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**When the original King Kong was made in 1933,
the budget was only \$650,000.**

**Now, 43 years later with a much bigger Kong
and a \$22 million cost, no wonder it is . . .**

THE MIGHTIEST KING KONG OF THEM ALL

He may not be the handsomest movie star in Hollywood history, but he certainly is the biggest and hairiest, standing 40 feet tall and covered with acres of fur.

He is King Kong, the greatest movie monster of them all.

He wasn't even born a year ago. But he was alive in the minds of Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson, who had been hired by producer Dino De Laurentiis, to come up with a mechanical monster big enough to fill the screen in a multi-million dollar contemporary version of the classic "King Kong" story of beauty and the beast.

Discussions among Rambaldi, Robinson and De Laurentiis led to an agreement that Kong had to be monster-size and mechanical, having moving arms and legs. The original intention was to have an aircraft company build King Kong from the designs evolved by Rambaldi and Robinson, but when it became necessary to rush the film into production, the decision was to have Kong coming alive on a Hollywood back lot.

Work on the Kong monster began in January 1976, months earlier than had been originally anticipated, and at his birth on that day, he was just a pile of aluminum and wires waiting to be shaped by the skilled hands of a hundred craftsmen assembled in the workshop by Robinson.

The dimensions of Kong, a tribute to the genius of the men who make movie magic, are staggering. He weighs 6½ tons. His skeleton is metal, mostly aluminum. His insides contain 3,100 feet of hydraulic hose and 4,500 feet of electrical wiring. His chest is 20 feet wide, and his arm span is 20 feet.

He is fully functional, the first such

creature conceived by Hollywood. His arms can move in 16 different positions. He can walk and turn at the waist. His eyes and mouth move. He is a very human monster, terrifying when aroused, but with the soul of a romantic lover.

The secret to his ability to move is in the proportional balance in the hydraulic valves, according to Robinson, who believes Kong should retain some of his mystery and not everything about him should be made public. But the master builder said these valves are operated by wires running through a crane to a control panel operated by six men.

"In designing Kong," Rambaldi explains, "we tried to give him a character which at any moment could become terrible, but which is not basically bad, a monster who is very human."

Five different heads were used on Kong for a good reason. His skin is a latex material, and when it is stretched too far, it tears. Since Kong's moods vary a great deal in the film, and he does a lot of roaring, certain faces already have the beginnings of a roar while others have the start of different emotions already registered.

"This is the first time in the history of the cinema when a mechanical head works as well as the actors," Rambaldi joked. "We interchanged heads and created any human characteristic we wanted."

"Our Kong is fully functional," Robinson states. "He wiggles his arm, rolls his neck, twitches his ears, rolls his eyes, bends both legs, pulls his mouth back to show his gums, rotates on his hips, thrusts out his legs and, when he has to, smiles."

While marveling at the mechanical wizardry of her ardent pursuer, Jessica

Lange, who spends much of the film literally in his hand, had legitimate fears about Kong getting carried away and crushing her in his palm. She was reassured by Robinson that safety devices had been installed in Kong's fingers so that they would be prevented from closing completely on her. However, the first indication that it was not going to be an easy ride was the day Kong's hand went into action.

It had tested out perfectly, and all was ready for Jessica to be picked up ten feet off the ground and drawn to Kong's chest. Everything went well until Kong turned his hand. Suddenly a tendon snapped and the wrist went limp. The woman in the hand found herself upside down and parallel to the jungle floor. Jessica was slightly apprehensive the next time she was asked to be picked up by Kong's paw. Though his hand never again went out of wack, it did on occasion get playful. For instance, Kong's mechanical thumb had a habit of pressing a bit firmly into her soft naked back, leaving her with bruises and a major ache.

Michael Dino, a famous custom wig-maker for stars of stage and screen, was hired to cover Kong. First, he came up with 34 samples of various kinds of hair. While doing this, he visited several zoos to get an idea not only how gorillas looked, but how they acted.

"Gorillas are gentle, fierce animals," he noted. "But Kong had to be special, and after studying them closely, I saw that gorillas had a sympathetic side."

Horse tails were decided upon for Kong's hair, and 4,000 pounds were imported from Argentina. To keep the hair color uniform, some of the tails were bleached and tinted. Next, a hundred



people began the pain-staking process of weaving the strands of hair into four kinds of netting, a job that took months. When the hair was secured into hundreds of panels, each was then glued on huge pieces of latex which in turn were glued on a plastic mold that covered the metal frame.

Finished, Kong went immediately to work for director John Guillermin, in the screenplay by Lorenzo Semple, Jr. But being basically bionic and too huge for the average-sized soundstage, he went to pieces, a hand here for one scene, a leg on another soundstage for a different scene, his massive head in a third place, so that all of Kong was in use all the time, although only sometimes was he in *one* piece.

And he has an active role in the film. He snatches Dwan (Jessica Lange) from a sacrificial altar, fights a gigantic snake to save her, crashes through a huge wall to get to her, falls into a pit, ends up in the hole of a supertanker, gets transported in bondage to New York City, and then does his own version of Cook's tour of the Big Apple trying to get back to his lady love, ending up on top of the World Trade Center.

The mechanical Kong's only disappointment was that he didn't get to make the trip himself to New York City. His alter ego, a 40-foot Styrofoam model, was taken there instead to play the death scene on the plaza at the Trade Center. No matter that he was unmechanical, a fact told to New Yorkers. They still came out by the thousands to see Kong is his swan song, proving that people are still ape over Kong!

Answering an advertisement in the daily newspapers to come see the filming of "King Kong," (a Paramount release), they arrived in droves by bus, car, subway and on foot, lining up patiently outside the barricades three hours before the start of the shooting, waiting to see one of the most memorable death scenes in movie history.

The enthusiasm of the crowd at being in "King Kong" was not diminished by the fact that the 40-foot mechanical monster was taking a brief vacation in Hollywood while his cousin, a 40-foot model, was used for the death scenes in New York. Alive or dead, Kong is Kong, whether moving or prone on the cement, and the more exuberant souvenir hunters in the crowd made off with patches of Kong's fur plus an eye before the shooting ended at the Trade Center.

Though it has a different storyline than the 1933 version, producer Dino De Laurentiis claims "King Kong" is still about beauty and the beast. "It is a straight, romantic adventure picture with some humor," he noted. "It is a picture for everyone, the whole family."

However, the movie has a PG rating. "It can't be a straight G," added De Laurentiis with a smile. "There is a relationship between beauty and the beast." ■



Jessica Lange, as Dwan, is recaptured by King Kong, after having fallen in the mud and dirt in her attempt to escape.



Thousands of New Yorkers arrive at the plaza of New York's World Trade Center Towers to view the fallen body of King Kong after the giant gorilla plunged to his death from atop the skyscrapers.