miller		50p*
397357	**KOJAK: GUN BUSINESS**		50p*
397446	**KOJAK: MARKED FOR MURDER**		50p*
398671	**KOJAK: TAKE-OVER**		50p*

398957	**THE MARRIAGE RING ("COUPLES")** Paddy Kitchen & Dulan Barber	60p
397276	**MURDER BY DEATH** H. R. F. Keating	60p*
398825	**McCOY: THE BIG RIP-OFF** Sam Stewart	50p*
398035	**PAUL NEWMAN** Michael Kerbel	75p
397470	**ODE TO BILLY JOE** Herman Raucher	60p*
300531	**PAPER TIGER** Jack Davies	50p
398191	**THE ROCKFORD FILES** Mike Jahn	50p*
398787	**THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN 1: WINE, WOMEN AND WAR** Mike Jahn	50p*
398329	**THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN 2: SOLID GOLD KIDNAPPING** Evan Richard	45p*
398442	**THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN 3: THE RESCUE OF ATHENA ONE** Mike Jahn	45p*
398647	**THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN 4: PILOT ERROR** Jay Barbree	50p*
398531	**SPANISH FLY** Madelaine Duke	50p
398817	**SWITCH** Mike Jahn	50p*
398051	**THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR** Bill S. Ballinger	50p*

0426 Tandem

180240	**AT THE EARTH'S CORE** Edgar Rice Burroughs	50p
180321	**THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT** Edgar Rice Burroughs	50p
164164	**LENNY** Valerie Kohler Smith	50p*
16184X	**ONEDIN LINE: THE HIGH SEAS** Cyril Abraham	60p*
132661	**ONEDIN LINE: THE IRON SHIPS**	40p*
168542	**SHAMPOO** Robert Alley	50p

Name .....

Address .....

Titles required .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Wyndham Books are available from many booksellers and newsagents. If you have any difficulty please send purchase price plus postage on the scale below to:

Wyndham Cash Sales
123 King Street,
London W6 9JG

or

Star Book Service,
G.P.O. Box 29,
Isle of Man,
British Isles

While every effort is made to keep prices low, it is sometimes necessary to increase prices at short notice. Wyndham Books reserve the right to show new retail prices on covers which may differ from those advertised in the text or elsewhere.

UK AND EIRE

One book 15p plus 7p per copy for each additional book ordered to a maximum charge of 57p.

OTHER COUNTRIES

Rates available on request.

NB These charges are subject to Post Office charge fluctuations.

KING KONG RETURNS

The great ape has held millions spellbound for decades – and now, once again, his epic tale leaps from the screen. Here is the full dramatic story of the legendary ape – from the terrifying moment he is first seen by the expedition in the jungle . . . to the mysterious fascination between the monster and the beautiful girl whose life he saves . . . to his death in the concrete jungles of New York.

Never before has this tragic and beautiful story been more vividly portrayed. And this book – the only book authorised by the makers of the film – takes you inside this movie-making feat. It's a film saga that triumphed over time, terror and technical disasters to create the most terrible – and most memorable – monster of the ages, coupled with a cast of the most fascinating characters you will ever meet!

THE THRILLING STORY – THE ONLY BOOK – BEHIND THE GREAT APE'S RETURN IN PARAMOUNT'S EPIC MOTION PICTURE!

WYNDHAM UK: 60p *Australia: $2.20
Malta: 65c New Zealand: $1.90
*Recommended Price
Film tie-in ISBN 0 352 30006 X