

ROLLING STONE

Jeff Bridges

**Who's Afraid
of King Kong?
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What Is Jeff Bridges Afraid Of?

*The dark, greasy white
roses; his mind; a hairy ape;
blowing it; famous actors;
becoming a dolphin;
being recognized in a porno
shop; dreams and...
the phantom two-by-four*

By Tim Cahill
With photographs by Annie Leibovitz

ENTERING THE MGM STUDIO LOTS BY NIGHT last summer was an eerie experience. There, soaring high over the dreary Culver City flatlands, was an immense wall supposedly built by Kong-fearing natives. Outside the wall, reaching up into the starless sky, was a huge, apelike hand, illuminated by arc lights. The arm, which was somewhat smaller than a Mack truck, was fixed to the working end of an industrial crane. The crane operator looked directly up, into the inside of the arm, an impossibly complex tangle of metal struts and silver wiring. Below and off to the side, half a dozen men sat at a control board and manipulated the fingers of the great hand.

Jeff Bridges, who plays a stowaway hippie associate professor of primate zoology in *King Kong*—I can't help it, it's true—was standing inside the wall. Despite his hippie professor beard and shoulder-length

Tim Cahill has, on occasion, been mistaken for King Kong.



hair, Jeff—at 6'2" and 180 pounds—had the All-American look of that fellow in your high school who lettered in three sports, four years running. Not the guy who really worked at it, lifting weights and running during the off-season. Jeff would be the natural: gifted, good-looking, easygoing.

The two of us were waiting for the special-effects shot the crew had been setting up all afternoon. On a signal, the huge hand would form a fist, the crane operator would jerk his vehicle forward, the fist would slam into a special breakaway section of the wall, and the hand would burst through to the other side in a shower of splinters.

It was, as it turned out, a highly successful stunt, and Jeff was pleased and excited. The mechanical hand had been malfunctioning of late—the technicians had used it to flip the bird, and the huge hairy thing had gotten stuck like that. Shooting had been delayed and it looked as if the film was going to take quite a bit longer than had been anticipated. In addition, people had been asking Bridges—at 26, a two-time Academy Award nominee—why he had taken the role in the first place. Wasn't he playing second banana to a machine?

"Every time I try to explain how I got interested in *Kong*, it's hard for me. When I was a kid I watched that movie a hundred times, the original *Kong*. I enjoyed the fear. You know how you go into a dark house . . . I don't know, you're probably afraid of the dark, everybody is at one time or another. And you finally learn to overcome that. My method was to focus attention on the light switch. Just think about the light and forget what's in the shadows. Well, one time I was down at my parents' beach house and some of my friends were there—I was maybe 15 years old and I hadn't been afraid of the dark in years. We were leaving and I had to go into the house to turn out the lights. Everybody else was outside and I felt that fear creep up on me. I thought, 'Maybe I'll just let this fear engulf me for a second and not do my normal thing.' I just sat there and felt this fear [he makes a loud roaring sound] rush into me. It was a matter of seconds and I was just lying on the floor in a weeping heap. All the people came in and said, 'What's wrong?'"

Jeff takes a moment to laugh at himself, at the ridiculous position he had put himself in. "For a few weeks after that I experimented. I did fear exercises on just about everything. I remember, I did it once with a white rose, I was able to see it as a greasy white rose, and somehow that scared the shit out of me. Finally I could do it with anything.

"*Kong* is an opportunity to get back into that. A lot of time the machine isn't there and you just stare into space, being scared. You know, 'Look over there, that's where Kong is.' And you'd be looking at a dishrag. What's frightening isn't this big giant monkey. It's everything I've ever feared in my life. It's my mind."

BRIDGES HAD HAD AN IDEA, A twist for the end of *King Kong*, and he approached director John Guillermin with it. "They didn't want to do it, but I wanted to see the monkey fall off the tower and smack into the ground, and it would be a machine inside. And they should just leave it like that. I mean, what the fuck is that? Is it from outer space? What kind of weird practical joke is that?"

The idea amuses Bridges enough to send him careening off on a strange tangent. "An offshoot of that is maybe that's what we are. I mean, the more they look into DNA and RNA, the more mechanical it seems. You see where they can now put together totally new forms of life. Well, what if we were one of those forms? What if we get really sophisticated with the mechanical aspects of genetics. What if we impregnated a woman? Put her in a spaceship and sent her out into the universe somewhere to start the whole thing again. A machine thing. And . . . and . . . it all came around again until finally it would be us really impregnating our own earth with ourselves in some strange time warp."

We watched the hairy Kong hand punch a couple of holes in the wall, then drifted over to Jeff's trailer where we made arrangements for an interview. We would do it at his place in Montana, and Jeff would show me

some of his writing, and we'd try to organize the interview around the topics that concerned him in his journals.

Several months later, after he had completed work on *King Kong*, I called Jeff Bridges to set up an interview. Jeff said he didn't want to do the interview just then. He wasn't ready. I got the distinct impression that he was sorry he had mentioned Montana on the set, and that he felt a little silly about falling into this situation. Months passed and in early December I ran into Jeff and his friend Burgess Meredith, the distinguished veteran actor, at Village Recorder, a Los Angeles sound studio. We listened to some songs Jeff had cut with old friends from University High. Jeff had written the songs, and his singing in spots was oddly affecting. The most memorable tune was a five-minute track called "Kong," featuring Jeff and Burgess.

The music began in a mode best described as discomysterioso and Bridges' voice came up underneath, almost speaking. "There's someone in the jungle and he wants to get out." The words were of a conventional Kong, but they begged to be taken metaphorically. An evocation of the innocent beast in us all. That sort of thing. The disco dribbled off into weird sounds and crowd noises. Up came the recorded voice of Burgess Meredith. ". . . standing there like some great feather . . . oh, oh he's burst into flame, he's falling, he's burst into flames, he's falling from the tower. . . ." The voice

Jeff and I wandered off to a quiet room. He wasn't too sure about an interview.

"It won't be any trouble," I tell him, "we'll work from your writing."

"I'll call you in two days," he says, "on Sunday."

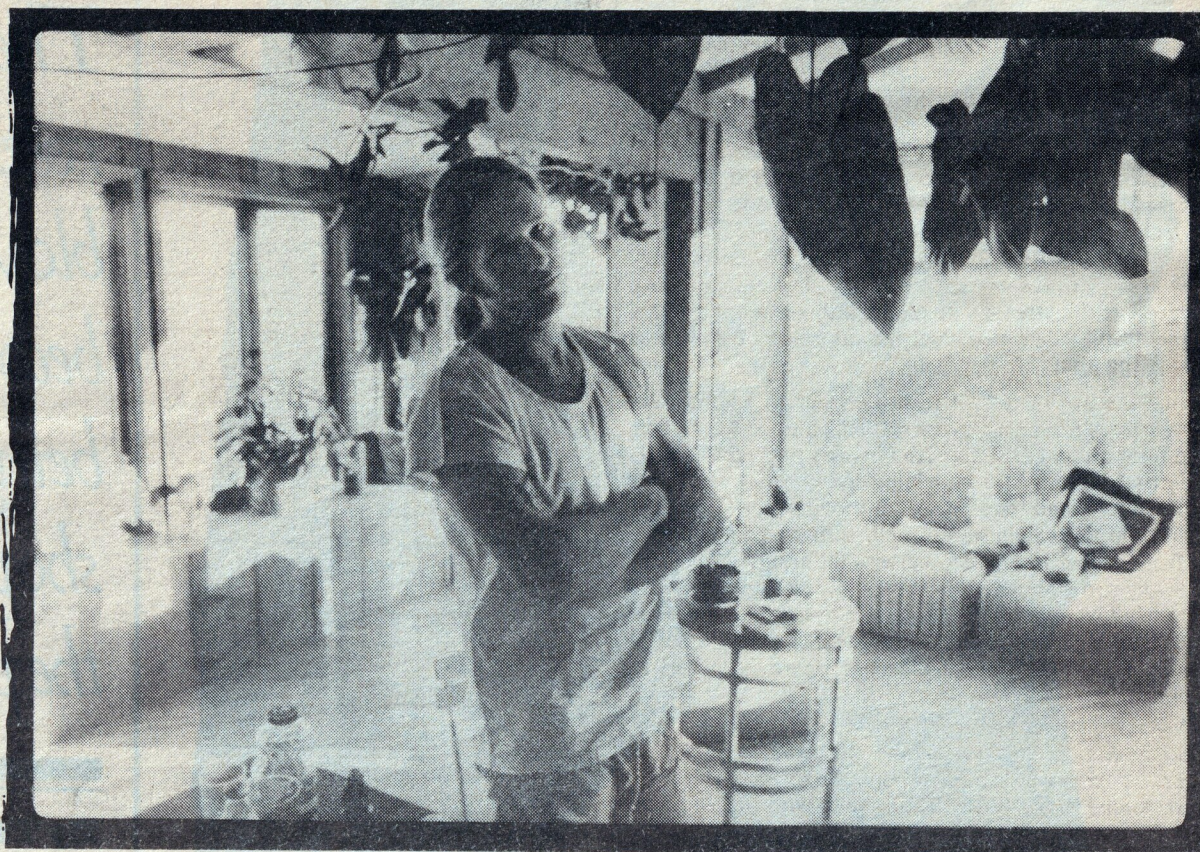
SUNDAY, 9 P.M., JEFF BRIDGES: "LET'S do the interview. The reason I'm unsure of it is because I'm not really sure who I am. I can't talk to interviewers. It always sounds like I'm talking to a psychiatrist and I don't like the way that sounds."

Monday morning, 2:30 a.m., Jeff Bridges: "Listen, I've been thinking about this interview and I just don't want to do it. I'm going through massive changes in my life and I don't know what to say. It's just not the right time."

Monday morning, 11 a.m., Jeff Bridges: "I didn't blow it last night, did I? Let's go ahead with the interview. I changed my mind. That'll be one of the things we'll have to talk about."

JEFF BRIDGES LIVES IN THE HILLS above Malibu. He lives with a steady woman friend who feels that she has been portrayed as a "piece of ass" in previous interviews, and therefore is not present and Jeff will not discuss her. The house is all wood and glass and overlooks the Pacific. There are dogs and cats and plants and big com-

Jeff at home in Malibu before he cut his hair for his latest role in 'Winter Kills,' a film loosely based on JFK's assassination.



breaks. Meredith sounds as if he is speaking through actual tears. The narration is clearly patterned on the famous NBC radio broadcast of the wreck of the Hindenburg. "Oh my God, it's terrible, terrible. Oh my God there's panic . . . all the people who started this religion, oh my God falling from the tower and the monkey's in flames and he's falling and he's crashing to the ground. All the humanity. . . . There's blood all over the plaza. . . . The blood is burning! A machine. It's a machine, do you know what that means! It's a machine, do you know what that means, do you know what that means, do you know what that means. . . ."

Jeff Bridges' voice comes up softly under Meredith's. "And New York City was the King's open grave, and the Kong became the new teenage craze. . . ." And right into a full disco version of "do the King Kong baby," complete with suggested gestures such as "pick the fleas off your knees."

fortable couches all about. Jeff is dressed in shapeless green slacks, a faded Hawaiian tourist shirt and huaraches. He is clean-shaven and his shoulder-length hair is tied back into a neat ponytail. Occasionally he rolls a mixture of Thai stick and home-grown.

"Last night all these things started to come together, important shit, and I thought, 'Oh God, I've got this interview tomorrow and everybody's gonna know what I am and I don't even know what I am and I don't know if I want to expose what I don't know I am.'"

Some of the things coming together involved decisions. Should he release the album he spent five weeks working on? Did it need more work? Maybe he could release "Kong." The song is his version of how the movie might have been, but would people think he was just cashing in on the movie? He had to appear on the *Dinah Shore Show* to promote *King Kong*. Most important, he had a new film coming up in ten days.

The film is called *Winter Kills* and it's loosely based on the Kennedy assassinations. Bridges plays a man who would be John Kennedy's stepbrother, if he had had one. The movie is set ten years after the assassinations and, as new evidence emerges, the stepbrother begins to follow through. "The thing about the script that hooked me," Jeff says, "is that it's about taking responsibility for who you are and what you've been given. And that's one of the reasons why I decided to do the interview. This morning when I called you back I thought, 'Shit, I don't have to do anything I don't want to do. I can make this anything I want it to be . . . I can do anything, except go crazy and lose my head about it. . . .'"

"It's like my writing, the stuff you asked to see. I sent over some of it last night and I thought, 'Oh shit, I don't want anybody to see this.' That's the thing. I'd like to see it in the article, but it isn't right. It isn't developed. It's not time. I'm afraid I'll blurt it all out and blow it prematurely."

"I would like people to know me as I am. I think each person's life is an art piece, each person's life is a poem. Or a nightmare, sort of." It is a peculiar verbal habit Jeff has, this use of "kind of" and "sort of" to deflate his best lines. It is as if he's afraid of sounding too articulate. "I remember I did this one interview in which I talked about how I think love and hate stem from the self." As an example, Jeff had said he hated himself for using his father's name to get work in film. Though he was probably overstating the case—just searching for an example, really—it is true that being one of the Bridges didn't harm his early career. His brother, Beau, nine years older than Jeff, had been a child star in the 1949 version of *The Red Pony*. Whenever the producers of *Sea Hunt*, the long-running Lloyd Bridges TV serial, needed a towheaded youngster in peril, they called on Beau, Jeff or their younger sister, Cindy. Lloyd's agent handled Jeff, and he landed him parts in TV doctor shows and series such as *The FBI* or *Lassie*. Beau resumed his film career in '67 with *The Incident*. Jeff appeared in his first film, *Halls of Anger*, in 1970. In 1971, Jeff was nominated for an Academy Award for his performance in *The Last Picture Show*. His roles after that in such films as *Bad Company*, *Fat City*, *The Last American Hero*, *Hearst of the West* and *Stay Hungry* were landed on the strength of his acting, certainly not his name. "Still," Jeff says, "all the interviews I have end up talking about my self-hate."

In the midst of this conversation Kenny Lauber, the man who is producing Jeff's record, stopped by. Kenny had been present at Jeff's 27th birthday party that Saturday, and he was still chuckling about what had happened. A friend had made a moving speech about friendship and when he finished, someone set the cake in front of Jeff in a sweeping, elegant gesture. Jeff took the cake and completed the gesture by smashing it in his face. Kenny and Jeff laughed over that one quite a bit and when I expressed some bewilderment, they assured me that it was one of those things where "you had to be there."

We talked a bit about Jeff's past, and there is a common thread . . . catharsis and the need for a father figure . . . that winds itself around the things he chooses to remember best. "When Dad scored with *Sea Hunt* we moved from Vista Mar to Westwood. I went to Uni High and got pretty tight with this guy Caldwell Williams. He was running one of these groups where you could get together and discuss drug problems. I've always been a pothead, but I didn't have any real big drug hassles. Speed was the problem then. But this turned out to be a place where you could work through other hassles too. It was like an encounter-group situation and a lot of the real problems had to do with love and not getting enough love. It was a safe place to do some experimenting on yourself."

"We used to have these marathons where we'd go somewhere and we wouldn't sleep for three days. Remember we were talking about fear? So long as you keep up the front, keep your smile, you'll be cool. Just turn on that light. But that takes rest and stamina. After a while without sleep you don't have the strength to keep up those walls. Anyway, we had a marathon in the high desert at a Benedictine monastery and there was this young seminarian there who sat in with the group. About the third day I was bored and I walked outside



'Sometimes you subject yourself to staying up for days or not eating just so you can assume fear, get next to it and find out what it is. I put myself in these positions and once I get out I feel very empty. It's catharsis.'

with this kid. We started talking. I felt he was into the group and that he wanted to express his feelings about spirituality, but that he just couldn't do it. I came back into the group and all of a sudden I felt really bad. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I felt so fucking sad. And Caldwell said, 'What's going on with you Jeff?' And I said that I felt sad. Then someone said something to click it off: 'You're always so happy,' or 'That's bullshit.' I don't even remember, but I just went into a convulsion. I was spewing laughter and sobs and shaking and I really didn't know what it was. It lasted between 15 minutes and a half an hour. I either passed out or fell asleep."

"I think it had to do with fear. When you just don't have the strength, then you have an opportunity to let off some of that stuff. And then you realize you can do that any time you want. That fear thing: you can cause it. That's what acting is all about."

"Sometimes you need . . . sometimes you'll subject

yourself to staying up for three days or not eating just so you can assume that fear. You want to get next to it, to find out what the fuck it is. I put myself in these positions. And once I get it out I feel very empty and the emptiness feels very good. It's catharsis.

"You can use that for acting. When I was 20, I did a movie called *Halls of Anger*, about busing white kids into a black school. I play a guy who tries to participate and adapt. He goes out for sports, tries to be friendly. And they keep beating the shit out of him. He keeps coming back and the black kids keep beating the shit out of him. And then there is this last scene that I have with Calvin Lockhart, who plays the boy's principal. He tells me to stick with it, to not leave the school. It was a big emotional scene for me. And I really happened to get off. I had a cathartic experience doing the scene. We filmed for half a day and I really got empty. And it taught me a lesson: a cathartic scene for the actor is not necessarily a cathartic scene for the filmgoer.

"The first time I saw *Halls of Anger* was in the auditorium in a black high school. And my scene comes up. And I thought the editing was, well, not right. I'm talking to the principal—'I can't do it, I can't'—and I'm not crying or anything. Lockhart says a few lines and then all of a sudden—bam—they cut to me at the peak of my emotional come. The last time you see me, I'm [makes a composed face] and the next time [makes a horribly contorted face]. And everyone in the audience just laughed. The whole auditorium. When I got up I left skin on the chair, I was so fried."

EARLIER IN HIS CAREER JEFF WAS in the Coast Guard Reserve, and when his boot-camp time came up, he "got really tight with this guy Don Harris, a chaplain. We arrived at camp and a guy comes out and calls us assholes and fuckheads and says that we belong to him. They take you in a room and take all your clothes and possessions and mail them back to your home. You're nothing but your naked skin and your head's all shaved and everybody's scared. Then Sunday comes and you're in church and Don Harris says, 'When you're in here, you're not in the service.' That's all I needed. He got together with me and a couple of other guys. We formed a group, just like in high school."

There seemed to be a pattern developing, this dependence on a charismatic older man. When I asked Jeff about that, he agreed that it was something "in me. I don't think I'll ever be over it. We cast our own plays, sort of. I saw a lot of my father. He was acting a lot, but acting is good because there's also a lot of time when you're not working and can do some extensive hanging out with your kids. I have one father who is my father and the basis for all these other fathers. But, uh, I think we all have fathers and mothers and children in our life. Some people aren't as aware of it as others."

The next person Jeff "got tight" with was Burgess Meredith. "I've just recently been drawn close to him again, but ten years ago we did a movie in Hong Kong. It was called *The Yin and Yang of Dr. Go*, and Burgess wrote and directed it. I played a James Joycean rock star AWOL from Vietnam. I wrote and played some music in that. The film was one of those independent things and as of now it won't ever be released.

"I did *The Last Picture Show* after that, but I still wasn't sure I wanted to be an actor. Not even when I got the Academy Award nomination. I made up my mind about that during *The Iceman Cometh*. That was American Film Theater. My agent called and said, 'You gotta do this, Jeff, it's class.' They had Robert Ryan, Frederick March, Lee Marvin—an incredible cast. I decided, as an experiment, I would put myself in that situation. Trying to get right up next to the fear again. Because these guys were the actors, guys I was maybe a little intimidated by, guys I admired. Most of my scenes were with Robert Ryan and he taught me a lot. And it felt good. After that I was pretty much committed to acting."

Jeff Bridges earned his second Academy Award nomination for his performance in *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, and managed to get himself into a "weird situation" before the awards ceremony.

"My dad said, 'If you go to the Academy Awards with us in this car, this Gremlin, I get the car free.' That

just turned my head all around. You know—the holiness of the awards—and I'm going to step out of a fucking Gremlin? With my mother and father? To be faced with that kind of weird situation. My brother Beau keeps teasing me and teasing me and finally I said, 'Okay, fuck it, let's go.' It ended up that my mother and father and brother and his wife and me and my lady all—six of us—all ended up smashed into this Gremlin. And the coup de grâce: I borrowed my friend's video camera to film the entire experience, from the car right up to that hallway where Army Archerd interviews you. And I'd be shooting him interviewing me.

"We'd all been drinking champagne at my parents' house and my brother was driving and he kept saying, 'Jeff, stop wasting film, the light's not right.' Of course, in the film he's in perfect focus and the light is just right. But the highlight of the film, the main, major part, is my mother in a long monologue saying, 'Whatever you boys do, please, don't be assholes out there, just don't be... assholes.' It was perfect: just exactly what I was afraid of being. She's totally serious, and we're all making comments and poking her and she's going, 'Come on now, no stop, don't be assholes.' And all you can hear in the background is our insane laughter. Just as we got to the door, the camera batteries ran out."

WE TOOK A BREAK FOR BEER and herbal refreshment, then stood out on the deck, watching the sun set into the Pacific. Jeff said he could see the whales migrate down the coast at certain times of the year. He began to talk about John Lilly, the medical doctor and scientist who has done

is about 200 grams per foot to our 240 grams per foot. Larger whales—the sperm and great blue, for instance—have far larger brains.

Jeff Bridges gets excited about the possibility of interspecies communication. "I get so jazzed my voice raises in pitch. Lilly says an incredible thing. He says he'd like to hear the whales tell their history of the world, their legends and tales. He thinks that if beings from outer space have landed here, they probably wouldn't bother with the land and all these hostile motherfuckers on it. They'd go to the ocean, they'd talk to those people. Now, what do those people know about that?"

"I've only met Lilly about five times, but he's a friend of Burgess'. When I ran into Burgess and asked him what he had been doing, he said he was involved in tank work with Lilly. In the tanks you deprive yourself of your senses: you don't see, don't hear, don't feel. You just are. The isolation tank is about seven feet long, four wide and four high. There's about two feet of water inside at 93 degrees. It doesn't feel hot and it doesn't feel cold. You float on your back, and the water is so thick with epsom salts that you don't touch the bottom. Your ears are underwater, but your whole face is out of it. I've only been up there three times." Lilly devised the tanks in 1954 when he decided to do a series of experiments on "humans isolated from all visual, acoustic, tactile, pressure and gravity stimuli."

Jeff suggested we take a drive up the coast to Lilly's place and do some tank work. I jumped at the opportunity, but then he seemed to demure. We agreed to talk about it the next day.

I wasn't much surprised the next day when Jeff said

Jeff with his parents at the first screening of 'King Kong.' He got his start playing a towheaded kid in peril on his father's series, 'Sea Hunt.'



stunning work with dolphin communication. Lilly believes that within the next decade or two, the human species will establish communication with another species: "nonhuman, alien, possibly extraterrestrial, more probably marine." It would be better, Lilly reasons, for man to pursue the matter of interspecies communication before it is forced upon him by an alien species.

To this end, Lilly has literally lived with dolphins and studied them for over 20 years. He points out that the brain of a bottle-nosed dolphin is about 1700 grams, compared to the 1450 grams in an average human adult. The relative brain weight to body length of the dolphin

that going up to the tanks might not be all that hot an idea. It was a "new and tender space" for him, he explained. He did say that tank work had taught him a lot. "I find it hard to be alone. It's the same thing as 'I don't want to be afraid of the dark—so let it be dark.' We're afraid of something and we're drawn right to what frightens us. The first thing that happens in the tank is you hear all your body sounds: your heart pumping, the blood slushing through your veins. Then suddenly you don't hear it. It can be claustrophobic, then you can feel like you're floating in space. Everything you're feeling has only to do with you. You think, 'Fuck, it's getting

hot in here.' But you know it's not getting hot. You think, 'I gotta get out of here.' But you don't have to get out of there. And you carry that out of the tank. You realize that you really create what you experience. What you are feeling is a lot of what is happening.

"The second time in the tank I experienced more discomfort. Something more than boredom. I wanted to get through it, then I'd get pissed off about it. All of a sudden I'd imagine I was in the calm of a river, the shallows, and there were trees on both sides that I could almost see. Then I'd think, 'Gee, Lilly looked kind of strange. What does he have in this solution? Is he trying to change me into a dolphin?' I thought he was doing experiments on me. The water was charged with an electrical current. He was trying to read my brain. I was thinking all these things to scare myself out of the tank. My mind wanted me out. To protect something else in my mind. And I wanted to see what was on the other side of that. When I finally got out, Lilly was in another room and I heard this strange music coming out. I thought he was meditating. It turned out he was watching *Star Trek*."

I asked Jeff if he had made up his mind about letting me work from his journals. It would be okay, he said, if I looked at some of the better things. He showed me four or five short pieces, all two to three typewritten pages long. They were brief narratives ending in a thought, or a way of thinking. One was about fear and diamonds. One—titled "Who Is King Kong"—begins with Jeff contemplating a trip to some local porno store. But what if they recognized him there? What if everybody stared at him and started muttering, "Jeff Bridges, that's Jeff Bridges, Lloyd Bridges' son." No problem. He would just turn and face them. "Hey c'mon," he would say, "us movie stars jack off just like you guys."

I was impressed by a few of the pieces and I said so. Jeff began backing away. "It's like that cathartic thing

'My strength is my weakness. If you say I'm tough, tough goddamn it, you'll break. If you realize that you have fears, and you define them, you win. I will always be deathly afraid. I use my fear for my art, as fuel for my art.'

with *Halls of Anger*," he said. "All those people laughing at you after you've exposed yourself. And that's the thing about this writing. Do I show this stuff, am I an artist, do I have balls, or do I go for comfort and relax? I think of my mother and that videotape. 'Don't be an asshole out there.'"

Jeff said he still wasn't sure about the journals. He asked me to meet him at CBS that night, after he taped a *Dinah Shore Show*. He'd give me some of the pieces then.

Jeff was there all right, and he had some of the writing in his briefcase, but he had had second thoughts. He'd like to get all his friends together. Ask them what they thought.

I spent the next day poring over my notes. Something was definitely wrong. Jeff was an immensely lik-

able man. He'd been candid and cooperative and we had spent much of the interview time laughing. And yet all I seemed to have was this guy who was afraid of just about everything and who regularly crumpled into a weeping heap. That couldn't be right. You didn't see that on the screen. You saw a cocky kid who could be tough, or romantic, or violent, or funny. Some of America's most respected critics have commented on his masculine, meaning macho, image, and one compared him to a young Gary Cooper.

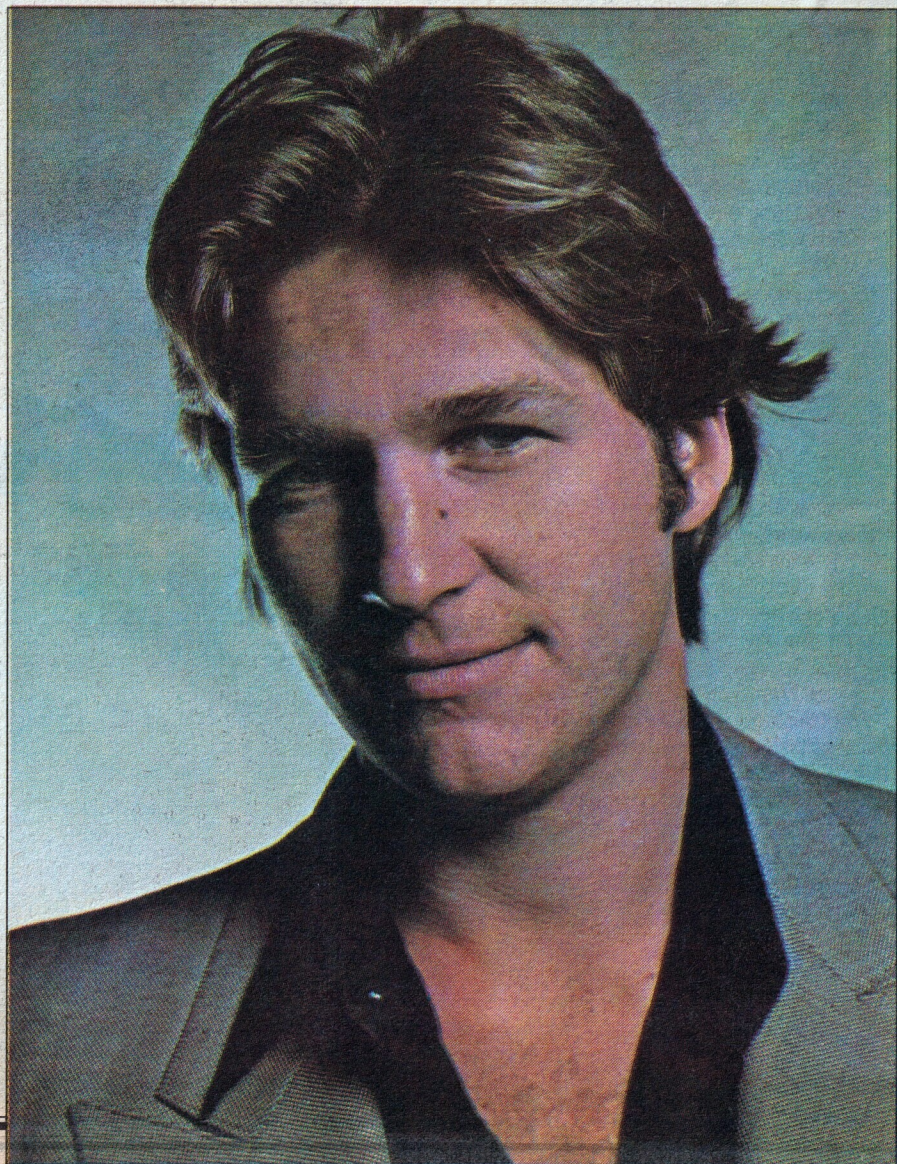
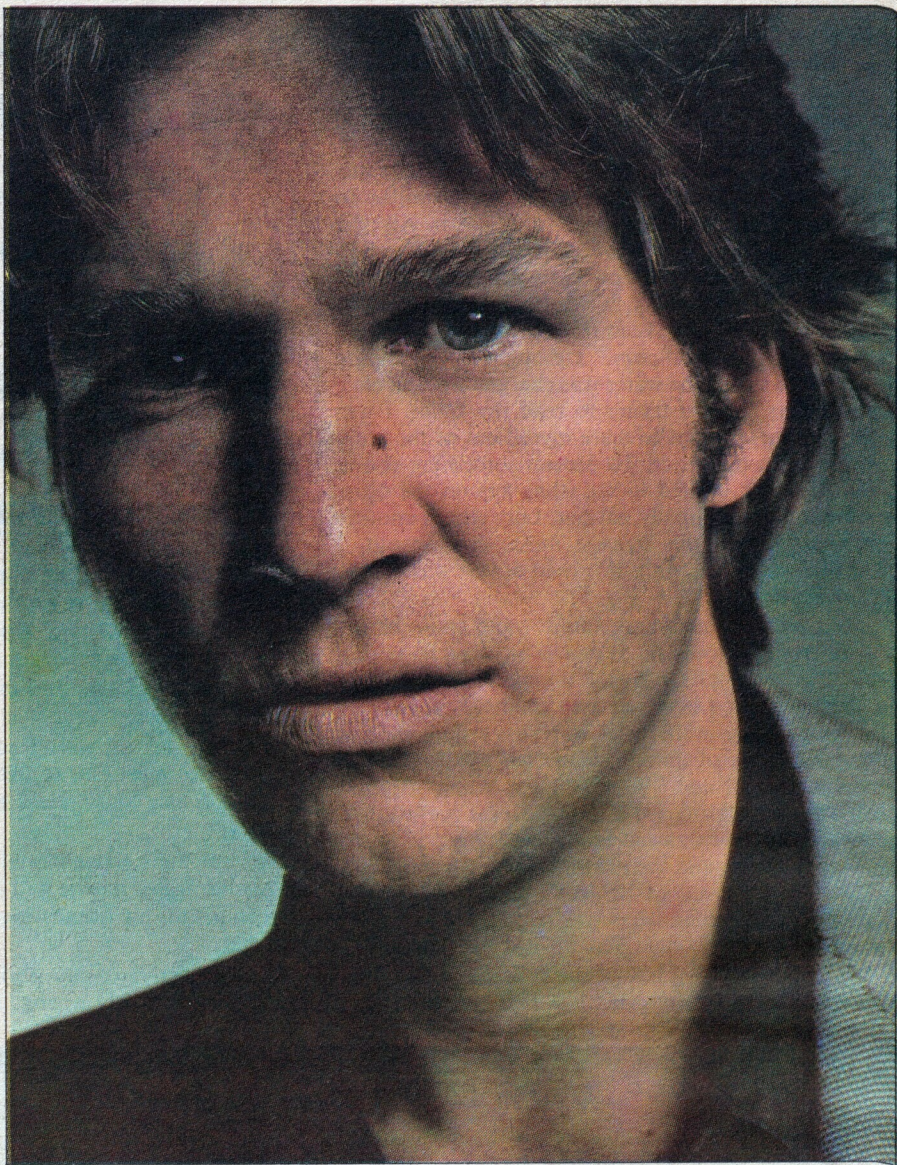
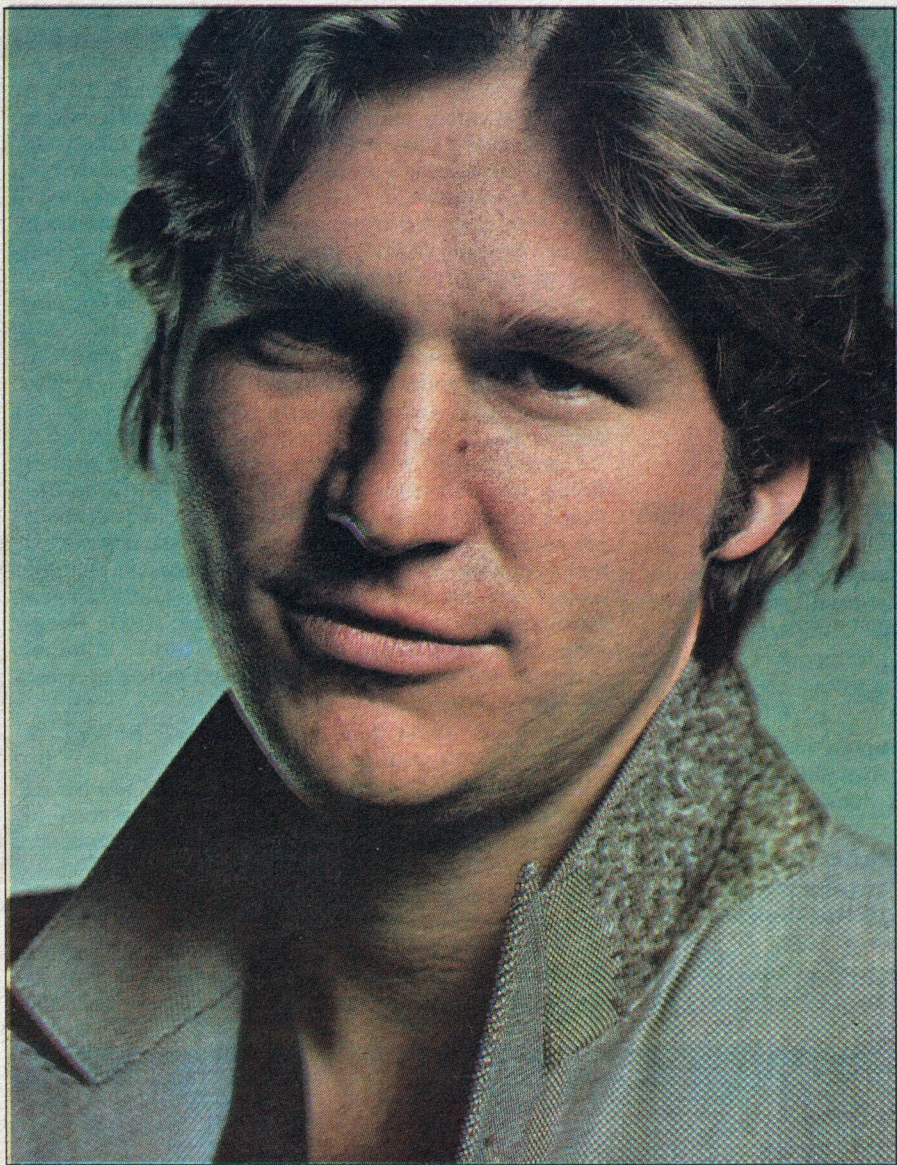
I called Jeff and told him that we'd better talk again, that I had nothing of his strength or his steel. "My strength," he said, "is my weakness. If you say, 'I'm tough, tough goddamn it,' you'll break. If you realize you have fears, and define them, you win. I'll always be deathly afraid. I use fear for my art, as fuel for my art."

I drove out to Malibu the next day with a plan. I simply wouldn't allow Jeff to talk about fear or weakness. I wanted to hear about the things he did well, about his self-esteem. By the time I hit the Coast Highway, I had second thoughts about the plan. It seemed a shabby, second-rate encounter-group leader's ploy. Still, I knew I would prefer to hear Jeff saying good, strong things about himself. I began to wonder if I—like a lot of people in Jeff's life—hadn't been seduced by a pretense of fragility.

"I thought about those writing things," he said. "I decided I didn't want to do it."

"You caught me at a critical time. Usually, just before a movie, I get spaced out. All kinds of things come to the surface. I'm usually not this, sort of, volatile and, uh, vulnerable. Before the first day of shooting, the character hasn't even been born. After that first day you have something, however small, to base it on. Before that, it's tough. You keep thinking, 'Here it comes, it's going to happen in ten days, it's going to happen in a week, it's going to happen tomorrow, here it comes.' Then the





first day of shooting, whoosh, it's all gone. If you think I'm spacey now, you ought to see me in another couple of days."

THE PHONE RANG. IT was Jeff's father with a proposition. If the two of them went to a screening of *King Kong* the next day in this special electric car—a boxy silver affair with a lightning-bolt logo—then Lloyd Bridges got to keep the car. "I told him it was just a crummy little screening," Jeff said. "Not a premiere or anything. He said it didn't matter. They just needed a photo of the two of us getting out of the car." Jeff cracked up at the idea. "So tomorrow my dad and I are going to a screening in an electric car." It was just another one of those weird situations he keeps getting into.

Like the whole thing about his journals. "I've been sitting here with these pages for two days and it's been a major topic of conversation. Oh God, talk about brooding. I've been sitting here reading this stuff over and thinking about the absurdity of the situation I got myself into. Every once in a while I'd burst into laughter." The more he thought about it, the more Jeff seemed to think that it couldn't hurt too much if he gave me just one of the pieces for publication. We decided that he should just read it into the tape recorder.

I particularly like this section of tape because it begins with Jeff gearing up to read. "Oh my God. *Why* am I doing this? This is so pretentious. I can see somebody reading *ROLLING STONE*, saying, 'Who the fuck does this guy think he is?' What *am I doing?* How do I even *dare* read such a thing?"

The piece he selected was entitled "Invisible Giants," and Jeff read it in a soft, embarrassed monotone:

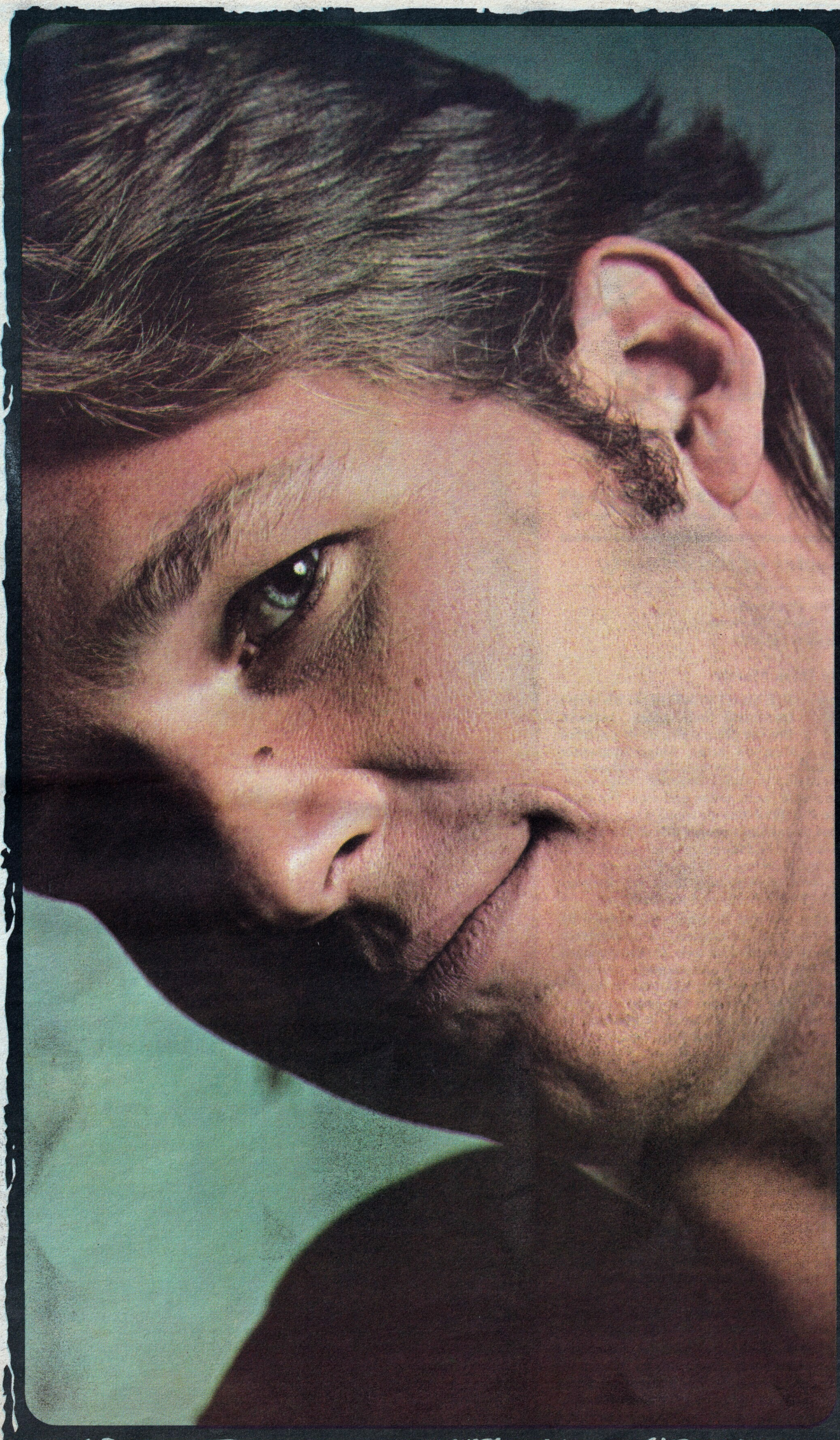
"I was about halfway through and my body was in incredible pain. I hadn't run the mile since high school. My legs kept telling me that this was bad for them. Something in my neck felt like too much stuff was being forced through it. For some reason my lungs and throat were working fine. The method of breathing that my friend had taught me seemed to be working—very rhythmical, in four, out four. He told me to think of myself as a machine, to observe my body as I would a train, to pay attention to what I was thinking.

"I was thinking, 'How do you tell the difference between intuition and paranoia?' Toward the end of the mile I thought I'd run with my eyes closed. When I did, a terrible thought forced me to open them. The thought I conjured up was a two-by-four swung by some invisible giant. It would smash into my face.

"When I opened my eyes there was nothing there but level beach. I did it again. Somewhere out there a big steel bar was waiting for my shins. My throat was unusually vulnerable. A fast ball was going to break my voice box. I opened my eyes. Nothing there. Nothing but the waves and empty sky and level beach.

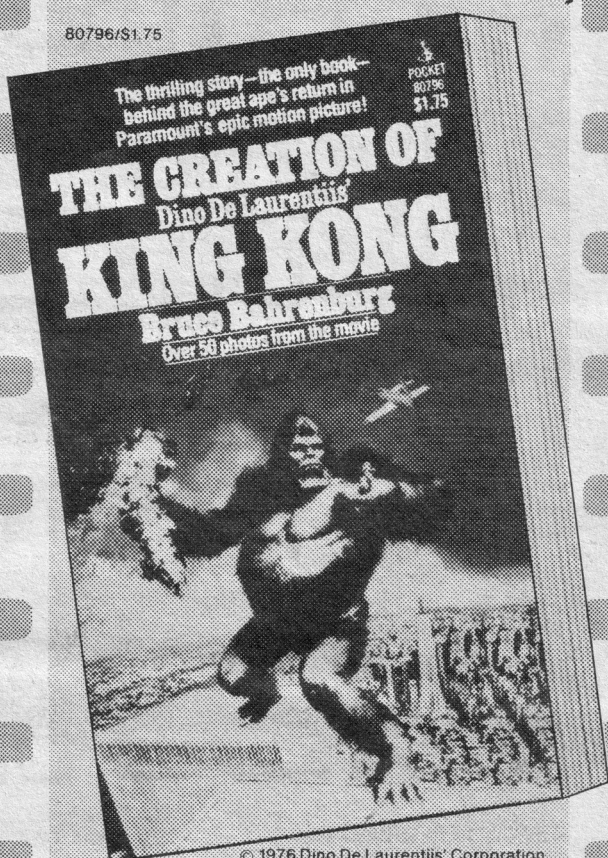
"After doing this several times I realized that all the things I fear are dreams I have: that thoughts are what make me quit, not physical situations. The pain of my body while I ran was the phantom two-by-four and I kept my eyes closed and saw it for what it was."

"I would like people to know me as I am."



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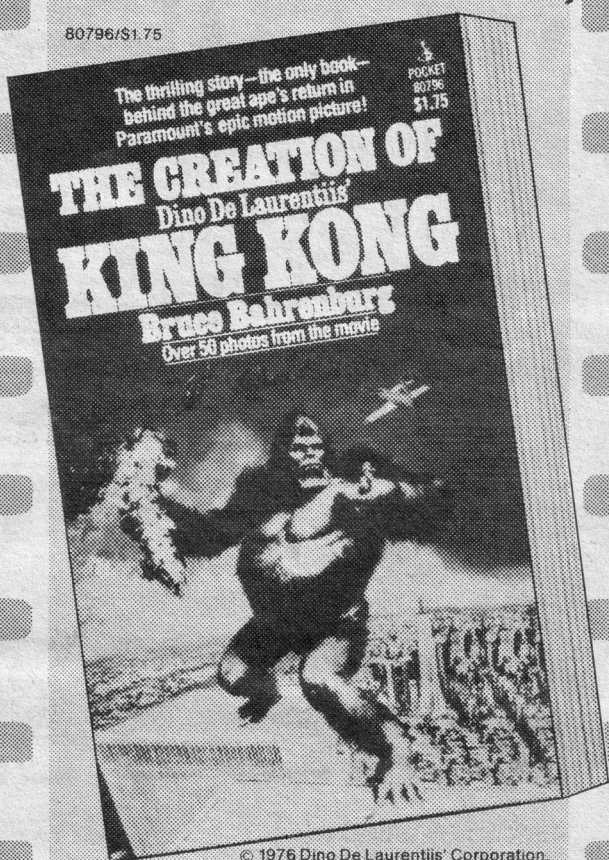
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