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Jock Mahoney took over for Gordon Scott as the new Apeman in John Guillermin's *Tarzan Goes to India*.

One of the director's most successful films took George Peppard into the killer skies as a young German pilot in *The Blue Max*.



Blue Max Photo: Copyright 1966 20th Century Fox

Lord of Disaster

Setting "The Towering Inferno" aflame was just another great adventure for Tarzan director John Guillermin.

By LOWELL GOLDMAN

"I've never been very good at giving interviews," declares director John Guillermin. "I'm not sure why. Some directors are quite good at this sort of thing. But it's just not that easy for me."

Although initially reluctant to talk about his films, he does let his guard down. Eventually, Guillermin is surprisingly candid about such genre efforts as his two Tarzan movies, *The Towering Inferno*, *King Kong*, *King Kong Lives* and *Sheena*.

Guillermin was born in London and educated at Cambridge. He began his career in France in 1947 as a documentary filmmaker and made his feature film debut two years later in England with a picture entitled *Torment*. In the '50s, he helmed a series of small, black & white British films. So, it was a bit of a surprise when he set his directorial sights on the colorful *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* (1959).

Lord of the Jungles

"The earlier Tarzan movies were really program pictures made on the backlot," notes the director. "We made a location picture for the first time. We went to East Africa [Kenya]. For a short schedule, fairly low-budget picture, the whole affair really got me quite excited."

In the film, Tarzan (Gordon Scott) is hot on the trail of four men searching for a valuable diamond mine. Anthony Quayle portrayed the leader of the gang. One of



King Kong Photo: Copyright 1976 Paramount Pictures

his henchmen was a new actor named Sean Connery.

"Sean certainly had a striking personality," recalls Guillermin, "but his diction needed a lot of work. Sean was not always easy to understand. He had what you would call a thick Scots accent. He really worked on that over the next few years. Obviously, he has had an extraordinary career. He has managed to bridge that gap between leading man parts and character roles."

Tarzan's Greatest Adventure did well enough at the box office that the series of Tarzan movies continued throughout the '60s. Replacing Gordon Scott as Edgar Rice Burroughs' legendary hero in Guillermin's *Tarzan Goes To India* (1962) was Jock Mahoney (STARLOG #136).

"I'm not sure why Gordon didn't do *Tarzan Goes to India*," ponders the director. "But Jock did a good job. He was an ex-stuntman. Jock was an extremely tough guy."

In this adventure, Tarzan creates a sanctuary for elephants and other wild animals when their habitat is threatened by the impending construction of a huge dam. The director reveals that it wasn't easy dealing with a dam and elephants on location.

"It's especially difficult when you're making a film for two cents in six weeks," he says with an uneasy laugh. "It really was an absurd bit of business."

"She certainly looked good on screen," recalls Guillermin of his discovery of Jessica Lange, Kong's 1976 flame.

"Technically, we did construct a bamboo wall that was used to charge 50 elephants through. You couldn't stop them for two or three miles. But, we did manage to stop them in a river bed. It was all very exciting."

Regarding his two Tarzan films, Guillermin admittedly prefers his first effort. "For one thing, *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* had a tighter plotline. Plus, I think it had a much better feeling for the genre."

Although both films were well-received, Guillermin decided that he wanted to branch out in different directions.

"Two Tarzan films were enough for me. [Director] Bob Day did a whole bunch of Tarzan films in the '60s. I've known him for years." Mike Henry played Tarzan in most of Day's movies. "I knew Mike, too. Mike was in a picture I did with Chuck Heston for MGM called *Skyjacked*."

"Mike was a really nice guy," Guillermin's quick to add. "He's a great character. I don't think he's still acting in films. I'm not sure what he's doing these days."

Making movies in foreign or exotic locales has always fascinated Guillermin.

"I've always liked going to a country and creating a different world than what was happening there at the time. I'll give you a case in point—*The Blue Max* [1966]. We shot the film in Ireland where we re-created World War I Germany."

The Blue Max is also one of the director's most successful movies. George Peppard plays an ambitious German fighter pilot having a torrid affair with Ursula Andress. Besides their steamy love scenes, the movie was noted for its superb aerial photography and exciting dog-fights. The cinematography was done by Douglas (Raiders) Slocombe.

Peppard liked Guillermin's style so much that he insisted the director helm the actor's next film, the private eye thriller *P.J.* (1968). The director and star next teamed up for an European-made melodrama with Orson Welles, *House of Cards* (1969).

Guillermin then made what he calls a "fettuccine" Western with Jim Brown and Lee Van Cleef in Spain entitled *El Condor* (1970) and the third entry in the Shaft series, *Shaft in Africa* (1973).

Lord of the Fires

Next on his agenda was the all-star disaster epic, *The Towering Inferno* (1974). Guillermin initially got involved with the project because he shared the same agent as Irwin Allen.

"I think the script came to me as a straightforward submission," he says. "They had also talked to Steve McQueen. I had known him at the time. Anyway, that's really how it got started."

LOWELL GOLDMAN, Philadelphia-based writer, profiled James Coburn in STARLOG #151.



"It's not a picture that I'm ashamed of in any way," says Guillermin of Tanya Roberts' prowl as Sheena.

According to the director, McQueen was originally set for Paul Newman's part. Then, McQueen decided one day that he didn't want to play the architect, he preferred playing the fire chief.

"The part of the architect wasn't all that great anyway," admits Guillermin. "But, we tried to make some sense out of it and Paul helped a lot too."

Guillermin has high praise for McQueen. "Steve had a terrific instinct for something he could play well. In the films where he played characters that he really understood, he did extremely well on screen. It wasn't an accident that he was a major, major star."

"He also had tremendous power and charisma. He could capture the truth of a scene. I'll give you a marvelous example: In *The Towering Inferno*, we had a scene where Steve was physically exhausted. Yet, he had to get up and fight this out-of-control fire. He was in a state of despair. We discussed how to play the scene. Originally, he was supposed to get up and start moving around. But, we played it the exact opposite. He didn't get up. Instead, he gave orders from the floor. Well, it worked like gangbusters. Not too many actors would have played the scene that way."

The Towering Inferno combined two novels, *The Tower* by Richard Martin Stern and *The Glass Inferno* by Thomas N. Scortia and Frank M. Robinson, and two studios, 20th Century Fox and Warner Bros. At the peak of production, four camera crews were shooting on 57 sets on the Fox backlot.

There was also a great deal of model work. "The tower model shots were done by another unit. It was a very, very quick schedule. We had to integrate the model



Beauty Linda Hamilton is caught in the beast's grip with Brian Kerwin as King Kong Lives, Guillermin's reluctant "remake of a remake."

shots. It was a tricky business."

Although Irwin Allen gets credit for directing the action sequences, Guillermin maintains that Allen really handled only one of the units. "I would give Irwin the same credit as I would the other second-unit directors. We had seven units on the picture. All the acting scenes were done in 14 weeks. You know," Guillermin says, "Irwin can be a bit of a megalomaniac. He wanted to do everything."



Photo: Copyright 1959 Paramount Pictures

Still, Guillermin credits Allen for bringing the picture in on schedule and under budget.

"We made the movie for a very reasonable budget," he adds. "It was around \$15 million. In a sense, we couldn't have made it any other way. You could have made it the David Lean way. But then, it would have taken two years."

Lord of the Apes

While on the subject of film finances, Guillermin is quick to set the record straight regarding his big-budget 1976 remake of *King Kong*.

"Well, you know *King Kong* was commercially very, very successful. It was successful for Dino De Laurentiis and the studio, Paramount. In fact, the studio made over \$40 million. They probably did more than \$80 million rentals worldwide. Our problem was that the film's budget on paper was enormous. It was around \$25 million. Still, it's very difficult to know for sure."

Guillermin was working on other projects when the *Kong* remake came up.

"I had worked on a screenplay that was a modern story based on the film *The Hurricane*. The script didn't quite work out so Dino simply decided to remake the old *Hurricane*. My story was about a supertanker caught in a severe tropical storm. Unfortunately, it was never made."

De Laurentiis instead tried to sell the director on *King Kong*. Lorenzo (Flash Gordon) Semple Jr. (STARLOG #74-75) was hired to develop a viable screenplay.

According to Guillermin, Barbra Streisand was seriously interested in starring in the picture at one time. "Then, I found Jessica Lange in New York. She had been a model with the Wilhelmina Agency. We gave her a screen test. Well, she certainly looked good on screen."

Since this was a De Laurentiis production, Carlo Rambaldi and his crew were hired to design the mechanical Kong.



"It wasn't an accident that he was a major, major star," notes Guillermin of Steve McQueen, who went from being the architect of *The Towering Inferno* to its fire fighter.

Unfortunately, there was a language barrier between the director and the Italian-speaking staff.

"We developed an international language in the end," he says. "Still, it was a bit like conducting an orchestra. It didn't matter...I remember the mechanical arm didn't work for three months. It was very tricky for them to operate each finger. As always, hi-tech doesn't play as big a part as one imagines. It often comes down to the old levers and cables."

It's no secret that Oscar-winning makeup wizard Rick Baker (in an ape suit) played King Kong throughout most of the film.

"Rick did a great job," exclaims the director. "We also created a full-scale Kong. Although he was supposed to walk, he was really too darn big to walk. Anyway, we used the giant Kong as sort of a backdrop when the crowd goes crazy at the end."

"I thought the scenes at the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center worked quite well," he adds. "We got a lot of atmo-

sphere by using the real location. I was also very pleased that there's kind of a lyricism to the film. That's very difficult to achieve with the endless special FX."

Still, there was no way that *King Kong* could live up to its classic ancestor or all the remake's advance hype. "The film simply isn't allowed to speak for itself. I was not displeased with the overall picture. It was totally different from the original, which is now considered a classic. That was an enormous thing to overcome in itself."

After all the problems he went through on *King Kong*, one wonders why the director would try it again with De Laurentiis' *King Kong Lives* (1986).

"Well, I had wanted to do *Tai-Pan* with Sean Connery at the time. Unfortunately, the producer went bankrupt. Dino picked up the project, but soon lost interest in it. Instead, he wanted to do a remake of *King Kong*," Guillermin sighs, "which I got involved with. It was not a great idea to do

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Towering Inferno Photos: Copyright 1980 Warner Bros. Inc.

Guillermin

(continued from page 61)

another remake of the remake."

King Kong Lives was filmed in De Laurentiis Studios in Wilmington, North Carolina. "We also did some location work which we integrated with the process shots. But that's a technical thing. The audience is not concerned with that. All they're concerned with is whether the film works for them or not."

Obviously, it didn't. *King Kong Lives* was a box office disaster. "Dino was striking out on all sorts of things at the time. It's really too bad. He was involved with some interesting projects."

Lord of the Elephants

Guillermin had already struck out commercially with 1984's ill-fated *Sheena*.

"Unlike the Kong films, *Sheena* for me had some great possibilities," laments the director. "I saw the character of *Sheena* as sort of an ethereal person. It would have made the film more of a fairy tale. But, of course, it didn't quite go that route."

David (*Superman*) Newman initially worked on the *Sheena* screenplay and Lorenzo Semple Jr. later revised it. Then, it went through a great many front office decisions at Columbia.

An elaborate jungle set was built by the studio in order to run screen tests. Reportedly in the running for the part of *Sheena* were Sandahl Bergman, Cheryl Ladd and Christie Brinkley, among others. Then, Tanya Roberts auditioned on the *Fantasy Island*-style set. After some deliberation by the producers and director, Roberts won the title role. She even dyed her dark hair blonde and went on an intensive training program to firm up her shapely figure.

The movie was made on location in Kenya. "We shot scenes that were very real," boasts Guillermin. "We also shot amongst a herd of 500 wild elephants. We were only 30 to 40 feet away from them."

In addition to the elephants, there were rampaging rhinos, ferocious lions and a flock of flamingos that attack a helicopter.

"It's not a picture that I'm ashamed of in any way," he exclaims. "I did some work in *Sheena* that I feel good about. Unfortunately, the film wasn't a success. It was not well-received. There were things that went wrong on the picture. But I don't want to dwell on them."

In his 40-year film career, Guillermin has racked up some impressive credits. He was even offered a Bond film to direct. "Cubby [producer Albert R. Broccoli] wanted me to do one, but I just didn't feel right about it."

Luckily, he still feels good about making movies. "You know, there's really nothing like an exciting film on a big screen," John Guillermin pauses. "Hopefully, I've made a few in my career."