

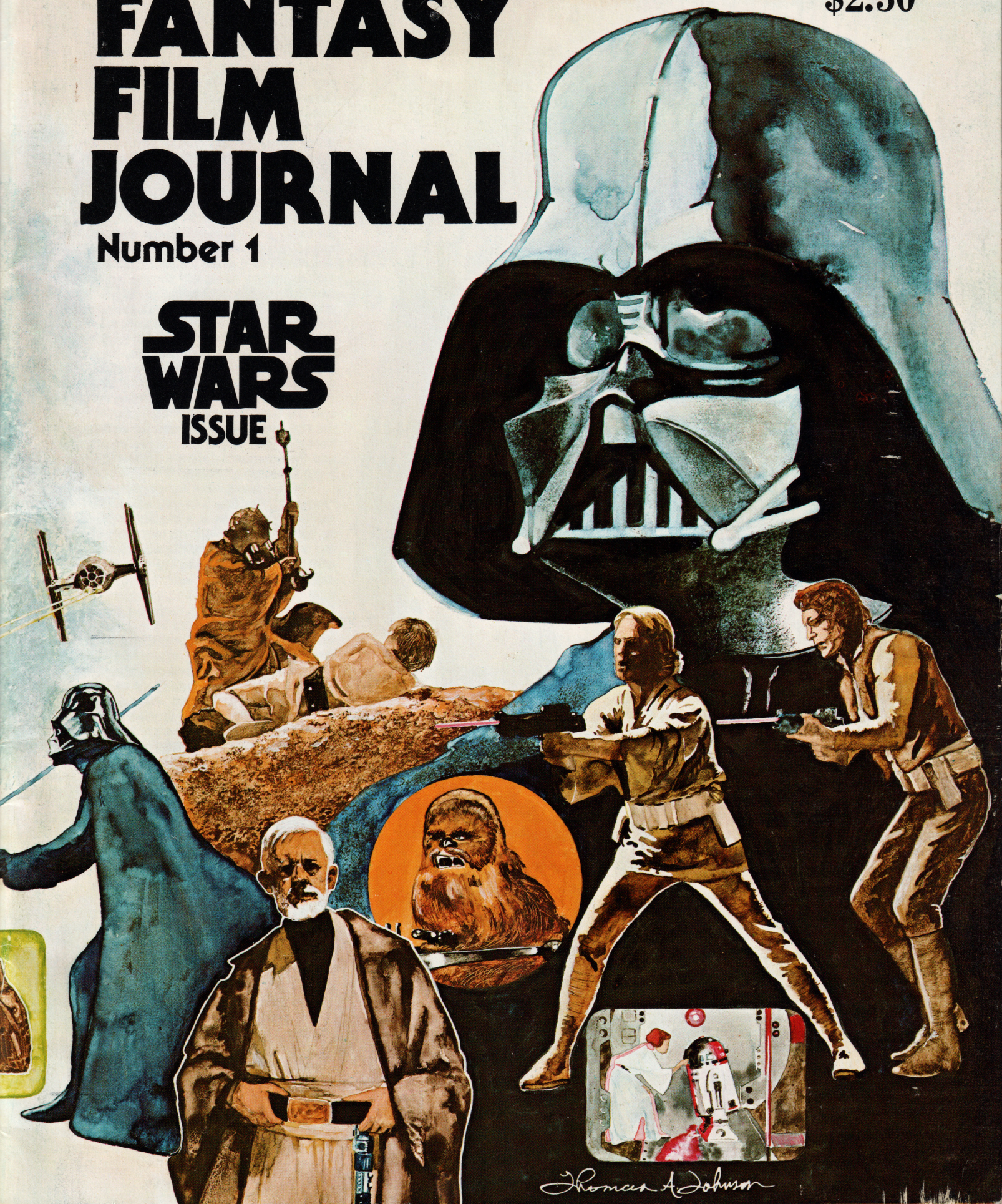
EXCLUSIVE STAR WARS INTERVIEW: JOHN DYKSTRA

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**STAR
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ISSUE



Thomas A. Johnson



King Kong

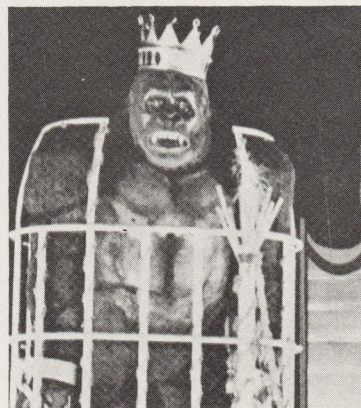
King Kong

KING KONG - A Paramount release. In Panavision and Metrocolor. Produced by Dino DeLaurentiis. Directed by John Guillermin. Screenplay by Lorenzo Semple Jr. Executive producers, Federico DeLaurentiis and Christian Ferry. Director of photography, Richard H. Kline, ASC. In charge of production, Jack Grossberg. Music composed and conducted by John Barry. Film editor, Ralph Winters, ACE. Production designed by Mario Chiari and Dale Hennessy. Production manager, Terry Carr. Unit managers, Brian Frankish (Hawaii), George Goodman (New York). Art directors, David Constable, Archie J. Bacon, Bob Gundlach. Set designers, Dianne Wager, Carleton Reynolds, William Cruz. Illustrators, Mentor Huebner, David Negron. Miniature design, Aldo Puccini. King Kong technical advisors, Rick Baker, William Shephard. King Kong creators: designer, Carlo Rambaldi. Special effects, Glen Robinson. Hair design, Michaeldino. Makeup, John Truwe. Molding, Don Chandler. Supervisor of photographic effects, Frank Van Der Veer. Running time: 134 mins. (MPAA rating: PG)

Dwan.....Jessica Lange
 Prescott.....Jeff Bridges
 Wilson.....Charles Grodin
 Captain Ross.....John Randolph
 Bagley.....Rene Auberjonois
 Carnahan.....Ed Lauter
 Timmons.....Mario Gallo
 Garcia.....Jorge Moreno
 Perko.....Jack O'Halloran
 Boan.....Julius Harris
 New York D.A.....John Agar

by T.A. Johnson

One would think that everything has been said about Dino's KONG, and perhaps one is right. Perhaps one should just allow the poor thing to lie buried in peace. However, we feel that with almost a year after its release, it might be time to try and objectively take a look at "the most exciting original motion picture of all time". No, we don't mean STAR WARS, but KING KONG 76, the bicentennial ape. KONG received so much bad press at the time of its release, especially from fandom, that it would be only fair with the advantage of hindsight to take another look. The trouble is, we find our opinion has changed very little since December - Dino's KONG was a lousy, extremely poor remake of the original. Standing on its own, without reference to the original, it fares a little better, but not really very much. The whole atmosphere surrounding the film so reaked of crass commercialism that it is hard to view the film without contempt, especially if the viewer has love and respect for the original KONG and its creators. The entire advertising cam-



TOP: Natives take the drugged Dwan to their god, Kong. **TOP MIDDLE:** The giant doors are opened that had held Kong back for centuries. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Kong reaches for his strange new toy. **BOTTOM:** The ridiculous DeLaurentiis robot in the New York stadium.

The most
 exciting original
 motion picture event
 of all time.



King Kong

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Dino De Laurentiis presents
 a John Guillermin Film
"King Kong"

starring Jeff Bridges Charles Grodin

Introducing Jessica Lange

Screenplay by Lorenzo Semple, Jr.

Produced by Dino De Laurentiis Directed by John Guillermin

Music Composed and Conducted by John Barry

Panavision® in Color A Paramount Release

Read "The Creation of Dino De Laurentiis' KING KONG" from Pocket Books

PG PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED
SOME MATERIAL MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR PRE-TEENAGERS

Original sound track album
 and tapes on Reprise Records.



There still is only one King 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

King Kong

FOR AN ENLARGEMENT OF THIS ADVERTISEMENT PLEASE WRITE TO: KING KONG, DEPT. SE, PARAMOUNT PICTURES, ONE GULF + WESTERN PLAZA, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10023



paign brings a sneer and utter contempt for the minds that try to substitute "hype" for quality and respect for their subject.

At about the same time both Paramount and Universal announced plans to film a remake of KING KONG. However, having already begun their production, Paramount and DeLaurentiis leveled a lawsuit at Universal and sped up their efforts so that their film could be released within a year. DeLaurentiis set about to do in a year the impossible, considering the scope of his production. He planned to build a full-length robot of Kong and supplement that with a man in a suit. He was told by those in the industry and fandom that it would never work satisfactorily. One of the most important elements in making such a film work is the credibility established by the special effects; without effects that work well, the film will fail, or at least suffer. Another necessary element is the attitude towards the subject taken by the director and actors. If the people involved do not take their story seriously, do not believe it, then neither will their audience. KONG succeeded in neither area.

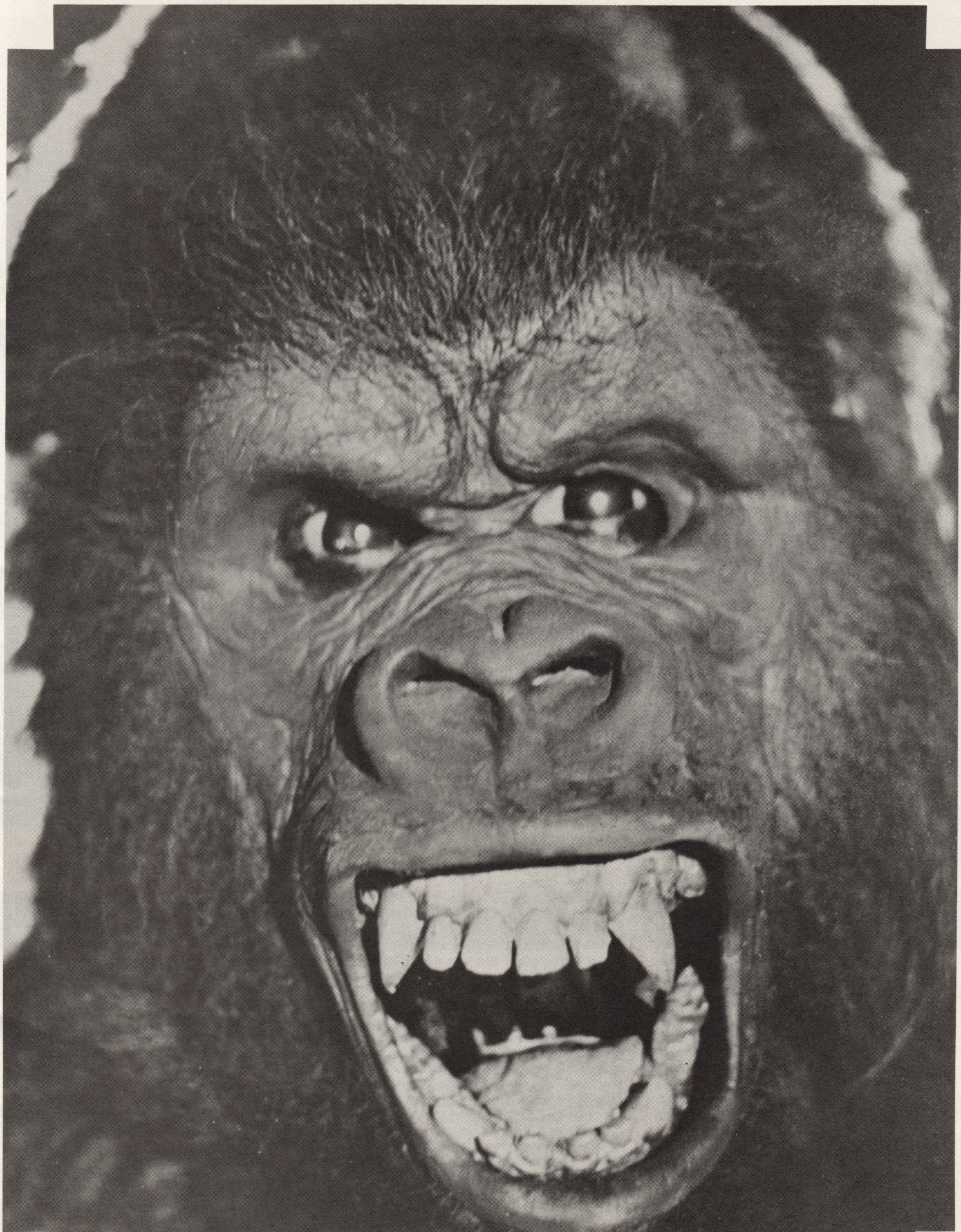
Things did work in the new KONG, and by and large it was an entertaining film, but it lacked everything the original had that made it a legend: charm, innocence, fantasy, mystery. A timelessness not captured by Dino Kong. A fantasy film such as KONG must always keep one foot firmly planted in reality. KONG 76 never knew where to place its feet.

The story was logically updated, giving the characters and action a seventies look. It is unfortunate that the "seventies look" also represents in many cases a warped fascination with violence, and a loss of innocence that the original KONG had and is so often necessary in fantasy. There was no mystery or illusion of fantasy in the new KONG and the few scenes that touched those elements were often killed by unnecessarily rough language or the intrusion of today's world.

The script, by Lorenzo Semple Jr. of BATMAN fame, was camp, the characters unlikeable and on the whole unbelievable. The hero, Jeff Bridges, was too square-jawed and college-reactionary, which has become the biggest cliché since James Cagney and the Dead-End Kids. The heroine acted (and I use the term loosely) as though she stepped out of a porno film; although she photographed beautifully, she was no actress. The villain, Charles Grodin, appeared to have been left over from scripter Semple's BATMAN days. I hadn't seen a bad guy twirl his moustache in years.

Less screen time was devoted to dinosaurs and other creatures on the island, and more to the relationship between Dwan and Kong. Her dialogue was natural enough for a seventies audience, but was embarrassingly ridiculous. We were thankful Kong had no dialogue. In the original, the ape and his lady had little time alone; each moment was filled with the terrors and dangers of that land that time forgot. It was little wonder Fay Wray screamed more than she spoke; she never had the chance to discover that 'ol Kong was just a nice guy wanting to fool

TOP: The original ad promotion announcing the film, inviting readers to write for a free poster which was merely a rough sketch by artist John Berkey. **BOTTOM:** Kong inspects Dwan. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Rick Baker as King Kong.





TOP: A John Berkey poster idea used in other promotions. The actual movie snake was far less fearful.

around. However, KONG 76 is more relaxed and casual, with no more danger to Dwan than a bad case of halitosis or a snake made by Sid and Marty Kroft that Kong rather gruesomely split asunder. Director Guillermin created a very tight bond between Dwan, Kong and the audience, milking every ounce of sympathy, so that at Kong's death the reaction would be more tragic.

Although the film reportedly cost \$25,000,000, the look and feel of the effects was a cheap one. The miniatures were very poor, rivaling the look of the most mediocre Japanese Godzilla film. Looking like cardboard, the miniature island created for Rick Baker's walking ape suit lacked reality, depth and weight; actually, the HO train layouts at the local hobby shop were more realistic. None of the studio island sets ever matched up with actual live Hawaiian location shots; the matching of these shots was so incredibly bad it was beyond belief, and this film won an Academy Award for its effects! but then, the Academy has been

known as a farce for quite some time.

We have previously, and briefly, mentioned Rick Baker's efforts as the man in Dino's ape suit, but few actually know how much of the giant ape was a man in suit or the \$2,000,000 disaster. We would estimate 99% was Rick Baker. The PR people for KONG pulled a massive snow job on the public by informing them that they were viewing on the screen the giant Kong robot, the Hollywood marvel of the seventies. In fact, the robot never worked satisfactorily, breaking down repeatedly and looking ridiculous when it did. Seen for only brief seconds as Kong broke free from his bonds in the New York stadium, the robot served no real purpose other than as publicity. Rick Baker must indeed be commended for his efforts, although through no fault of his, the man in a suit trick did not work; Baker neither moved or walked like an ape.

The true misfortune concerning the Kong remake is that producers will have little interest in doing a sincere remake, now

that DeLaurentiis' version has dulled the public. There is little chance that we shall see an animated Kong in color and on the wide screen. If only the Universal-Paramount case had gone to court and Universal won, perhaps KONG 76 would have been different. Universal had planned to retain the 1933 period, use Jim Danforth in animating Kong, and recording Kong's roar in the relatively new Universal gimmick, Sensurround. However, Universal chose to hold their version, collect 11% of Paramount's take for doing so, and perhaps resume filming if the public's response warranted another remake, but a Universal version is highly unlikely now. A shame.

It is sad when such a beloved property as King Kong is placed into the hands of a man like DeLaurentiis, without the integrity or artistic insight to realize the true obligation and potential he has for turning out a modern classic of fantasy.