

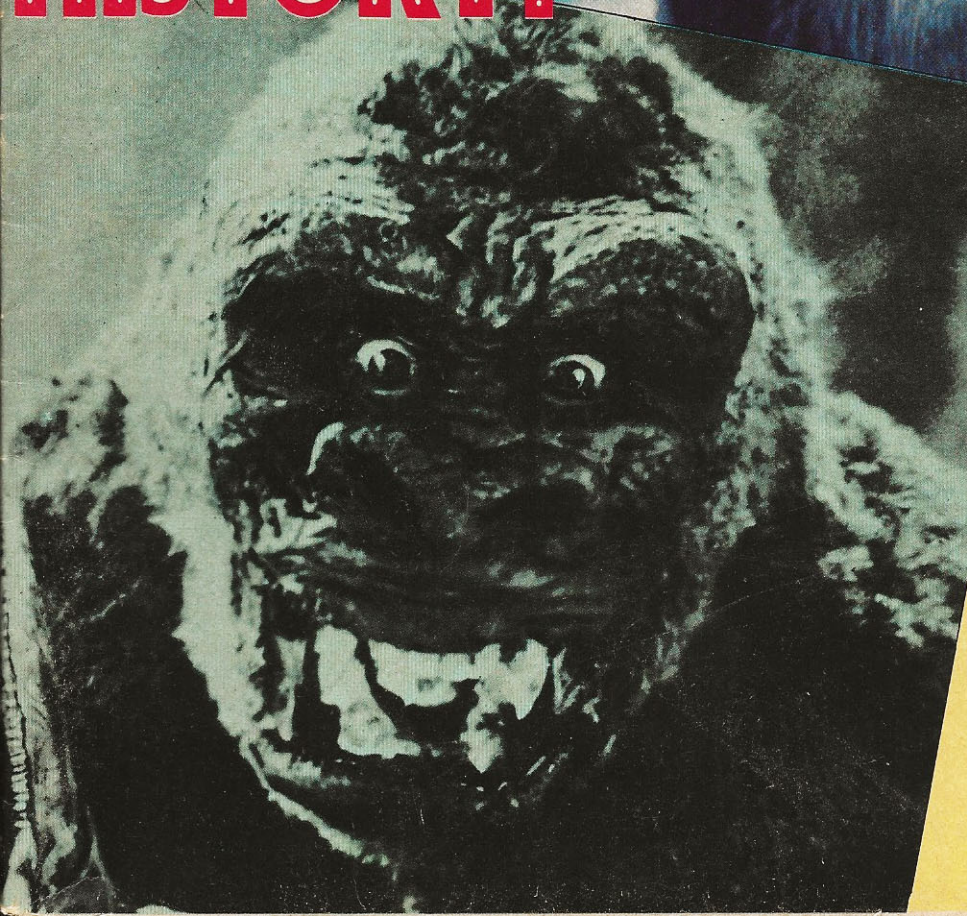
KING KONG

\$1.00

AMAZING
KING KONG
POSTER INSIDE!

THE MONSTER
THAT MADE
HISTORY!

SPECIAL
REPORT PACKED
WITH
FAX AND
PIX



THE MIGHTY
KONG
LIVES!



WHEN Film Producer Merian C. Cooper informed Fay Wray that in her next picture she was to star opposite 'the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood', she was naturally expecting someone like Clark Gable . . . What she got was a 50ft animated gorilla answering to the name of KING KONG!

by Vic Lime

The basic idea for KING KONG had originally been conceived by Merian C. Cooper himself sometime in 1929. But it was not until the final weeks of 1931, after David O. Selznick — the newly-appointed RKO Production chief — had assigned him to study Willis O'Brien's incredible new animation process, that Cooper decided it would be technically possible to go ahead with the movie. Ernest B. Schoedsack — a former Keystone Cops cameraman, who had forged his alliance with Cooper during the silent era — was brought in to assist with the project. By this time, Schoedsack was a fairly experienced director. Indeed he had just finished working in that capacity on Cooper's production of *"The Hounds of Zaroff"*, in which Fay Wray had taken a leading role.

Their first job was to try and mould the existing storyline into some kind of reasonable working order. With this in mind, Selznick signed up world-famous mystery-writer Edgar Wallace for an eight-week contract — he was to collaborate with Cooper on the plot. As things turned out, however, Wallace was destined to contribute virtually nothing to the finished



Above: Robert Armstrong and Fay Wray — stranded in the jungle.

product . . . He arrived in California on December 5th 1931, and within three short months he was dead of pneumonia. Yet despite this apparent lack of involvement, the film eventually went out on general release widely advertised as 'Edgar Wallace's Last Story', which remains something of a popular misconception even today. Just to put the record straight, the actual screenplay for KING KONG

KING KONG THE ORIGINAL

was written jointly by James Creelman and Ruth Rose (otherwise known as Mrs. Merian C. Cooper!).

ARTY APE

But with little doubt, the most outstanding figure in the entire production set-up was to be Willis O'Brien, the highly gifted animator. O'Brien's remarkable pioneering work in the field of model animation made the film possible in the first place, but was perhaps also the key to its astounding success at the box-office. He, and he alone, gave KING KONG the gift of life!

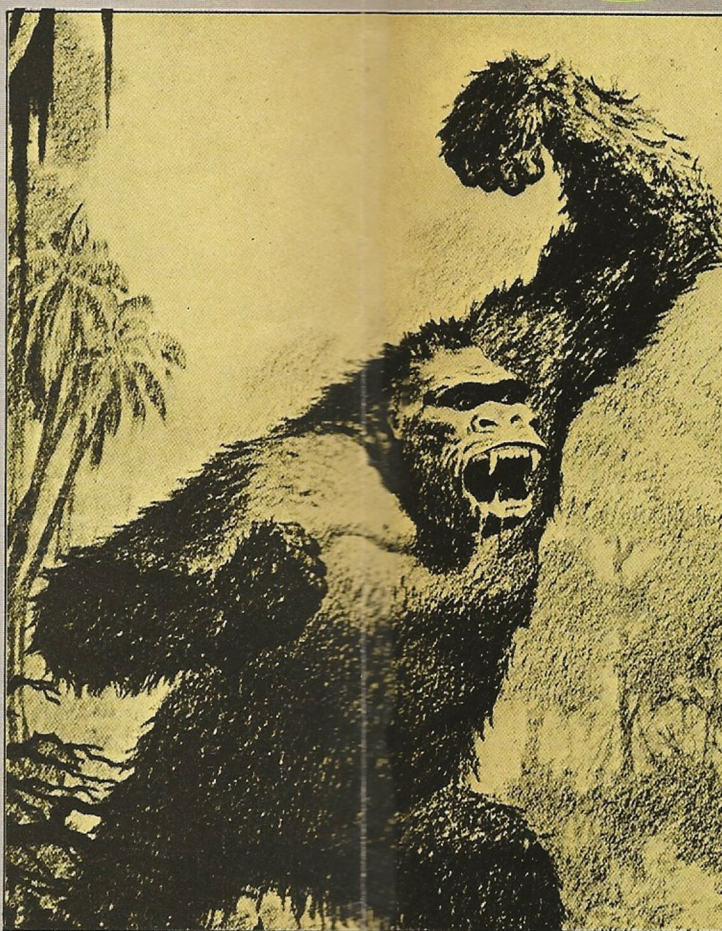
In previous attempts by film-makers to create prehistoric nightmare beasts for the Depression's thrill-hungry public, ambition was usually thwarted by simple lack of technology: ex-wrestlers dressed up in gorilla costumes, giant birds were suspended from wires, and numerous exotic lizards were decorated with a variety of sinister fins, fangs and horns. It was all very primitive: nobody was fooled for a minute . . .

O'Brien's technique had been usefully employed in the 1925 silent version of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic adventure story *"The Lost World"*. At that early stage there was still plenty of room for improvement, but O'Brien was quite convinced that he was working along the right lines; so that by the time he joined forces with Cooper and Schoedsack, his talents had reached a totally unprecedented level of sophistication. He was fully prepared to meet the ultimate artistic challenge of KING KONG!

Certainly the task that lay ahead of him was nothing short of staggering, and it would take every ounce of skill, patience, and sheer single-minded devotion that he could possibly muster. Over 20 different scale models of Kong were painstakingly constructed with the assistance of sculptor Marcel Delgado; the largest of which was nearly 30ft high!

The animation process was achieved by means of stop-frame photography: this meant that a separate photograph had to be taken every time the models were adjusted by a mere sixteenth of an inch. O'Brien commented at the time: 'We worked 10 hours a day — the fight between Kong and the pterodactyl took seven weeks to film!'

The overall budget for the picture eventually ran up to an amazing 650,000 dollars, not a great deal of money by today's lofty standards, but in the early 1930's it was a very considerable sum indeed; and Selznick was constantly having to squeeze finance out of less important RKO



Above: A Byron Crabbe drawing from the original "King Kong" storyboard

productions in order to keep the project afloat.

Finally, on February 24th 1933, KING KONG was submitted for copyright registration; exactly one year had elapsed since Edgar Wallace's untimely death. The film opened to packed houses at the Radio City Music Hall and the Roxy in New York (the two largest movie theatres in the world!). Some 10,000 paying customers flocked to catch any one of the ten daily performances . . . Between them, Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack and Willis O'Brien had created one of the major triumphs of motion picture history: they had created the legend of KING KONG!

ANTHROPOIDAL ANTICS

There can be few people, even in this day and age, who are unfamiliar with the basic storyline; the film still manages to communicate its timeless message to each passing generation, thanks mainly to its regular screenings on the world-wide TV networks.

KING KONG's three central characters are portrayed by Fay Wray, Robert Armstrong and Bruce Cabot. Miss Wray takes the part of Ann

Darrow, an out-of-work movie-extra who is discovered on the streets of New York by Documentary Film Producer cum explorer Carl Denham (Robert Armstrong). Denham is able to offer her some interesting location work . . . He has chartered a steamer for the East Indies, but his final destination is the mysterious 'Skull Island' said to lie somewhere south-west of Sumatra.

The voyage takes them a little over six weeks to complete, during which time Ann manages to form something of a romantic attachment with Driscoll (Bruce Cabot) the ship's first mate. Upon arrival at 'Skull Island', they find the natives engaged in some kind of strange tribal festivity, and whilst Denham is busy filming their frantic pagan rituals, Ann is silently abducted from the ship by several fearsome-looking tribesmen. They subsequently chain her between two enormous pillars set on the perimeter of the village, then beat a swift retreat to a position of comparative safety. They know that the great Kong will soon come to claim his bride . . .

It is almost fifty minutes into the picture before Kong makes his first, unforgettable, screen appearance: Cinema audiences of the time could scarcely believe their eyes as the giant ape smashed his way through the tropical undergrowth, delicately gathered up the helpless Miss Darrow into the palm of his massive hand, and transported her to his primeval lair in the depths of the mist-shrouded jungle. She is eventually rescued from the beast's jealous clutches, thanks to the heroic efforts of the rugged Driscoll. But not before she's survived a number of spine-chilling encounters with several of the island's more grotesque prehistoric predators!

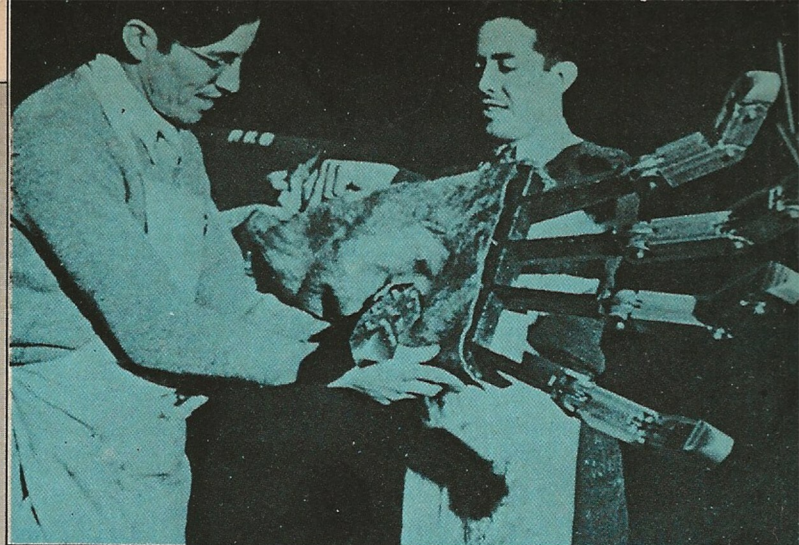
Angry and frustrated, Kong storms back to the village in search of his lost plaything, very nearly levelling it — and its inhabitants — to the ground, before he is at last overpowered by a barrage of gas-grenades. The unconscious ape is tightly secured, then shipped straight back to New York where he is put on exhibition as 'The Eighth Wonder of the World'.

Carl Denham, with his sights firmly set on maximum exploitation, unveils his heavily restrained prodigy for the first time; in front of a packed auditorium — 'He was a King and a God in the world he knew, but he comes to civilisation merely a captive, a show to gratify your curiosity.'

A buzz of apprehension ripples through the stunned audience: newspaper cameramen clamour for the best angles and a thousand flashbulbs explode simultaneously in a blinding flash of light. Kong's primitive temperament is unable to cope with all the excitement and confusion; his instincts tell him that he is in great danger, and therefore he must somehow break loose . . . Having regained his senses, the giant ape starts to exert every last ounce of his prodigious muscle-power, splintering the heavy iron chains as if they were matchsticks. Within minutes the jungle-born juggernaut is once again smashing his relentless way through the jungle: only this time it's the concrete jungle of New York City!

Ann Darrow was understandably reluctant to join Denham and Driscoll at the auditorium, after all, she had seen more than enough of Kong during her traumatic adventures on 'Skull Island', and was quite happy to remain behind in the relative safety of her hotel room. The last thing she expected was a repeat performance! Suddenly there was a frighteningly familiar face at the window, closely followed by the probing of a huge hairy paw. The mighty Kong had come to reclaim his bride!

The picture reaches its climax as Kong scales the New York skyline for that final never-to-be-forgotten sequence atop the 102-storey Empire State Building. Though he is now



Above: "O, the finger bone's connected to the wrist bone, and the wrist bone..."

more than a thousand feet above the city streets, still there is no sanctuary for the bewildered beast; army biplanes pepper him with non-stop machine-gun fire and slowly, but inevitably, he begins to weaken . . .

There is a mood of immense pathos as Kong, having realised that he is mortally wounded, keeps hold of the unconscious Ann until the last possible second, eventually setting her down on a narrow ledge moments before plunging to his doom. The ubiquitous Driscoll is once again on hand to complete the rescue operation. Meanwhile back on the ground, a policeman informs Denham that the planes have succeeded in their mission. 'Oh no,' he replies, 'It wasn't the airplanes — it was beauty killed the beast.'

This makes a neat enough epitaph, but perhaps the most significant feature of KING KONG was its interesting element of role reversal. For the first time in motion pictures, the beast was portrayed as hero and mankind as the monster: a theme which was to be re-explored in literally dozens of future productions.

The movie's incredible world-wide success absolutely demanded that there should be a sequel, and indeed the trio of Cooper, Schoedsack and O'Brien were already working on it with all possible haste. The result was entitled *"Son of Kong"*, and it was in the cinemas by Christmas 1933, a mere nine months after the release of the original! *"Son of Kong"* was

essentially an out-and-out comedy, in fact Kong Junior turned out to be so much of a clown that the movie had to be subtitled 'A Serio-Comic Phantasy'. No attempt had been made by the producer to try and overshadow its predecessor, the picture was simply a cheaply constructed exploitation vehicle.

O'Brien was to fall out with Cooper and Schoedsack over the rather slapdash nature of this latter project, though he returned to work with them again in 1949 on yet another sequel (*"Mighty Joe Young"*) for which he somewhat ironically picked up his only Academy Award. O'Brien went on developing the ever-expanding possibilities of model animation right up until his death in 1962; but he will always be most widely remembered for his contributions to the original KING KONG.

And so the legend continues . . . In more recent times we have seen movies such as *"King Kong versus Godzilla"* (1962), *"King Kong Escapes"* (1967) — both of which were made in Japan — and *"Konga"*, a 1961 British production, which was very nearly released under the mind-boggling title — *"I Was A Teenage Gorilla!"* More than 40 years have now elapsed since its conception, yet the giant ape from Skull Island remains as much a part of our horror-movie heritage as either *"Frankenstein"* or *"Dracula"*.

Make no mistake:

KING KONG is here to stay!



Above: The classic animation sequence — Willis O'Brien's masterpiece

THE INCREDIBLE RETURN OF KING KONG



EVERY SO OFTEN, the motion picture industry unleashes a movie of such staggering commercial potentiality that it seems almost predestined to condemn all existing box-office records to a fate of instant oblivion. In 1975, the feat was accomplished by a film called *"The Towering Inferno"*; this year it was *"Jaws"*; but in 1977, even *"Jaws"* looks like getting swallowed up by the return to the screen of, perhaps, the greatest movie-monster of them all — the immortal *KING KONG*!

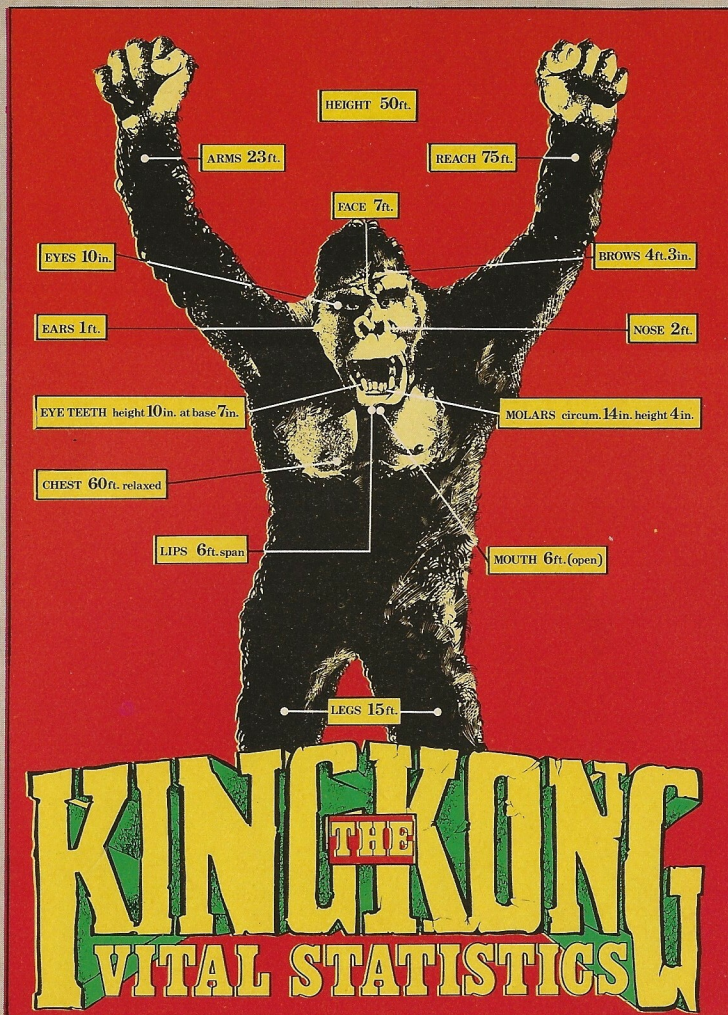


by
Vic Lime

KING KONG (1976) is basically an updated remake of its 1933 predecessor, retaining most of the classic ingredients of the original, but with the added dimension of some distinctly tongue-in-cheek-type humour! The man at the helm of this amazing new venture is Italian movie-mogul Dino De Laurentiis, a truly outstanding showman who must easily rank among the world's most powerful and influential film producers. Laurentiis lacks neither confidence nor experience, having headed his own production company since the age of 22, and in latter years have become universally renowned for engineering a string of lavish multi-million-dollar spectacles, including *"Waterloo"*, *"The Bible"*, and *"War and Peace"* (Italian version). At the present time, he is probably the most prolific independent film-maker in Hollywood. So, with these sort of credentials to fall back on, even the mammoth task of revitalising KING KONG was unlikely to pose any great problem to Laurentiis; and once he'd secured the necessary permission from RKO, he had little trouble in persuading Paramount Studios to put up the required finance.

TITANS STRUGGLE

There was one slight problem though: a rival studio (Universal) were planning to shoot an almost identical picture — *"The Legend of King Kong"* — which, they maintained, was to be based not on the original movie, but on Delos Lovelace's 1932 novel. At any rate, a heated legal battle was to ensue, but it didn't stop Paramount rushing their KING KONG remake into production at an overall



budget of 25 million dollars! With such an enormous sum of money at stake, Laurentiis wisely chose to surround himself with a team of seasoned professionals. The crucial job of director went to John Guillermin, an expatriate Englishman who had made a name for himself in America through his work on large-scale pictures like *"Skyjacked"* and *"The Towering Inferno"*. In these two films alone, Guillermin had direc-



and almost unrivalled experience: he would be responsible for converting the classic storyline to a modern setting without compromising too many of its finer points. The result of his labours — shot on location in New York, Los Angeles, Brazil and Hawaii — was roughly: — "Petrox", a giant international fuel corporation, send an expedition to the South Seas to drill for oil, whereupon they discover and capture KING KONG, shipping him back to the States in lieu of the oil they didn't find! The mighty ape is used by "Petrox" as a somewhat unconventional sales promotion gimmick, but somehow manages to break free during a public exhibition of his strength at the famous Shea Stadium. And of course it's not long before he is once again trampling his way through the streets of New York, terrorising a completely new generation of inhabitants.

SKYSCRAPER SCRAP

The traditional show-stopping finale comes into effect as KONG scales the twin-towered, 110-storey World Trade Center, armed only with his helpless female hostage. On this occasion the original bi-planes have been replaced by rocket-firing jet

They made it possible — Above Left: DINO DE LAURENTIIS, a producer in the grand Hollywood tradition. Above: JOHN GUILLERMIN, the director who breathed life into the myth. Left: JESSICA LANGE, 25-year-old starlet, proves that if he didn't have good manners, Kong had good taste!



QUEEN KONG!

HOT ON THE HEELS of Hollywood's hairiest box-office behemoth comes his Anglo/Italian produced counterpart: the equally mighty though somewhat more glamorous girl-ape — QUEEN KONG! The movie, which is being filmed exclusively at Shepperton studios in Great Britain, is a light-hearted spoof on the 1933 original, featuring a 64ft tall lady-gorilla in the title role. Needless to say, it is being played strictly for laughs, and in keeping with the picture's powerful pro-female slant, the gender of all major characters has been reversed!

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Thus Rula Lenska — who was last seen in the top-rating *"Rock Follies"* TV series — takes the part of Luce Habit, an extremely butch lady film producer, while Robin Askwith, the well-known Window Cleaner, Pop Performer and Driving Instructor, assumes the guise of a long-haired hippie by the name of Ray Fay! — who is perhaps best described as the movie's obligatory sex-object! Queen Kong is first sighted in the remote jungle village of Lazangawheretheydothekonga (!), and in the usual time-honoured tradition she is captured and transported back to the civilised world: in this case England. Pandemonium reigns supreme as the lust-crazed lady-gorilla stomps through the City of London, scaling Big Ben, the Post Office Tower, and even St Pauls Cathedral, in her efforts to get her hands — or rather her paws — on the elusive Ray Fay. Laugh-a-minute lunacy reaches its peak as they fall into a sidesplitting tap-dance routine during a fantasy sequence in



brother measures up: those of us who haven't will at least have the chance to discover for themselves what they've been missing! Either way, 1977 is unlikely to spawn a superior example of all-round family entertainment. KING KONG RULES, OK?



not bad going when you consider that the film only started shooting on the 12th of January 1976! Right from the word "go", the Paramount publicity machine has kept the media — and thus the public — bang up to date with dozens of detailed reports concerning each and every aspect of this momentous movie, indeed advance interest in the picture has been so great that Paramount have already compiled and distributed some 200,000 copies of a specially-written newsletter entitled "Kong News". And at one stage there was even talk of erecting a 30ft tall promotional statue of KING KONG in New York's Times Square, but the City Fathers unfortunately withheld their permission. So now, as the world awaits the imminent unveiling of the new improved 1976 version, "King Kong", there is an unmistakable mood of anticipation amongst film enthusiasts everywhere. Those of us who have seen, and been captivated by, the original KING KONG will doubtless be interested to see how his younger



**KING
KONG**





ART GOLDSTEIN