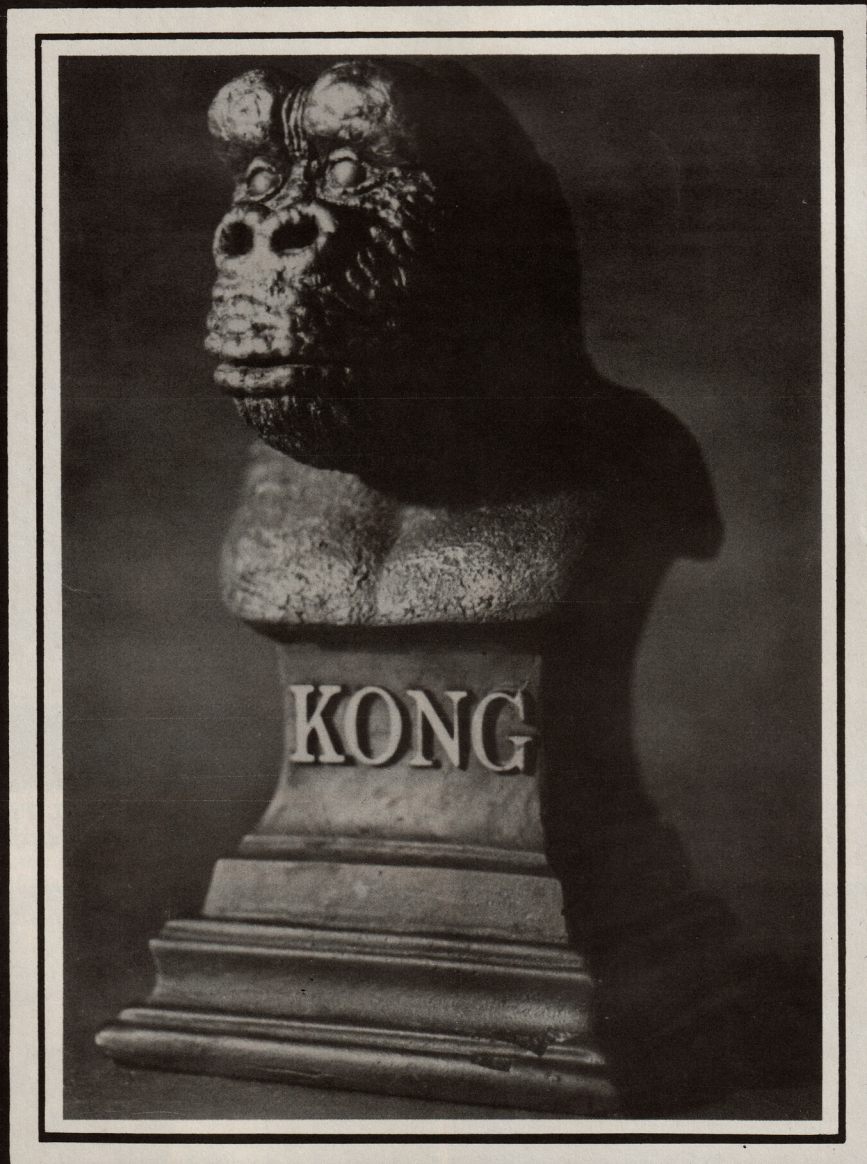


# CLOSEUP

number 3

## IN MEMORIUM



# THE 8TH WONDER OF THE WORLD

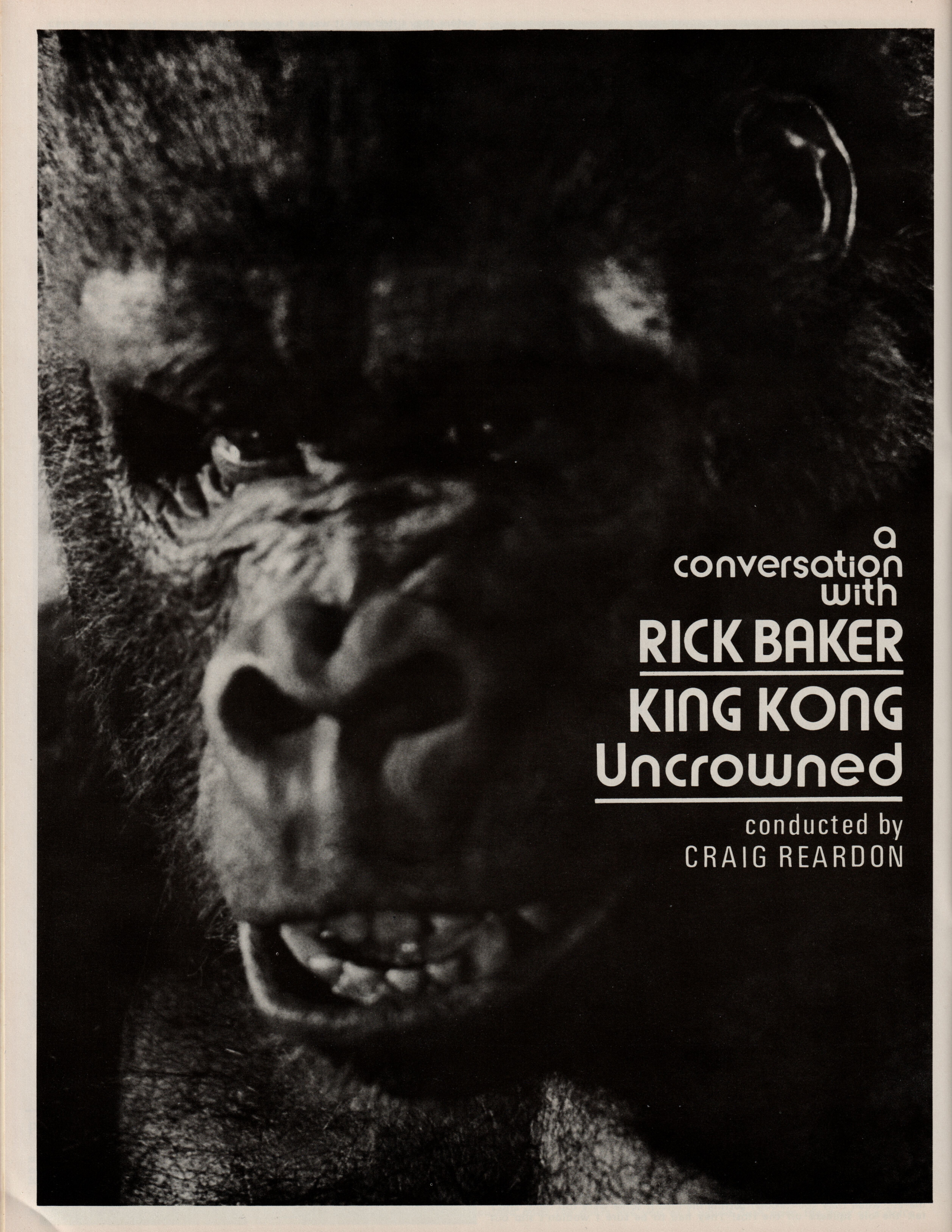
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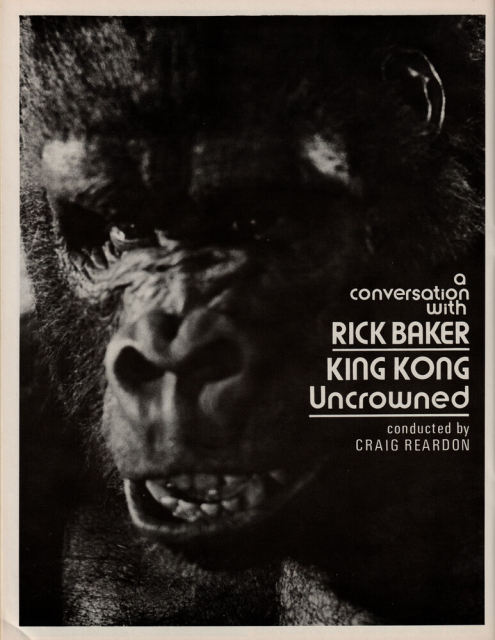


# THE 8TH WONDER OF THE WORLD



a  
conversation  
with  
**RICK BAKER**  
**KING KONG**  
**Uncrowned**

conducted by  
CRAIG REARDON



a  
conversation  
with  
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**KING KONG**  
**Uncrowned**  

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conducted by  
CRAIG REARDON

Born in upstate New York in 1950, Rick Baker and his parents moved to California two years later, settling in Covina, where Rick spent his formative years. As a child he was interested in drawing, and very shortly, an interest in theatrical makeup soon developed. This interest had Rick creating fantasy masks in his early teen years and he continued to work diligently at this hobby all the while he attended school.

In 1968, while still in high school, Rick landed a job at Clokey Studios, the famous producers of the "Gumby" and "Davey and Goliath" stop-motion animation series for television. It was at this job that he met several young animators who have remained close friends, and was introduced to new techniques and materials which he soon applied to his mask-making and makeup hobby.

Remaining at Clokey's one year, Rick was finally able to break into the field of makeup as a professional when he was chosen to construct the costume for the low-budget feature film OCTAMAN, which starred Kerwin Matthews. Since then he has worked steadily, creating special masks, makeups and devices for films and television commercials, and has also created his own special appliances and masks for merchandising during the Halloween season.

In 1971, Rick created the makeup and costume for John Landis' satire on bad horror movies SCHLOCK, and this was soon followed by a two-headed gorilla suit for the AIP film THE THING WITH TWO HEADS (which "paired" Rosey Grier and Ray Milland for the first time).

In 1973, Rick's mentor and friend Dick Smith, with whom he'd been in correspondence since 1969, selected Rick to assist him on the film, THE EXORCIST. Rick did none of the creative work, but labored hard making molds, and travelled to Iraq to assist Smith under the trying conditions of location filming. During the production of the above movie, Rick was referred by Dick Smith for the job of creating duplicate heads of Geoffrey Holder and Yaphet Kotto for LIVE AND LET DIE (1973), which he managed to squeeze in to his schedule. Next, on his own Rick got the job to create the monster baby for Larry Cohen's IT'S ALIVE! (1974). He created grisly makeups for an unreleased film, THE CHAMELEONS (1974), and then was once again referred by Dick Smith for the job of aging Cicely Tyson in the tv film THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MISS JANE PITTMAN. On this film he was ultimately paired with another makeup man, Stan Winston, and the two shared responsibilities; for their efforts they received Emmys. In 1975, Rick created a death mask design for David Carradine to wear in the exploitation film, DEATH RACE 2000. He then created the makeup for a horror film entitled SQUIRM, and simultaneously became involved in the remake of KING KONG, which lasted from October 1975 to October 1976 and which is discussed in the interview below. Soon thereafter he was hired by George Lucas to supervise a team of artists to create some additional monsters for a barroom scene in THE STAR WARS. Rick's latest job is an appearance, in his own custom gorilla suit, in John Landis' film, KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE.

In 1974, Rick Baker married the former Elaine Parkyn, and they both live in North Hollywood. Rick is never inactive, and even when between jobs he is constantly turning out fabulous masks and imaginative makeups. He is truly an artist "born to his craft."

CLOSEUP: When did you first hear about the KONG remake, and how did you become involved in it?

RICK BAKER: Uh, I don't want to talk about it! (laughs) It was back in October, I guess it was, of 1975. I had just heard from several people—one of them was John Landis, the guy who did SCHLOCK—and he said, "Hey, did you hear they're remaking KING KONG?" And I said, "No." "Yeah, some Italian guy, Dino De Laurentiis . . ." And I had never really heard of De Laurentiis before, and I said, "How about that? What are they going to do for the gorilla?" And he says, "Oh, I think they're going to shoot it in Italy, and some Italian guys are going to build a gorilla suit." And I said, "Oh, great, that's going to look real good." (laughs) Anyway, then a couple of my animator friends were going and speaking to De Laurentiis about doing stop-motion animation on KONG, and they all said that Dino said he wanted to use a man in a suit, not a stop-motion thing, because he didn't like stop-motion, for some reason. So, they recommended me; and enough people recommended me that they called me in and talked to me.

CU: AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER states in their January 1977 issue, that, quote, "In the beginning, a talented makeup artist, Rick Baker, presented for Dino De Laurentiis' approval a gorilla suit of his own devising which he proposed to wear himself in order to animate the character of Kong, but after preliminary camera tests, it was decided that this suit was not nearly flexible enough to simulate truly life-like movements—let alone the wide range of almost human expressions which Kong was supposed to be capable of. It was at this point that Carlo Rambaldi was brought over from Rome for consultation on the problem." Is that the way it was?

RB: Well, that's a sore point, that question. What happened is, when I talked with them about doing KONG, I went in there with some sculptures of gorillas, and masks, and I told them if they wanted me to work on the picture, we'd have to start right away, because I was going to start pre-production work on another project within a week. And I said, if they'd give me some money to show me they were serious, I would turn down the other job and do KONG. They said, "Yeah, yeah, we want you to do it . . . we'll get back to you in a couple of days." Well, they didn't get back to me—and these other people called me up—and so I took the other job. And that was a film called SQUIRM. So, the same day I told the guys I'd do SQUIRM, the KONG people call me up and say they want me to do KING KONG! I told them I was doing this other picture, and they said, "Well, can you get out of this other job?" And I said, "No—that wouldn't be very professional, when they're counting on me." I said I'd see what I could arrange. So, I did the pre-production work on SQUIRM; I designed the makeups and made the appliances, and trained somebody to apply them—that way I could go on to KONG. Then I came back and called up the KONG people, and said, "I'm ready to work." But what had happened during the time that I was gone, working on SQUIRM, was that they'd brought in Carlo Rambaldi, who was this effects man from Italy, who Dino had used many times before. And they said, "We've got this guy from Italy who we want to work with you on building this Kong suit." And I said, "No!" (laughs) I said, "I've had experience working with other people before, and . . . it's hard for two creative people working on the same project—especially when you have one guy who doesn't speak Italian, and another guy who doesn't speak English!" I said, "He's got different techniques, I'm sure, and I don't want to have anything to do with him. It's going to end up that one of us is going to be getting all the credit for the other guy's work," and that type of a deal. And they said, "Well, before you leave . . ." (laughs) ". . . we've got Carlo's portfolio here; take a look at this stuff—we'd like to see what you think of it." So, he had a really impressive portfolio; two or three of them—his life's work. And some of the stuff was pretty good. It ranged from mediocre to really outstanding stuff. I said, "Yeah, this guy has talent, and I might consider working with this guy." So, what they decided is that Carlo had some ideas that he wanted to use for a suit, and I had some very

definite ideas on what to do—so they said, "well, what we'll have you do, is, we'll have you both, within a period of a month, build a test suit, each of you. And after this month's time, you'll meet on such-and-such a date, and you'll compare suits—compare notes. You'll work completely independently of each other, and that way, you won't suppress Carlo's ideas, and vice-versa." And I said, "Fine, that's agreeable to me." So I said, "With only a month's time, I'm going to need some assistants," so they said, "Oh yeah, fine"—so they gave me enough money to hire one guy! His name was David Celitti, a friend of mine, who's a wax museum sculptor. So I hired David; and I had a very limited budget. They gave me these drawings of Kong as a missing-link. They wanted Kong to be an ape-man, not a gorilla. And I kept fighting with them about how that was a big mistake. They said, "Here, make the suit like this." I completely disregarded the drawings and went about building a gorilla suit basically the way I wanted to.

CU: Were those Carlo's drawings?

RB: No, none of them were. They had a whole crew of sketch artists who were working on the film a month before I even talked to them. So, David and I went about working on the suit, and we ended up working seven-day weeks, with fifteen-hour days. I really made a mistake. Normally, I would have built up the padding out of sheet polyfoam and things. But, I knew we would have to build more than one suit, eventually. So, I thought, well, since I have a little extra expense money, I'll see about casting the padding. We'd spend a little more time on the initial work, but then all the padding would be the same, and we could make as many suits of padding as we wanted—very quickly, a couple of suits a day—whereas building it up would take a week, a piece. So David and I sculpted this big gorilla body, then made a big mold of it, and cast it in soft urethane foam. But that held us up . . . so, I didn't have time to really finish off the suit completely the way I wanted to. But, it was done on time. So, I showed up the day that we're supposed to shoot the tests, with my suit—I put the suit on, walked around, and did the different tests with the miniature sets. And I said, "Well, where the hell is Carlo, and his suit?" And they said, "Well . . . Carlo didn't have enough time to finish his suit, so, we're going to have to wait for him—we'll just film the tests with yours." And I said, "Well, that kind of ticks me off—I didn't have enough time, either, but I got the damn suit done." So they said, "Well, he's been doing some things, and he's been busy, and he hasn't had the time." So I wandered on over that day to the little shop where he was working . . . and saw that he has twenty people working for him! He had a crew of twenty people, and I had one guy! And he hadn't even made molds of anything yet. And I say to myself, this is great—I got one guy, and I'm breaking my butt, and I find out that Carlo's been coming in at ten, eleven o'clock, and staying 'till about four o'clock, and going home. And, it kind of ticked me off, you know? And then, Carlo has the advantage of seeing my suit. He comes and sees my suit, so he knows what he has to come up against, and he's like learning things from the way I did it. And the thing that disturbs me about that damn comment that my suit wasn't flexible enough . . . because it was big, you know, they assumed it's not flexible. Carlo, through an interpreter, says, "Let's see you walk around some." So I did. Then he says, "Let's see you move the face." I had a little mechanism to move the lips, so I did that. Then he says, "Well, let's see you put your arms straight up in the air, like this." They didn't think I could do it, because of the shoulders, you know. So, I put my arms completely straight up, and touched the arms together like this—and they said, "Oh . . . uh, good." It wasn't the most flexible suit in the history of the world, but I could do anything I wanted to, in it . . . and that disturbs me, about his comment. So, what happened is, more than a month passed, and Carlo still hadn't finished his suit. So, he had double the time that I had. Finally, they called me up—I was continuously shooting tests at this time—and they said, "Well, come in tomorrow, because Carlo's suit is going to make its debut, and we want you to be there to see it, because we think it's really going to be great." So I say, alright, and I show up at MGM, and I go over

to the little shop where they're working—and they're still sewing on hooks and eyes! It's not ready—and they're frantically running around, trying to get the stuff done. They said they were going to shoot at ten. It turned out they got it there about two o'clock. And it still wasn't finished. The suit had hooks and eyes, from the feet all the way up the backs of the legs, around the butt, up the back, and down the arms—which took them about 45 minutes, just to hook the guy all together. The suit wasn't made to fit me, by the way—it was made to fit this black guy named Albert Popwell. The mask was a hollow, slip-rubber mask—which is like a Halloween mask that you'd buy—just a regular slip-rubber mask, that he'd filled up with polyurethane foam—the whole mold, completely—and dug it out by hand, just to make it hollow. He didn't even use a core, where you use a guy's life mask to create the negative space you want. He just dug it out by hand. There was no mechanism; there were no teeth in it; the guy's eyes were about a half-an-inch away from the eyeholes in the mask; and the guy couldn't move in the damn suit. And that's what burns me about him saying that my suit wasn't flexible enough! When Guillermin (director John Guillermin) saw it, he started screaming. He said, "We waited all this time for this damn suit, and it looks like this?" And he went on and on and on about how unsatisfactory it was; and then he said, "Rick!—where's Rick?" And I said, "Here I am." "Put your suit on!" I purposely had left it at home, because I didn't want it to be there that day—and, I'd decided at that time that I was finished with this picture, and they could just cram it. So, they said, "Go home and get it." So . . . I said, "All right." They had a driver who drove me home, and I got the suit, came back, and put it on. And this was the first time I ever met Dino—this is after I've already been working for a couple months, you know. So I put the damn suit on, and they had a whole comparison thing. John was saying, "Look at this—now look at Baker's suit. Look at the shoulders—look at the power it has, compared to this outer space thing. There's no comparison! Look at here—it's so much more of what we want." He agreed that I was right about the size of the gorilla, instead of the missing-link—and just the whole way the suit worked. So I really felt badly about Carlo, because they were just saying right then and there that his suit was a piece of junk, you know? And I thought to myself that I just wanted to have nothing to do with it. But they said, "Yeah, yeah, well, now . . . this is going to work out . . ." Rick and Carlo are going to work together." And I said, "Wait a minute, folks." I called John and Dino together in the little roll-around dressing room I had, and I said, "Listen, guys—all I've had since I started this picture was a bunch of crap from you people. I kept hearing 'Carlo Rambaldi did this,' 'Carlo Rambaldi that,' and, 'his suit's gonna be great,' and this and that." And I said, "It bothers me! I've got a big ego, and it just bothers me." And I said, "I've decided I don't want to have anything to do with this picture, and your Carlo Rambaldi can go ahead and do the damned suit." So Dino says, "No, no, no, no! I'll take care of everything!" He says, "You come and see me in da morning, and we'll have a big meeting—everything will be fine!" So, I say, "Well . . . I don't know." But I go there, maybe expecting him to make me a better offer, or something—perhaps putting me in charge. Instead, he says, "Rick . . . you, and Carlo, are . . . one person! No, you and Carlo gonna make-a King Kong!" And he says, ". . . finest guys in the world—and you gonna be equals. It's no longer gonna be Carlo Rambaldi's suit. It's gonna be Carlo Rambaldi-Rick Baker's suit!—you know, both of your suits." And I said, "Well . . . I don't know." And he says, "No—really! You are both equals. You come talk to me any time you want—any problems between you two." Because I was saying we have different techniques, different artistic values . . . it's not gonna work. And he says, "You come to me, any time—you got any problems? Come to me! Carlo Rambaldi-Rick Baker's suit." Okay. Then I started working at MGM, instead of here at my own shop at home.

CU: Which must have been worse, really?

RB: Working at MGM, was worse? Yeah—because the first thing that happened was I got hassled by the unions. I could not sculpt anything; I couldn't





make a mold of anything; I couldn't do nothing, except be in charge. I got hassled by the moldmaker's union. I got hassled by the makeup union. So I went up to the executive in charge of production, Jack Grossberg. I said, "Jack, I mentioned this before I started the picture—I told them I wasn't in the makeup union, and it was going to be a hassle." And I said, "You're either going to have to do something about it, or I'm not going to be of any use to you." So he says, "What's the problem?" I said, "Well, so-and-so in the moldmaker's union is hassling me, and this-and-this with the makeup union." He says, "Don't worry—I'll take care of it." So he ended up getting me in the moldmaker's union, as a sculptor. So, I could sculpt the stuff, but I couldn't make any molds of it. And they did that just to appease the unions. They said, "Well, we're gonna work on getting you into the makeup union—but I'm sure they didn't do dump, because I talked to the business agent for the union, and he never even heard from the guys. So, I just figured, "Oh, hell... I want to do this job. At least I can do it, this way." So, after I built my suit, which was more gorilla-like—and Carlo's was that missing-link—they said, "Well, we want it gorilla-like, but we don't want it just like what Rick has. Rick's suit is along the right lines, and we want to base it on his, but we don't want this suit. We want something a little different." And I agreed, because the suit wasn't the way I wanted it to look, not at all. But the way it was, I'd just barely had time to finish the suit, let alone make it right. So, I said, "Fine, fine—now, who's gonna sculpt the stuff?" They said, "We don't know—you guys can work that out." And I said, "Well, I want to sculpt it, and Carlo wants to sculpt it, I'm sure." They said, "Why don't you both sculpt heads, and we'll look at them and decide which is the better of the two?" I said, "Fine"—so I sculpted a head, and Carlo sculpted a head. They chose mine. They said, "This is the face we want," so I says, "Alright, then I'll sculpt it." But they said, "We want this much change... we want the muzzle to be out a little bit more... or something... but you sculpt the head." Okay, fine. They said, "We want the head done tomorrow." (laughs) It wasn't tomorrow, but it was soon—and I was running around doing so many other things anyway, that I finished off the head really quickly. Then, I had to show the moldmakers how to make molds of it, the way I wanted to. But they didn't do it the way I wanted, and there was a big screw-up on part of the mold—but we patched it up and made it work. So, I sculpted that head; designed the way the mold was going to work, and how we were going to cast it; got the proper material to use for it, foam latex; and, made a core for it, so we could cast it the thickness we wanted to without having to go in there digging it out. So, I took care of all that. But, in the meantime, they used the hands from my test suit as models for Kong's hands, and they had a sculptor working on those, for the suit. Then, there were three or four sculptors who were working on the big hand. The hand on Carlo's ape suit was like a human hand with pointy fingernails, and that was his "gorilla hand," you know. And they had already made a big hand for the mechanical Kong, carved out of foam, to look like that. So, they had this big human hand with pointy fingernails. John Guillermin said, "No—we want it to look like a gorilla hand, like Rick's—much better, with the shorter thumb and thicker fingers." So then the sculptors were working on that big hand, at the same time another was working on the small hands. Anyway, it went on and on and on, where I took care of the rubber stuff, sculpting things, supervising the sculpture I couldn't do, and telling the moldmakers how to make the molds. I was still

convinced we could cast the padding, and make it work for us, but I wanted to cast it in sections, to make it more flexible—maybe put flexible fabric in-between—and I thought, that way, they would all match, and we could make it all in a short amount of time. Carlo wanted to build up the padding, and I said, "That's fine—it'll work very well—but it's harder to match." Well, he went about building up the padding, and I sculpted a body and made a mold, just as a back-up thing, in case we didn't get the other stuff done. Then, we got into the problem about what we were going to use for fur. On my test suit, I'd used a synthetic, which wasn't exactly the synthetic I wanted to get, but, I didn't have time to look around too much. And Carlo had used human hair, which was made into wefts, and layered on his suit. The hair on his suit alone cost about twice as much as my whole suit cost, including my labor and David's! Well, I had already decided a lot of things, after I'd come back after finishing SQUIRM, and I said, "Look—things have to be done in this order, or it's not going to work out. First, you need a scale model." Oh, in the meantime—I forgot to mention this—Carlo had convinced Federico (Federico De Laurentiis, Dino's son and Executive Producer on KONG) and Dino that he could build a forty-foot mechanical Kong that would walk, and do anything in the picture—which would completely eliminate the need for a man in a suit, and eliminate any optical effects... because you'd actually have a forty-foot tall gorilla that would run around and do the stuff. When I first talked to the KONG people, they talked about using a forty-foot tall statue, where maybe the head would turn, just for a couple shots. But Carlo convinced them it could be totally functional. They went to Sid and Marty Krofft, and said, "Can you build us a forty-foot statue?" This was when Carlo had only just come on the scene. They said, "Yeah, we can do it, but it will take us about six months." Which is a very reasonable estimate. If anything, under-estimating, I thought, to do a really nice job on the thing—because that's an enormous job. And Carlo says, "Six months?" He told me, in one month, he'll build his, that walks. And they said, "He's a bleeping genius!" and I said, "He's a bleeping liar... he's not going to have a mechanical thing that walks, in a month!" And they said, "Yeah, he will. You don't know this man—he does amazing things!" So anyway, in the beginning, I'd said, "If we're going to have this mechanical King Kong, you cannot just design the thing as though it was a giant shark, because, it's going to have to match to the man in the suit." I said, "I don't care what Carlo says, you're going to have a man in a suit in a majority of the picture, and if you want it to match, you're going to have to use the man in the suit for the scale model. You can't just sculpt a three-foot tall gorilla, and use it as a scale model for the forty-foot one." So I said, "The man in the suit should be the scale model." So I said, "The first thing we should do is make a mock-up suit; it doesn't have to be perfectly flexible—we can maybe even alter the padding on my test suit, just to get the look of it established. And then you can build your forty-foot one." They said, "Well, we don't have time." They'd already started the framework for the forty-foot one, and then you, before I even had my test suit done. They were building it according to Carlo's original designs—which were completely rejected. So they had to start all over again, salvaging what they could. So I said, "If you're starting all over again now, you're in the same place you were before—you don't know what the suit is gonna look like." "Oh well, it's close enough," they say. It goes without saying they had to make a lot of changes, still. Anyway, I still said, "You have to do this, before you do

that"—which is, make the suit, before we make the mechanical one. I said, "We also have to decide what we're going to do about the fur," because, I said, "You have to match the fur on the big one. Besides matching the fur on several suits... because one suit wasn't going to make it all through the production, "... you have to make that same fur, only in different texture and length, for the big one. It has to match. So, what the hell are we gonna do, there?" I suggested that we talk to a big mill that manufactures synthetic fur. It may cost a great deal of money to have something made to specifications, but at least we could have consistency. We could say, we want this to be this long; we don't want it to shine, or, we want it to shine; we want this color; this kind of blend; put it on a kind of stretchy base... and they could make something up, so we could make all the suits we wanted, and any little parts to match. And then we could say, now we want this same thing, only, blow it up this many times... you know, for the big one. And I'm sure they could do it. Either that, or I also suggested having a suit all hand-tied, all the hair hand-ventilated—which is an enormous job, incredibly expensive—but, it would pay off. But, they said, "That's no good—we gotta find something else." So I said, "Okay, forget about it; you find something else, and I'll worry about getting the rubber stuff done." You know, all along, I kept trying to convince everybody that Kong should be a gorilla. I asked them, "Have you ever even seen a gorilla?" "Well, we've seen a lot of pictures of gorillas..." I said, "Have you ever even gone to a zoo, since this started?" "Well, no, not really..." I said, "Go to L.A. Zoo—it's just down the street, practically—look at the gorilla there. Look at how majestic and how powerful he is! That's what Kong should be, majestic and powerful." I said, "You've got a scrawny missing-link thing." You see, their original concept for the missing-link was to have it done with a skinny, hairy suit, and to do the face with light appliances, like PLANET OF THE APES. So I said to them, "Audiences have seen it all over in 2001, and PRIMAL MAN, and five PLANET OF THE APES films, plus a TV series—and they're sick of it. You don't want that—it's going to blow it. Go and see the damn gorillas." Eventually, one day, I got everybody to go out, and I went with them, and we looked at the gorillas; and they're going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah"; and the same day, they said, "Well, let's go look for some real fur, somewhere." So I said, "Let's go to Bischoff's Taxidermy," which is a big taxidermy place near here. So we went there, and we looked around, and they had a nice black bear that was stuffed. And Carlo said, "This is nice." And Mario (Mario Chiari, co-Production Designer) says, "This fur is real good." And I said, "Yeah, it's good, but it's on a rigid form. It looks great, but, we don't want to use that." They said, "Yeah, we do!" And I said, "If I have to wear the damn suit, just the weight of that fur alone is an incredible amount and then you have the inflexibility of the hide." And the guys at Bischoff's were giving us all kinds of BS: "Oh, if it's too heavy, you can just take a razor, and shave the hide off, 'till it's real thin, like tissue paper." I said, "No, no thanks." But they bought a fur, and they took it to Dino, and Dino says, "Beautiful." They photographed it, all ripply, and shiny, and nice—just a piece of it! "It's beautiful—this is what we're gonna use." And I said, "No, no good." "Yes it is, we're gonna use it." I said, "Listen, you're gonna have to match all those hides—it's going to take more than one hide to make one suit; then you're going to have to make several suits. It's not going to work." "Yeah, yeah, yeah..." I said, "It's going to be so bulky and so heavy..." "No, no, no... just shut up!" So, I did. We had a





couple tallors working there in the shop, building up the padding. And Bischoff's Taxidermy had the chore of actually making the fur suit. They found hides there that were similar, and they sewed them together, according to the padding that we had built up. Then they brought the fur in one day, and they put the fur over the padding—and it just turned into a big fuzzi ball. All the hair stood straight up, and it looked ridiculous. And this was like two days before we were going to shoot!—shoot a test, that is. So, Carlo got in there with a pair of scissors and just started hacking away at it, and cut off all the guard hairs—which are the nice, long, shiny ones—and just left a little fuzzy, downy kind of stuff underneath, and it really made it look like hell. We could've got \$5-a-yard synthetic stuff and chopped it off, and it would've looked the same. And another thing I was trying to tell them, is we don't want black. Mountain gorillas are black, but, black doesn't photograph. Especially with the low-key lighting they were talking about using. It would turn out solid black . . . just a big silhouette walking around, you know. So they ended up spraying it with Streaks 'N' Tips, a colored hairspray. Every day, they'd spray the damn suit brown, and it got more and more brown, more and more gunked-up.

CU: You once told me that they would spray the stuff on the fur while you were wearing the suit! Right in your face . . .

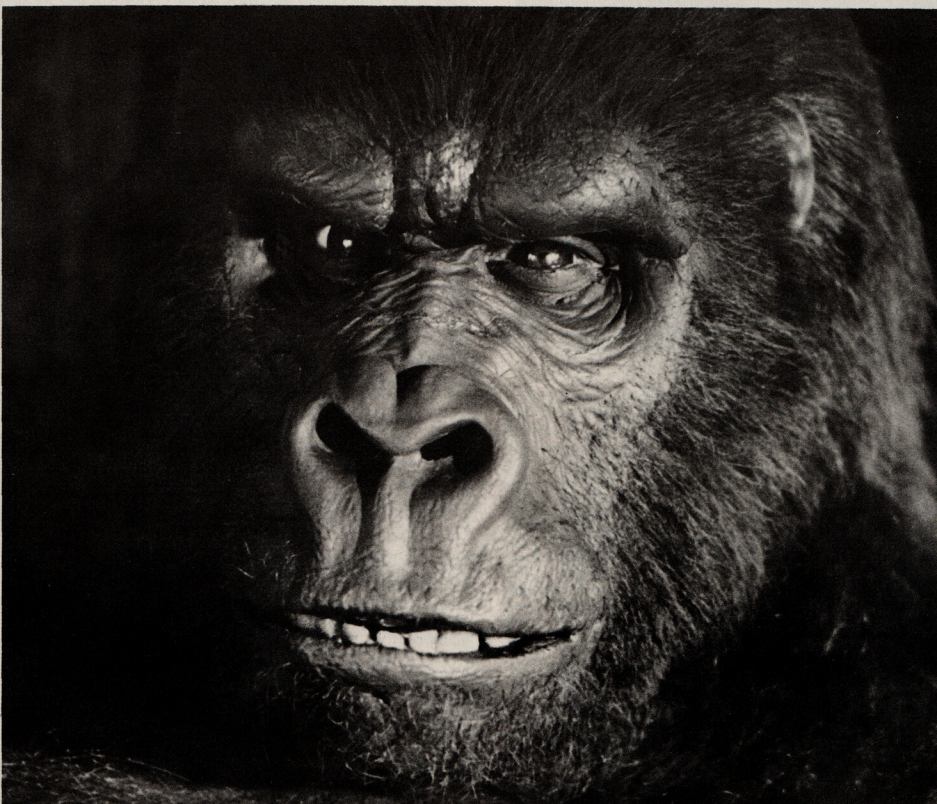
RB: Yeah, that's right; Richard Kline (the Director of Photography) was the only one who bothered to point out that I was in there trying to breathe! Dick was a very nice man. In fact, Dick is the one man who's really responsible for making that suit work, because there were a lot of problems with that suit, and a lot of things that really looked like hell in person—things that I fought against, like the way the arms join on. On a gorilla, the hair on his forearm grows up, and the hair on his upper arm grows down, and it meets at the elbow. It's a natural place to join it on. That way we could switch from an extended arm to the gloved hand, and you wouldn't have any problems with the length of the sleeve, because it would just join on at the elbow, and it would match there in its natural place. That's the way it joined on in my test suit. Well, Carlo wanted it to join on at the wrist. I said, "If we have it join on at the wrist, and we have arm extensions, it's going to be in the wrong spot; it's very obvious, and people look for it there." Well, "no, no, no . . . we have to do it there." So they did it there—and it looked like hell, because the hair that was on the hands had been punched-in, using those long guard hairs. So, we had these long, coarse-textured hairs on the hands, and short, fuzzy-textured hair on the suit. It was a very obvious join. But, thanks to Dick . . . I mean, Dick carefully lit everything. And anytime that that looked very bad, he would put a nice little thing in there to create a shadow on it. And where the chest joined on—the whole chest was completely removable, and just snapped on, which I was very much against—and where that joined on, you could always see where it was, and he just carefully lit everything—and, thanks to him, it comes off looking pretty good. If it was just a hack cinematographer, or you just took the suit outside and shot it, running around, it would have looked like a piece of garbage.

CU: The AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER shows you in a funny-looking undersuit with sacs of fluid all over it; was that just something that was tried, and not used?

RB: No, that was the way the padding actually was. When I first talked with Carlo, when we started working together, I said, "These are some things I wanted to do that I didn't have time to do on my test suit, which would really pay off." And one of them . . . well, there was this guy named Charlie Gemora, who had the best-looking gorilla suit ever made, in my opinion—because he was the only guy who ever knew what a gorilla looked like and how one moved. In THE PHANTOM OF THE RUE MORGUE, he had a suit that had a liquid-filled chest, that had weight to it; and when he'd hold on to the bars of the cage and moved around, you'd see the weight of this chest moving and flowing, and it really gave it life. So, "Let's do this liquid-filled chest." Carlo says, "No good."

CU: And yet they give him credit for that idea.

RB: Well, that later comes out. So he says, "No good . . . won't work." And I said, yes, it will, it's been done, it's a good idea, it's really going to pay off. I said, "Why don't we try making different parts of the suit in different densities? Like the rib cage—let's make it a semi-rigid type of thing. Not rigid like fiberglass, where you could get hurt, but more rigid than what the muscle material is—because that way, it would move more like a ribcage, and it wouldn't collapse, and you'd be able to see that it wasn't all the same soft stuff. You know, the ribcage collapsing where it isn't supposed to." And, I said, "Let's put some rigid shoulder blades in there, too, so that when he moves his shoulder, you can see the shoulder blade moving separately from the other stuff." I had several ideas like that. "No good!" he says. So I said, "Listen . . . I'll call up the office, and see if they can rent this PHANTOM OF THE RUE MORGUE, and we'll show the last reel, that has the gorilla in it. Then we'll all look at it, and you'll see what you think." So, I called the girl in the front office, Charlotte, and she said she'd take care of it. In the meantime—I later found out—Carlo sits down and he makes this sketch of a liquid-filled chest! And he goes to Dino, and he says, "Look at this great idea I'm-a got!" . . . you know? And he says, "Look-a this . . . liquid chests!" Well, we go to see the movie, and Federico, Carlo, and I are watching it, and they say, "Real good." And it goes on. Gemora also had arm extensions, which I was fighting for from the beginning, and they're all





couple tallors working there in the shop, building up the padding. And Bischoff's Taxidermy had the chore of actually making the fur suit. They hide there that were similar, and they sewed them together, according to the padding that we had built up. Then they brought the fur in one day, and they put the fur over the padding—and it just turned into a long fuzzy ball. All the hair came straight up, and it looked ridiculous. And this was like two days before we were going to shoot—shoot a test, that is. So, Carlo got in there with a pair of scissors and just started hacking away at it, and cut off all the guard hairs—which are the nice, long, shiny ones—and just left a lot of hair, doing a kind of stuff underneath, and it really made it look like hell. We could've got \$3-a-yard synthetic stuff and chopped it off, and it would've looked the same. And another thing I was trying to tell them, is we don't want black. Mountain gorillas are black, but, black doesn't photograph. Especially with the low-key lighting they were talking about using, it would turn out solid black. . . . Just see blackness walking around, you know. . . . So they ended up spraying it with Streaks 'N' Tips, a colored hair spray. Every day, they'd spray it in some suit, brown, and it got more and more brown, more and more gunked-up.

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saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we gotta use arm extensions—at least so the proportions are better." In fact, I forgot to mention it, but the first day I went in to talk to these guys, I was with a friend of mine, Jon Berg. Jon had made a pair of arm extensions for a suit that he'd wanted to build for himself, where each finger moved individually, the wrist moved, and, it would lock in the proper position for knuckle-walking. And we thought we were really going to knock 'em out with this thing, saying, "Now look at this . . . we can make a gorilla that looks real and walks real." So we showed them this thing, and they didn't give a damn—because they wanted it to be a missing-link. They said if it had human arms and hands, it would be better anyway. But I kept saying arm extensions, arm extensions, all through this thing, and they kept saying no, no, no, so I didn't even put arm extensions on my test suit. Forget it, I said . . . that will make my suit that I'm going to build for myself that much more unique. I said, if they're not going to let me build Kong the way I want to, then fine—I'll build my gorilla suit the way I want to, and that way it'll make my suit look better. But, in fact, after they saw my test suit—and especially when we went with this bigger, bulkier, padded-up gorilla—with the human length arms, it looked like a teddy bear. So they decided we'll have to use extensions. And, that's funny, that's one thing that cracked me up, and also kind of teed me off, about one of Carlo's comments about my suit, later on . . . which was, the arms were too short! I said to myself, "Aahhh, you stupid jerks, I've been telling you it was too short

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CU: So, after seeing this film, all of you people had tentatively agreed upon the need for a flexible undersuit and arm extensions. Were either of these features used in the suit, as it appears in the film? It doesn't look that way.

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RB: No, that wasn't his, it was mine. In the beginning when I came in to talk with them, I suggested that although the face of Kong could be given movement by a mechanism, it wouldn't give all the expressions we'd need, and that I would sculpt some different heads. I thought we'd have five different masks, with the sculpted expressions helping out the mechanism. I suggested the different masks, because the kind of mechanism I had in mind was to have been self-contained, and couldn't be all that elaborate—and so it could only go just so far in giving us the effects we needed. I didn't expect the mechanisms to be as good as they eventually were . . . you know, at that time . . . but everybody agreed it was the right thing to do. So, after I had made the mold, and I knew how I wanted to cast the foam latex, very thin, using a core—then I just made a fiberglass casting of the core of the mask, for Carlo to fit the mechanisms to. As I said, I wanted the mechanisms to be self-contained. I could do a lot of the expressions myself, by working the mechanics with my jaw and even with my tongue. (Note: Stuart Freeborn designed and built a series of masks for the film 2001, which used self-contained mechanisms for achieving facial expression and movement, and which were operated by the persons wearing the masks. The results were very effective. It was possibly the first time something like this had been done. Rick Baker probably had reference to a similar approach for King Kong.) Carlo said that he couldn't really do it that way. He'd done things like that before, he said, and he thought that by using remote-controlled cables, it would come out best. He was going with what he was accustomed to. So, after he got the fiberglass copy of the core, he just went to it, and started playing around with it, and came up with the mechanisms we used in the end.

CU: These are the ones illustrated in the AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER article?

RB: Yes.

CU: Now, the feature of the large gorilla eyes, which turned out to be so expressive . . . was that your idea? And did you suggest this feature at the beginning, also?

RB: Yeah, that was mine, too . . . and it was something I had in mind way before the beginning of KONG. I mean, both of the ideas were something I wanted to have on my own gorilla suit: a couple different heads that portrayed expressions better, and also, the eyes. Now, I never really invested the money for eyes like that, on my own, because they're pretty expensive. But I thought this was the one chance to really do it. A gorilla doesn't have eyes like a man—though they're similar—and when you look at a gorilla suit and you see these human eyes staring back at you, it just ruins the illusion. We actually made a compromise between a human eye and a gorilla eye, because I was afraid that if we went all the way to a gorilla eye, we'd lose a lot of the expression. And we needed to use the eyes, a lot. I figured that if the area around my eye was dark, and the whole physical eye was dark, it would really cut down on what the eyes could do.

CU: So, you used contact lenses to achieve the proper effect?

RB: Yes. It's called a scleral contact lens. Scleral lenses were really the original type of contact lens. At the time, they figured you would need a lens that covered the whole surface of your eye, and which would fit under your eyelids, just to hold it on. Anyway, I used a clear, cosmetic scleral lens, which has no optical correction, and the pupil and iris were just painted on the lens itself, and laminated. This work was done for me by a specialist.

CU: Were they uncomfortable?

RB: At first, I could hardly wear them for more than a few minutes at a time! That's how uncomfortable. But by asking around, I finally was told that my eyes were aching inside these things because the lens was blocking off oxygen to my eyes . . . so, I had holes put into the lenses, and it made an immediate difference. I could then wear them for hours without a break.

CU: Rick, when was it actually decided that you would be King Kong, as well as help make the suit?

RB: Well, when I first talked to them, I said, "I can build a gorilla suit for you, and I can play a gorilla. I've studied gorillas for quite an amount of time, and I know how it is; I've also worn suits, so I know I can do it." They said, "Well, we're looking for somebody like Marcel Marceau"—you know, a mime. Only Mario, the art director, and Federico, were saying, but, he has to be black, you know, because they'd have a certain feel for it . . . and they were trying to say that they were structurally much better. Maybe if we can get, like, a guy who's like Marcel Marceau, who's black, and a muscle builder! So they got into a whole big



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racial thing, there. They hired a guy named Hampton Fancher. Hampton was a white actor who came around, and he'd heard about these interviews for these gorilla things—and Hampton had taught acting—and he says, "Hey, I can do all kinds of animals—you know, I played a rabbit before, on stage," and so on. So he goes up to them and says, "I can do some gorilla things, I think"—and he did some stuff. Hampton actually was pretty good. I thought it was a little on the cartoony side, but, he went to the zoo and looked at a gorilla for a little while, you know, and he picked up on a few things that were pretty good. So they hired Hampton, at the same salary I was working at. This was during the same time I was building the test suit, I think. They hired him to help pick out a black actor to play King Kong. So they interviewed hundreds of black people, and several white people. This was around November 1975. And Hampton kept saying none of these guys could do it, and he finally picked out this guy named Albert Popwell—and Popwell is the guy who ended up wearing Carlo's test suit. Anyway, these guys were kind of on a free ride. They got paid the same money I did, and I was working seven-day weeks. They were going to the zoo, and they'd get free trips to San Diego, all expenses paid, to study the gorillas. I'm sure they were just out there playing, but I can't blame them, I'd probably have done the same thing, you know? Just taken advantage of it. Well, like I say, Hampton was pretty good, and Popwell was catching on, but they didn't quite have it. The fact is that, doing it without the suit . . . you see, a lot of what Hampton did was as if he were playing a gorilla without a suit—you know, a lot of weird things he did with his face, little subtle things, that wouldn't show in the suit. And also the fact that he's an actor, and not accustomed to wearing anything like this, convinced me that he would have the suit on for half an hour, and would decide that he was crazy to do the picture, and would want to get out of it, and may become difficult.

CU: You mean, his ego suffering from the fact that neither his body nor face showed?

RB: Yeah, and just the physical strain that it took to wear the suit. Anyway, they said, "Well, we've got these two guys, and we think we'll use you, too." And I said, "Well, that's not going to work, because they're six-foot-something, and I'm five-foot-nine, and we're going to have to build three different suits and different sets and everything!" Or have them do separate sequences—which was not the whole idea. Anyway, once that whole thing happened with Carlo's suit, and everything else, they decided they didn't actually like their performances as much. Guillermin liked the way I played Kong, better. And not only that, but they weren't my size, and I think if they had been, they probably would have kept them on, and said, "Well, you get together with Rick, and do what Rick does." So then it came to the point of finding somebody else, because I said I need a relief. They said, "Well, well, we'll see." So Federico went through his notes and found one guy who was close to my size, named Bill Shephard. And Bill came out, and I talked to him for awhile, and put him in my test suit, and I said to Grossberg, yeah, hire this guy, he'll work. And eventually what happened was that Guillermin could see the difference in the look of Kong when Bill played it, and when I played it, and he didn't want Bill to do it—in the same scene as I did, especially. The whole purpose was that when I got tired and was ready to pass out, then Bill would hop in and finish the sequence. Well, Guillermin just wouldn't hear of it. He says, "I want Rick, and Rick knows how to do it the way I want to do it." It's not that I was superior to Bill, but only that he liked what I did, and he could see the difference, and so he said it wouldn't work out. So, Bill spent most of the time sitting in his dressing room being bored, and I really felt sorry for him in a way, because he was . . . bored! It's disturbing. I mean, he was collecting a check, but when you sit there all day, and not do anything, and not really serve much of a purpose, it gets to be hard on your ego, and the fact that he could be out doing something somewhere else that would be more creative . . .

CU: How would you say it worked out in the finished film, percentage-wise, as to what you did and what Bill did?

RB: Oh, Bill's got probably 10% of the stuff.

CU: What, specifically?

RB: Bill re-did some stuff that I did on breaking through the wall. I broke down six gates with the second unit director, and John Guillermin wanted some additional angles that the second unit director didn't get. And they were also talking about using Shephard to fall into the pit, because they didn't want me to break my arm, or something, right at the beginning of the picture.

CU: Oh, was that shot made toward the beginning of production?

RB: Pretty much toward the beginning. So, what happened is, when I was doing the sequence in the super tanker where Kong is on his way to New York, they had the second unit director and Bill Shephard do a couple of pickup shots at the wall, and then Bill did the actual fall into the pit. And the next thing Bill did was they had him rigged with a harness with some wires, so he could do some shots where Kong was going to jump from one Trade Center building to the other. And wherever any wires had to be used, they used Bill for that. And then Bill ended up doing most of the snake fight. Again, he did that second unit, while I was working first unit with John Guillermin. I did the first shot of the snake fight, with Guillermin, where Kong sees the snake, and he grabs it around the neck; then the rest of the fight is Bill, up 'till

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CU: What kind of stuff was that?

RB: Well, the first shot we did is not in the movie . . . I don't know why. It looked nice enough when I saw it in the first cut, but it's probably that they didn't want Kong to be too violent. But it was . . . well, Kong's walking down the street, and there's a building that's on fire, and he smashes his fist through the window, and reaches around grabbing for somebody in there. And it's like right over the fire—there's a window underneath that's on fire—and the suit was not flameproof, when I did this stuff, and I was saying, "Wait a minute!"

CU: In fact, the suit was highly flammable, wasn't it?

RB: Yes, it was, especially with all that hair spray on it. So, I reach in there, and then you hear a car

skidding around the corner, and people screaming, and I reach down and pick up this two-foot long reproduction of a Cadillac, made out of lead. I pick it up, and throw it into this building, and it explodes into flames. And I'm standing, like two feet away from it! And then I walk right past the burning car and the building, out of the shot. The suit wasn't flameproof, but they did have a guy standing by with a hose, in case it caught on fire . . . but they didn't seem that concerned about it! So I did it the first time, and I could just feel the heat from that explosion right through that suit, and I said, "Wow! This is hot stuff!" When that went off, I jumped back a little, and John said, "Let's do it again, but this time, don't jump back like that." And I said, "Man, I didn't even know I jumped back!" It was reflex. Joe Day, the special effects guy that rigged it, says, "Well, I knew you were going to feel that, but I didn't want to tell you, because I thought I'd scare you!" The next time I thought I knew what to expect, but they put even more in it . . . John said the explosion wasn't big enough. So they had the front of the car filled up with rubber cement and benzene, and then they had the back filled up with it also, this time—so it was really a big explosion. So, we did that. Then there was a sequence where I was up to my neck in water. It was freezing cold water, for one. But it was in one of the old stages—it used to be an old process stage—and they had a part of the floor that was removable, with a twenty-foot tank. They filled it all the way up, then they built a little submerged platform for me to walk on. And I was concerned, because the suit just filled up with water instantly, and then it weighed like a ton. When I was in the water itself, it was fine, but I was awkward, and I was afraid I was going to slip



RIGHT: Kong's "stand-ins," the two hydraulically controlled hands which were used so extensively in the Paramount remake.



racial thing, there. They hired a guy named Hampton Fancher. Hampton was a white actor who came around, and he'd heard about these things for 10 years. He'd been in the business, he'd taught acting—and he says, "I play, I can do all kinds of acting—you know, I played a rabbit before. I was a rabbit. I was a rabbit. I was a rabbit and he did some stuff. Hampton actually thinks I'm pretty good. I thought it was a little cartoony side, but, he went to the zoo and looked at a gorilla for a little while, and he picked up on a few things that are pretty good. So they hired Hampton, at the same salary I was getting. This was 1975. They hired him to build the test suit, I think. They hired him to help pick out a black actor to play King Kong. So they interviewed hundreds of black actors and several white people. This was around November 1975. And Hampton kept saying none of these guys could do it and he had a name in mind. The guy named Albert Powell—and Powell is the guy who ended up wearing Carlo's test suit. Anyway, these guys were kind of on a free ride. They got paid the same money I did, and I was working under a contract. They were going to take me and they'd get free trips to San Diego, all expenses paid, to study the gorillas. I'm sure they were just doing this because I can't bust them. I probably have done the same thing, you know? Just taken advantage of it. Well, like I say, these guys were kind of on a free ride. They were catching on, but they didn't quite have it. The fact is that, going it without the suit... you know a lot of what Hampton did was as if he was playing a gorilla without a suit—you know, a lot of weird things he did with the gorilla. And he was playing a gorilla without the suit. And also the fact that he's an actor, and not accustomed to wearing anything like this, convinced me that he would have the suit on for half an hour, and would decide that he was crazy to do the picture, and would want to get out of it, and may become difficult."

CU: You mean, his ego suffering from the fact that neither his body nor his physical strain?

RB: Yeah, and just the physical strain that it took to wear the suit. Anyway, they said, "well, we've got these two guys, and we think we'll use you, too." And I said, "well, that's not picked out because they're six-foot-something, and I'm five-foot-nine, and we're going to have to build three different suits at different set sizes, and I don't have them do separate sequences—which was not the whole idea. Anyway, once that was the whole idea with the suit, I said, "well, if they decided they didn't actually like their performance as John Guillermin, everything else I played Kong, better. And not only that, but they weren't my size, and I think if they had been, they probably would have kept them on, and said, "well, you get together with Rick, and do what Rick does." So then it came to the point of finding somebody else, because I said I need a replacement, and I said, "well, well, well see." So Federico went through his notes and found one guy who was kind of like me, named Bill Shephard, and Bill came out, and I talked to him for awhile, and put him in my test suit, and I said to Grossberg, yeah, use this guy, he'll work. And I said, "well, that happened was that Guillermin could see the difference in the two, and he didn't want Bill to do it—in the same scene as I did, especially. The whole picture was that he didn't want me to pass out, then Bill would hop in and finish the sequence. Well, Guillermin just wouldn't hear of it, he'd want me, and I said, "well, I need a replacement. If the way I want to do it." It's not that I was superior to Bill, but only that he liked what I did, and he could see the difference, and so he said I wouldn't work out. So, Bill spent most of the time sitting in his dressing room being bored, and I was really feel sorry for him in a way, because he was... bored! It's disturbing, I mean, he was collecting a check, but when you all the time, you're doing anything, and not really see much of a purpose, it gets to be hard on your ego, and the fact that he could be out doing something somewhere else that would be more creative..."

CU: How would you say it worked out in the finished film, percentage-wise, as to what you did and what Bill did?

RB: Oh, Bill's got probably 10% of the stuff.

CU: What, specifically?

RB: Bill re-did some stuff that I did on breaking through the wall. I broke down six gates with the second unit director, and John Guillermin wanted some additional angles that the second unit director didn't get. And they were also talking about having Shephard to fall into the pit, because they didn't want me to break my arm, or something, right at the beginning of the picture.

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CU: In fact, the suit was highly flammable, wasn't it?

RB: Yes, it was especially with all that hair spray on it. So, I really in there, and then you hear a cry

sliding around the corner, and people screaming, and I reach down and pick up this two-foot-long reproduction of a Cadillac, made out of lead. I pick it up, and throw into this building, and it explodes into flames. And I'm standing like two feet away from it! And then I walk right back the burning car and the building, out of the shot. The suit wasn't flameproof, but they did have a guy standing by with a hose, in case it caught on fire... but they didn't seem that concerned about it! So I did it the first time, and I could just feel the heat from that explosion right through that suit, and I said, "Wow! This is hot stuff!" When that "w.t. off," I jumped back a little, and John said, "Let's do it again, but this time, don't jump back like that." And I said, "Man, I didn't even know I jumped back!" It was reflex. Joe Day, the special effects guy that rigged it, says, "Well, I knew you were going to feel that, but I didn't want to tell you, because I thought 'I'd scare you.'" The next time I thought I knew what to expect, but they put even more in it... John said the explosion wasn't big enough. So they had the front of the car filled up with rubber cement and benzene, and then they had the back filled up with it also, this time—so it was really a big explosion. So, we did that. Then there was a sequence where I was up to my neck in water. It was freezing cold water, for one. But it was in one of the odd stages—it used to be an old process stage—and they had a part of the floor that was removable, with a twenty-foot tank. They filled it all the way up, then they built a little submerged platform for me to walk on. And I was concerned, because the suit just filled up with water instantly, and then it weighed like a ton. When I was in the water itself, it was fine, but I was awkward, and I was afraid—I was going to slip



RIGHT: Kong's "stand-ins," the two hydraulically controlled hands which were used so extensively in the Paramount remake.



over the edge and sink to the bottom of the tank. They had a guy with a scuba tank there to help me keep my feet on the path, and they said, "If you fall over and you sink, he can stick the hose in your mouth." I said, "Yeah, but I've got a gorilla face on! He can't get it into my mouth!" They said, "Well . . . you won't fall over." But the hard part was, they wanted me to walk out of the water. I had to walk up this ramp, and step out onto the shore. And the suit! It was easily 500 pounds, and I'm sure it was more, and I could barely stand . . . my knees were just giving out. I would get out of the water and just literally collapse. Then they threw me back in and I'd do the thing again! I was just exhausted. Then, I had to go break up this power station. It's in the film, but very briefly. There was a lot of stuff there that they cut out, of me picking up these big power station things, and throwing them into other things, and explosions going off. There was a shot where I walked right between these two burning things—at least I was wet that time, and wasn't that afraid of the fire. But John Guillermin laughed, because he said he'd never seen Kong move so fast! Well, I wasn't about to pause. There was some danger involved in shots where you wouldn't think so, like when the helicopters are after Kong. We did some of the stuff out at Los Alamitos Air Force base, and there was a forty-foot tall platform—I had to go up there, then stand on top of a table, on top of that platform (and it was pretty close to the edge of the platform) with the gorilla suit on. Then these real helicopters are coming at me, fifty miles per hour—shooting blanks! And the blanks are ejecting shells this big, also coming fifty mph. I was the only safe one, as far as the shells were concerned, because I had this suit on. But the poor camera people were getting hit all over the place by these shells! But the thing was, I was standing up there with no support, with nothing tying me down, and the wind from those helicopters was incredible! I mean, I could not stand up, when they went directly overhead—I'd just fall to my knees. I was saying, "Shit! I'm going to blow off the edge of this damned thing!" Plus, they wanted me to put the suit on downstairs, and then climb forty feet up a ladder, with the suit on! I said, there's no way I'm gonna do it! So, it was freezing cold, and I'm half-naked up there, getting dressed and undressed. But, then there's another thing about the helicopter sequence. Just about the last stuff we did was the helicopter stuff, and they had a miniature of one of the towers of the World Trade Center, just the top few floors—and they had these remote-controlled helicopters that were on wires. They had nothing but problems with these helicopters breaking down. This was on Stage 26 at MGM, where they have a split level. A normal stage is like sixty feet high, and this one went up another twenty feet in one spot. The helicopters were hung from up there. The first time that we actually started shooting with the helicopters, they're flying around, and the next thing I know, something goes and BAM!, it hits me, and it just about knocks me . . .

CU: Hit you in the head?

RB: No, it missed my head, but it hit my arm, and I thought my arm was just broken in half. It was really painful, and I was bent over, grabbing my arm and moaning, "Oh, hell! What happened?" And I stayed down, because I didn't know what was going to come after that. And the thing that bothered me was nobody was that concerned about it, you know? Then I looked, and saw that a two-by-four had fallen from something like seventy feet above me, and fortunately, it hit my shoulder, where most of the padding was, and grazed my arm. If it had hit my arm directly, I'm sure it would have snapped it. If it had hit me on the head, where there was only about an inch of fuzz—if it would have hit me on the head, man, then that would have been the end of me . . . and then Bill Shephard would have taken over! (laughs) But I got a good bruise on my arm. The only other dangerous thing was the elevated train sequence, and that wasn't too bad. There was a scene where I picked the train up over my head and threw it, and it was on a wire to support most of the weight; and another one was, I ripped the top off one train, and threw it behind me, and then when it went behind me, a BIG explosion went off. That, again, was like two feet away from me. Each time, they got more and more lax about precautions. The first fire thing we did, they had a guy with a fire hose, and another guy with an extinguisher. This time, I said, "Well, where's the guy with the fire hose?" "Oh, well, we've got a hose on the set" . . . you know, that kind of an answer! But fortunately, nothing like that ever happened.

CU: From the standpoint of acting, were you happy with your own performance, or with the things you were told to do?

RB: No. I was unhappy most of the time on this film! (laughs) I got a reputation with the people in the front office of being a real pain in the ass. It's because I was constantly going up there and trying to have things done the way I thought was right, and would be best for the picture. They usually don't like to hear that kind of stuff. Dino's got a lot of guys who are yes-men, and when the production was really screwed up, Italians were battling the Americans. Glen Robinson—who was the guy who actually built the mechanical King Kong, and redesigned it from Carlo's designs to make it practical—he was working in his shop, and Carlo was in our shop, where we were working on the suit. They were making the big hands. And I would look at the hands, which were made to the size Carlo said—and then I went and looked at the mechanics—and it looked like they were two different sizes! And I said, "Wait a minute, guys—we're working on the same movie, here—why don't we get together?" And everybody was



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battling the Italian contingent and the Americans just working against each other. So I'd keep going up to the front office and say, "Listen—things aren't working out here, Dino," or whoever I was talking to. And I said, "This isn't working out at all." And they'd say, "Is that true, Carlo?" And he'd say, "No, no! Sure!" And I'd say, "Kong's got to walk like a gorilla! He's got to be a gorilla! He's got to walk on all fours." They'd say, "No, no, no." John Guillermin, who I think is really a fine person—John and I never really had a chance to get to know each other in any real depth, but, just from what I could see of John, I think he's a really nice man, and a very talented man, and a really realistic man. John was stuck in a really bad position, and I really felt sorry for him. To have to do this picture . . . especially under the conditions that he had to do it in, like, the whole picture had to be finished within a period of a year . . . and he had to put up with the same BS I had to put up with, like this Italian-American war that was going on . . . and he had to take a lot of stuff from Dino, too—he couldn't actually do it the way he wanted to, because Dino had certain ideas, too. I mean, John was really in a rough position, and it was . . . I mean, I talk about my physical wear and tear, but John Guillermin lost a hell of a lot more weight than I did, and he really looked ragged by the end of the production. I mean, the way he looked when I first met him and the way he looked at the end of the production, is like when you see a guy like Nixon or Johnson when they start the Presidency, and when they finish. I mean, it was that kind of a thing. John, who was a thin man to begin with, lost an incredible amount of weight.

CU: So you weren't inclined to argue with him about the performance, then?

RB: No. I feel it's the same way when I do

makeup. I figure I know more about makeup than the director does. I know what I think looks right, and what I think other people think looks right . . . and I will tell the director, this is the way I think it should be. But the director is still the director, and the director is the guy who's boss, as far as I'm concerned, on the film. If the director wants something different than that, then I'll have to give in to it. But in this case, I didn't give in too easily! (laughs) But, Guillermin and I never got into an out-and-out fight. I kept saying, "I think Kong should walk like a gorilla." John would say, "Well . . ." He didn't think it would work. He didn't think it would look right to have him walk like a gorilla. But he didn't really know what he wanted, and we just kept searching. But, we never really arrived at anything we were both happy with. Especially me—I think he was happier with it than I was. I still wanted to walk on all fours most of the time.

CU: Did you ever demonstrate for him? I know you can do a remarkable imitation of a gorilla walk . . .

RB: Oh, yeah. In fact, one of the first times we all met together was right here, where we're sitting now, and I put on an old suit that I had, with arm extensions. My wife Elaine helped me get into the suit in the bedroom, and I came out running on all fours from the hallway there, and leaped over this couch here, and just came right at 'em—and like to scared the shit out of Mario, the art director guy, who I'd never before even seen make an expression. You know, he's kind of a cold, expressionless guy . . . smokes a little cigarette that has about three inches of ashes hanging off it. So, they had seen me walk like a gorilla, and they liked it . . . but they didn't think it was right for Kong. So, we ended up simply searching. Some days I

(Interview continued page after next)

over the edge and sink to the bottom of the tank. They had a guy with a scuba tank there to help me swim my feet on the path, and they said, "If you fall over and you sink, he can stick the hose in your mouth." I said, "Yeah, but I've got a gorilla face on. He can't get it into my mouth!" They said, "Well . . . you won't fall over." But the hard part was, they wanted me to walk out of the water, had to walk up this ramp, and step out onto the shore. And the suit! It was easily 500 pounds, and I'm sure it was more, and I could barely stand . . . my knees were just giving out, would get out of the water and just literally collapse. Then they threw me back in and I'd do this thing again and again. Then, I had to go to the power station, this power station. It's in the film, but very briefly, there was a lot of stuff there, of me picking up these big power station things, and throwing them into other things, and explosions going off. There was a big where we were right between these two burning things—at least I was wet that time, and wasn't that afraid of the fire. John Guillermin just laughed, because he said he'd never seen Kong move so fast! Well, I wasn't about to pause. There was some danger involved in shots where you wouldn't think so, like when the helicopters are after Kong. We did some of the stuff out at Los Angeles Air Force Base and there was a forty-foot tall platform had to go up there, then stand on top of a table, on top of that platform (and it was pretty close to the edge of the platform) with the gorilla suit on. Then these real helicopters are coming at me, fifty miles per hour shooting bullets! And the bullets are supposed to be shells this big, also coming fifty mph. I was the only safe one, as far as the shells were concerned, because I had this suit on. But the good news was people were getting hit all over the place by these shells! But the thing was, I was standing up there with no support, with nothing tying me down, and the wind from those helicopters was incredible! I mean, I could not stand up, would fall over, and directly over-head—I'd just fall to my knees. I was saying, "Shit! I'm going to blow off the edge of this damned thing!" Plus, they were cutting over the suit on down stairs, and then climb forty feet up a ladder, with the suit on! I said, there's no way you gorilla do it! So, it was freezing the cold, and on half-naked so there, getting dressed and undressed. But, then there's another thing about the helicopter sequence—just about the last shot we did was the helicopter stuff, and they had a miniature of one of the towers of the World Trade Center, just the top few floors—and they had these remote-controlled helicopters that were on wires. They had nothing but problems with these helicopters breaking down. This was on Stage 26 at MGM, where they have a split level. A normal stage is like sixty feet high and it's one went up another twenty feet in one spot. The helicopters were hung from up there. The first time that we actually started shooting with the helicopters, they fell all around, and the next thing I know, something goes and BAM!, it hits on me, and it just about knocks me.

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CU: From the standpoint of acting, were you more into your own performance, or with the things you were told to do?

RB: No, I was anxious most of the time on this film. (Laughs) I got a reputation with the people in the front office of being a real pain in the ass. It's because I was not a real kind of stuff. Dino's got to have things done the way I thought was right, and would be best for the picture. They usually said, "No, you're not a real kind of stuff. Dino's got a lot of guys who are yes-men, and when the production was really screwed-up, Italians were in the back. And I remember that I was the only guy who actually built the mechanical King Kong, and I had to be a part of it. I had to make it make it practical—he was working in his shop, and Carlo was in our shop, where we were working on the mechanical. They had to make it. I had to look at the Carlo said—and then I went and looked at the mechanical—and I looked at it. I had to make it a different sized! And I said, "Wait a minute, guys—we're working on the same movie, here—why don't we get together?" And everybody was



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CU: So you weren't inclined to argue with him about the performance, then?

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makeup. I figure I know more about makeup than the director does. I know what I think looks right, and what I think other people think looks right . . . and I will tell the director, this is the way I think it should be. But the director is still the director, and the director is the guy who's boss, as far as I'm concerned, on the film. If the director wants something different than that, then I'll have to give in to it. But in this case, I didn't give in too easily! (Laughs) But, Guillermin and I never got into an out-and-out fight. I kept saying, "I think Kong should walk like a gorilla." John would say, "Well . . ." He didn't think it would work. He didn't think it would look right to have him walk like a gorilla. But he didn't really know what he wanted, and we just kept searching. But, we never really argued at anything we were both happy with. Especially me—I think he was happier with it than I was. I still wanted to walk on all fours most of the time.

CU: Did you ever demonstrate for him I know you can do a remarkable imitation of a gorilla walk . . .

RB: Oh, yeah. In fact, one of the first times we all met together was right here, where we're sitting now, and I put on an old suit that I had, with some extensions. My wife Elaine helped me get into the suit in the bedroom, and I came out running on all fours from the hallway there, and leaped over a sofa couch here, and just came right at 'em—and like to scare the shit out of Mario, the art director guy, who was sitting there. I mean, I've seen him so I expressed. You know, he's kind of a cold, expressionless guy . . . throws a little cigarette that has about three inches of ash hanging off it. So they had seen me walk like a gorilla, and they fixed it . . . but they didn't think it was right. So Kong . . . So we ended up simply searching. Some days I

(Interview continued page after next)

(Rick Baker: continued from previous page)

would walk more manlike than others, and John would just make suggestions. We would do the shot, and he'd say, "No, Rick, you were swinging your arms around too much. Do it with less arm movement." Or he'd say, "Well, bend over more—hunch your shoulders up more—it's too manlike." Or he'd say, "It's too apelike, make it more manlike." He didn't want it to look like a man mimicking an ape . . . so, it was difficult.

CU: How did the special effects men rig you to achieve the bullet-piercing effect, at the end?

RB: That was simple. I was wondering about that, also. My main concern was that they were going to use squibs—not that I was afraid of the squibs going off, but it was just going to tear holes in the chest. Because they don't shoot movies in continuity, that would mean you'd have to make up a lot of spare chests—and each chest had to be hand-ventilated. Every hair had to be poked in by hand. The initial chest took a guy close to a month to do. So, I thought it would really be a shame to blast it up for one shot. What they ended up doing, was, they had guns that were controlled by air pressure, and they had little pellets that were shot out of the guns that were made of a wax material—very thin, brittle wax—and filled with false blood. They'd aim these guns at me, and then when I'd hit my mark, they'd fire them off. When the pellets hit the chest, they'd break, the blood would come out, and the little pieces of shattered pellet would fly and almost resemble squibs going off.

CU: The final question is, what did you think of the completed film, as a whole?

RB: Well, I have to admit that it's better than I thought it was going to be. I mean, I had a negative attitude about the movie, because I was a fan of the original film so much, and because I'm a fan of stop-motion—and, you know, all my friends are animators. I just didn't think they had the right attitude about the picture. But when I first saw the first cut, I thought, "Hey, this is okay, at least from what I thought it was going to be." The second time I saw the film, I was more realistic about it, and kind of disappointed with a lot of the stuff. I don't feel that it's a great picture, and I especially don't feel it looks like a 24-million dollar film, or 25-million, whatever it is now. Or that it's really worth that much. It is kind of a rip-off . . .



kind of an exploitation thing. But, there are some parts I like.

CU: If there is a sequel, do you think you'll be participating?

RB: They would have to make a really outrageous deal for me to work for them again, and I mean it would have to be an incredible amount of money before I would work for Dino again . . . on anything.

(Rick Baker: continued from previous page)

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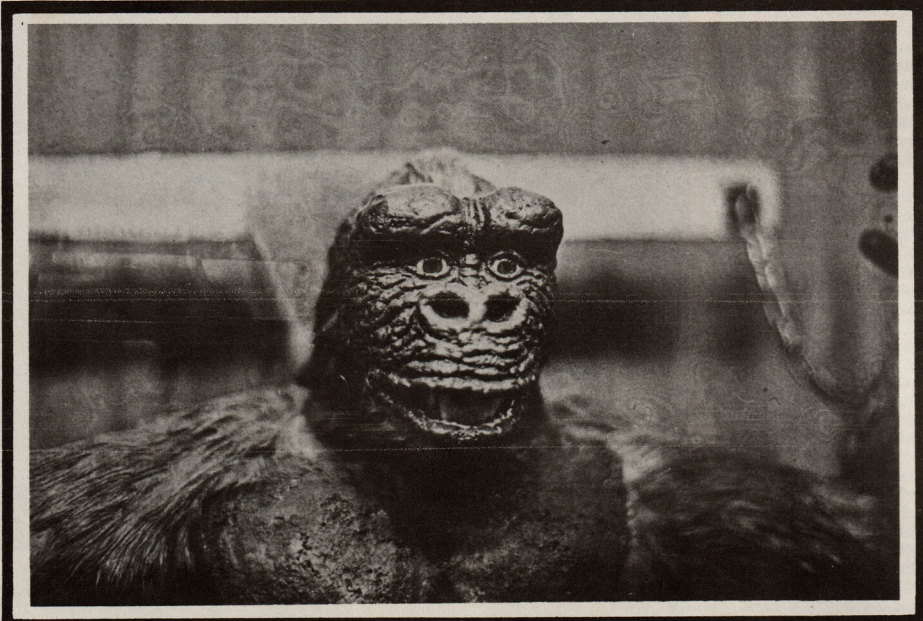


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# CLOSEUP

## IN MEMORIUM



# THE 8TH WONDER OF THE WORLD



a  
conversation  
with

**RICK BAKER**  
**KING KONG**  
**Uncrowned**

conducted by  
**CRAIG REARDON**





...the gorilla's face, showing its teeth and a slight smile. The gorilla is holding a baby gorilla in its arms. The background is dark and indistinct.

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...the gorilla's face, showing its teeth and a slight smile. The gorilla is holding a baby gorilla in its arms. The background is dark and indistinct.



...the gorilla's face, showing its mouth slightly open and teeth. The gorilla has dark, shaggy fur.

...the gorilla's face, showing its mouth slightly open and teeth. The gorilla has dark, shaggy fur.

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...the gorilla's face, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The gorilla's fur is dark and textured, and its eyes are prominent. The background is dark and indistinct.

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### THE GORILLA'S FACE

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