

FILM REVIEW

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BRITAIN'S TOP-SELLING M

BRITAIN'S TOP-SELLING MOVIE MAGAZINE



IN THIS ISSUE

PULL-OUT

KING KONG KALENDAR

PREVIEW OF MAJOR FILMS FOR 1977



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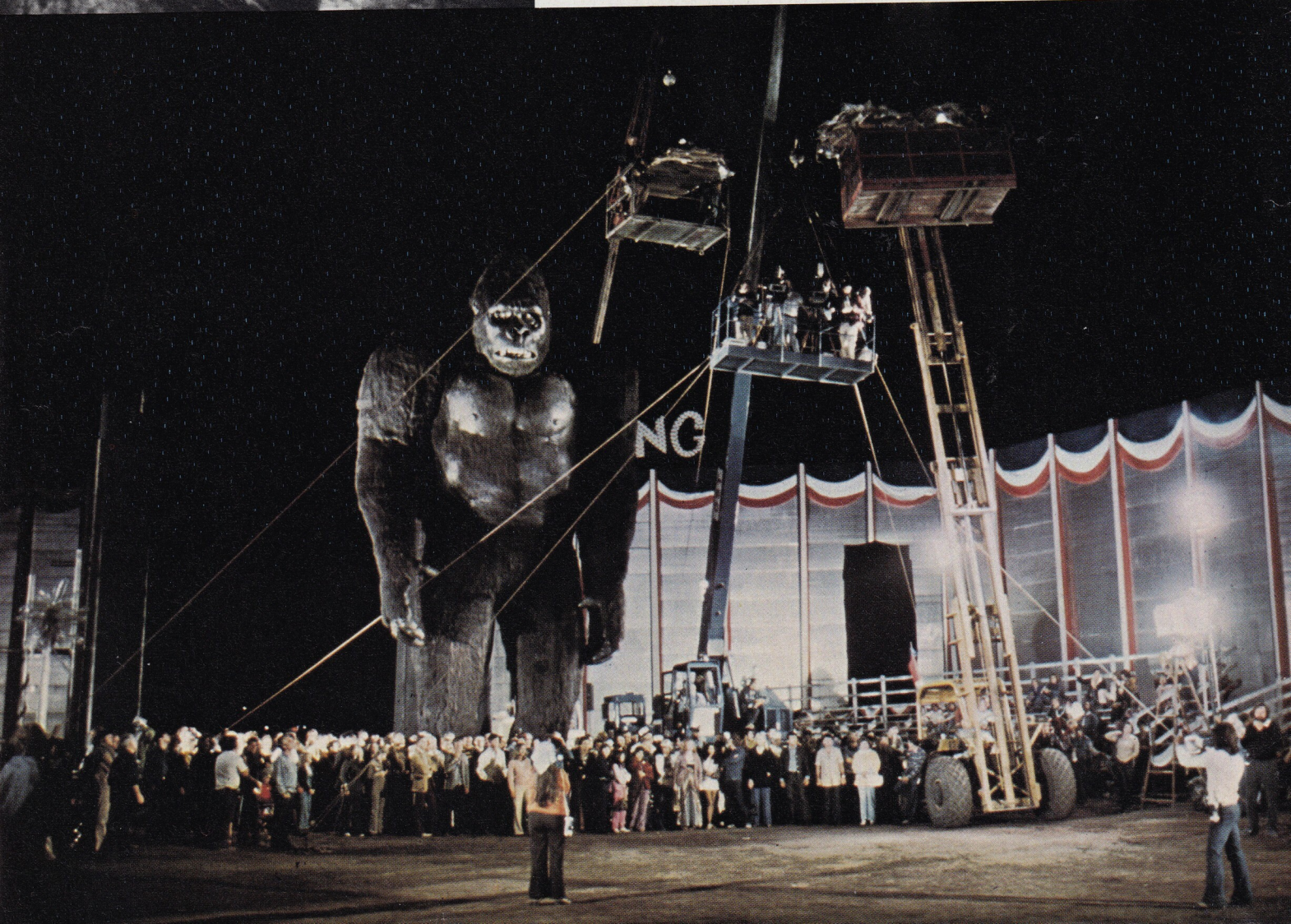
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KONG

Below: The unveiling of Kong to an astounded public — one of the highlights of the new film. The actual shooting of this sequence was attended by our Hollywood correspondent Barbra Paskin who describes it in this special Kong report.



GIVING THE KING HIS NEW LEASE OF LIFE

BARBRA
PASKIN
REPORTING
FROM
HOLLYWOOD

It is almost midnight on a cold evening on an MGM studio backlot. The air is filled with excitement and tense anticipation. Hundreds of people sit in stands around a huge arena, facing a colossal petrol pump, sporting the word "Petrox". Soon, very soon, Hollywood will witness the unveiling of its newest superstar, Kong. *King Kong*.

High in the air, seated on a cranelike jib, director John Guillermin shouts out terse instructions in his inimitable English voice. It's not the only one to be heard. All around me are gathered other news correspondents and photographers from several different countries, many of them English. All there to capture the historic moment in print or on film. Not long to go. The excitement begins to warm the chill air. Soon it is hot. Very hot. Guillermin raises the loudspeaker to his mouth. It gets hotter. Almost time. "Okay everyone," he shouts, "let's go! Action!"

Slowly the petrol pump covering rises in the air to display a huge cage. Screams fill the arena as a massive monster is revealed, standing chained to the bars of the cage. More screams. Opposite the cage, some hundred feet away, is a high platform on which stands a solitary girl, swathed in a stunning silver lurex gown. The monster moves his eyes and then his head. Sees the girl and lets out a chilling roar. It's his lady-love, Dwan. Slowly his fury mounts. He wants to go to her. More screams fill the air as slowly, very slowly, the monster moves his fingers and then his wrists, breaks his chains and smashes the sides of the cage. He stands there, holding twisted bars in his hand. Kong is free. And about to go on the rampage.

Pencils and cameras almost forgotten, the reporters stare awestruck at the terrifying-looking animal. Awareness returns and hundreds of flashbulbs begin firing and pencils scribble madly. "Cut!" shouts Guillermin. Sweat pours down his face. "We'll print it!" he instructs his first assistant. And it's the beginning of the end for King Kong.

One of the most ambitious projects Hollywood has ever seen, the epic film has taken just over eight months to complete in a hectic shooting schedule that saw the *King Kong* company move from the Hollywood studios, where it utilised seven sound stages, to Hawaii and New York and back again.

Though the storyline is different from its classic 1933 original, it's still essentially the tale of Beauty and the Beast. Charles Grodin plays an executive of the Petrox oil company, who leads an exploration team into the South Pacific to search for an underwater oil shelf. Instead, he discovers Kong and, realising the monster's enormous commercial value (yes, even greater than oil), makes off with him to New York. Accompanying him on the expedition is a young Princeton professor (Jeff Bridges) who becomes Kong's rival for the hand of the lovely Dwan (Jessica Lange), whom they find adrift in the Pacific Ocean.

Dwan is subjected to all sorts of adventures. Island natives capture her and hand her over as an offering to Kong who, after snatching her from the sacrificial altar, falls in love with her. Poor Kong! He did what

he did for love, but after fighting a gigantic snake to save Dwan and crashing through a huge wall to reach her, he is captured by the crew of the Petrox (the ship on which the expedition team make their voyage) and transported to New York.

But once there, while being revealed to the public for the first time, he breaks loose and goes on the rampage after Dwan. Ignoring the Empire State Building (setting for the earlier film), Kong ends up on top of the World Trade Centre building (one of the tallest in the world), from which he falls to his death.

The search for the girl to play Dwan was long and arduous and many of Hollywood's loveliest actresses were considered. But after an impressive screen test, the role went to New York fashion model, Jessica Lange, and although this marks her screen debut, both director and producer agree that she's coming on strong like a real pro. Still, it hasn't been all glitter and fun and Jessica's the first to admit that playing opposite Kong has been quite difficult. After all, he's hardly the average leading man!

Filming *King Kong* has been a daunting task to say the least, a task which began in the summer of '75 when producer Dino de Laurentiis gathered together his band of filmmakers to prepare his remake of the famous classic. With several months of pre-production work planned, actual filming was not scheduled to begin until April, but lightning struck when another company, Universal, said they too would shoot a Kong movie. With the spanner well and truly gumming up the works, de Laurentiis had to face a major decision and early in January he rushed his film into production, months before originally planned. Filming began without even the mere essentials: sets weren't built and Kong himself was a massive mound of metal waiting to be assembled, but the producer took a gamble and began principal photography with his stars in Hawaii, while back in Hollywood frenzied work began on the sets and the monster named Kong.

Hundreds of intricate illustrations – storyboards – were drawn up in the art department so that every scene became minutely designed and familiar to all those involved in the making of the film. On adjoining sound stages, carpenters erected scaffolding from which cameras recorded from various angles the enormous size of Kong; Seamstresses worked on costumes for hundreds of extras; plasterers made moulds that took the shape of the realistic rocks that the humans have to crawl over to escape from the rampaging Kong; and skilled cameramen experimented for hours with the latest cinematic techniques to bring Kong brilliantly to the screen.

Kong himself is a monumental compliment to special effects designers Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson, the latter a two-time Oscar winner for his work on *Earthquake* and *The Hindenburg*. The original intention was to have an aircraft company build Kong from the design sheets, but when it became necessary to rush the film into production, it

continued over

KONG continued

was decided to build the monster on a Hollywood backlot. Weighing 6½ tons, Kong is a basically aluminium skeleton covered with thousands of horses' hairs imported from Argentina. He stands 40 ft high and 20 ft wide with an arm span of 20 ft. Over 3000 ft of hydraulic hose and 4500 ft of electrical wiring make up his inner organs and, fully functional, he's the first such creature to be conceived by the Hollywood movie factories. His arms and hands move in 16 different movements, he can roll his eyes and turn his head and in a single stride can cover 15 ft, all of which is electronically controlled by a highly complex hydraulic valve system.

While marvelling at the mechanical wizardry of her love-struck pursuer, Jessica Lange, who has to spend much of the film literally in the palm of Kong's hand, had obvious fears about Kong becoming over-amorous and crushing her in his hand. And, though reassured that safety devices had been installed in Kong's fingers to prevent them from completely closing around her, it took several trials before the actress was totally convinced that she was indeed in a safe and friendly hand.

As work was completed on Kong, construction workers concentrated on "The Wall", the huge barrier that keeps Kong out of the native village, and as their labours progressed, it became clear that this would be the most impressive set in the entire film. Indeed, standing almost fifty feet high and 510 feet long, it's one of the biggest sets to be built in Hollywood in the last thirty years. Two long, winding ramps run to the top of the Wall and join on to a huge parapet from where 300 island natives, clad only in straw loincloths, offer Dwan to Kong.

King Kong, says Dino de Laurentiis, has been the most difficult film he has ever made, in a career that has turned out such films as *War And Peace*, *The Bible*, *Serpico* and *Death Wish* among many others. It's not hard to see why. The logistics of filming such a mammoth production have been overwhelming and the shooting schedule alone has been cruel. But he's done it. Completed a film – at a cost of \$22 m – which undoubtedly will be one of the biggest films of 1977.

"It was necessary to spend all that money," says de Laurentiis, "and very necessary. The film has to be of finer quality than the first *Kong*. And I think it will be unique for today's audiences.

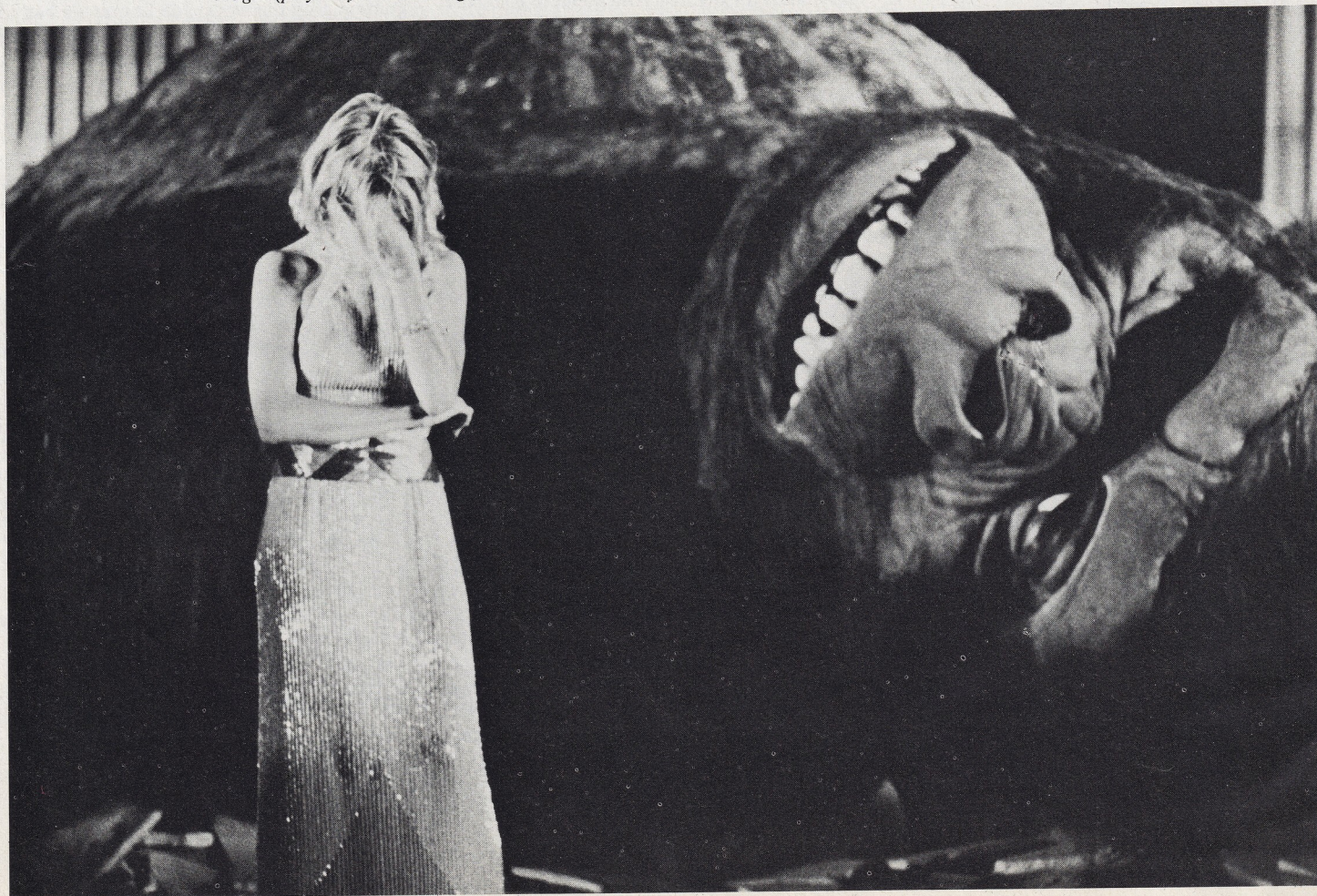
"There are too many films that are just about sex and violence. This is a film for everyone. A special movie for all audiences."

No-one is doubting that. And, although comparisons with the earlier *Kong* are inevitable, this new version is bound to attract a sizeable majority of the world's movie-going public.

In the past few years, the film medium seems to have become over-run by realistic disaster films, admittedly only because the genre has proven so popular. But the film industry has always moved in cycles – one trend, every few years, giving way to another. *King Kong* could well mark the return to one of those trends – the larger-than-life adventure story. After all, we don't constantly have to be shocked to be entertained ... do we?

MORE
PICTURES AND STORIES OF
KONG
NEXT MONTH

The death of Kong at the foot of the World Trade Centre skyscraper in New York – and unspeakable relief for the girl (played by Jessica Lange) whom he's put to some terrifying experiences.



King Kong



1977

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King Kong

1977

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December

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