

Regulars: Jay Cocks, Chuck Jones,  
Herman Weinberg, Gene Youngblood

JAN 1981

# TAKE ONE

Nicholas Ray:  
**REBEL**  
a major  
interview

plus reviews of:  
Network, Carrie,  
Rocky, Bugsy



JANUARY 1977

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TAKE ONE is published monthly by Unicorn Publishing Corp., Box 1778, Station B, Montréal, Québec, Canada H3B 3L3 (514-843-7733) and Box 95, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6H 4E1 (416-979-1984).

**National retail distributors:** For the USA: Eastern News Distributors Inc., 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10011 (212-255-5620). For the UK: South Bank Film Books, National Film Theatre, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1. For Australia: Anchor Books Pty Ltd., 590 George Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000, Australia. For Canada and elsewhere: Unicorn Publishing Corp., Box 1778, Station B, Montréal, Québec, Canada H3B 3L3 (514-843-7733).

**Subscription rates:** North America, 12 issues for \$8.00; Overseas, 12 issues for \$10.40. Airmail: Add 75 cents per issue (North America) and \$1 per issue (Overseas). Subscription sent free to individuals at prison addresses. Notice of change of address should include your old address as printed on a recent issue—please allow five weeks for processing. **Editorial information:** All manuscripts, drawings and photographs submitted must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope (or International Reply Coupon). While editors will take all reasonable care, they will not be held responsible for the loss of any such submissions. **Indexing:** TAKE ONE is indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, the International Index to Film Periodicals, and the Multi-Media Reviews Index. **Microfilm** editions of this magazine are available from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA 48106.

Second Class Mail registration number 1899. Printed at Montréal, Canada. Dewey Decimal Number: 791.43. International Standard Serial No. CN ISSN 0039-9132.

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**Postmasters:** Send Form 3579 to Take One Magazine, Box 1778, Station B, Montréal, Canada H3B 3L3. Postage paid at Montréal. Second Class postage paid at New York, New York and additional mailing offices. Printed in Canada.

Volume 5, Number 6. Published November 15, 1976.

# TAKE ONE

## UPFRONT

News, Gossip and Bazz-Fazz, including letters from our readers.

### The Essential Nick Ray



In which we present an examination of Ray's work and weltanschauung, plus news about his most recent activities.

### Nick Ray: Rebel!

Nicholas Ray, Mike Goodwin, and Naomi Wise talk about Ray's career in and out of Hollywood.

### Director in Aspic

Jay Cocks discusses where all that adulation can take you.

### Latest Flash

Up to the minute news about Ray's projected film, *City Blues*, and his other current interests.

### Marilyn's Story

Marilyn Chambers' version of what happened with *City Blues*.

### "Doctor, I Have These Strange Dreams..."

Frank Jackson leads us down the jungle path into a world of shadows.

### Eliza of the Spirits

Gordon Sheppard took nine years to make a unique feature film; Elizabeth Wajnborg gives us the background, and Sheppard talks about getting it seen.

## THE REGULARS

Columns by regulars Claude Daigneault, Robert Fiedel, Chuck Jones, Michael Mayer, Bob Parent, Herman Weinberg, and Gene Youngblood, plus *Dish Night*, and *Over-looked and Under-rated*.

## FILM REVIEWS

Reviews of *Bugsy Malone* and *Rocky*, *Carrie*, *The Clown Murders* and *Death Weekend*, *Chulas Fronteras*, *Network*, and *Folies Bourgeoises*; by James Monaco, Susan Schenker, Gary McCallum, Michael Goodwin, George Morris, and Geoffrey Minish.

## BOOKS

Book News and Reviews plus our regular checklist of just-published film books by George L. George.

## INFO

A complete list of sources for 16mm versions of films mentioned in this issue, plus conferences to attend, film festivals to enter, and our classifieds.

## PUNDITS' PAGE

A handy-dandy guide to some of this season's major films in the form of nuggets gleaned from the writings of some of America's major movie critics, compiled by Susan Schenker.

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# "Doctor, I have these strange dreams..."

## (Mythic Elements in the Simian Cinema)

By Frank Jackson

Few films in the history of the cinema have spellbound audiences to the degree that **King Kong** has. In many ways the film is a period piece: the Depression atmosphere pervades the opening, and the acting and pacing are in keeping with contemporaneous movies. Certainly the superb special effects engineered by Willis O'Brien help the movie transcend its early-thirties roots, but if we are to explain why the film has become a part of American folklore (and why so many film buffs regard the current remake as cinematic sacrilege), we must look beyond what we see on the screen or hear on the soundtrack, and speculate on the underlying meanings of the film.

On a superficial level **King Kong** is a rousing adventure story; on a deeper level it is an allegory of the rise of consciousness and civilization, and the repression of the primitive and unconscious. Admittedly, this is a heady, heavy assertion, deserving of explanation. I seriously doubt that those who collaborated on the film (and **King Kong** is an excellent example of anti-*auteur* cinema) intended it to have such significance — and it's just as well, for if they had, the film probably would have been a dry dissertation, rather than a compelling experience.

Light and darkness are prevalent symbols in art, and their polarity is particularly important in **King Kong**. In keeping with the conventional use of these symbols, light stands for reason, knowledge, and civilization; and darkness for ignorance, irrationality, and primitivism. The only brightly-lit scene occurs when the sailors and film crew land on the island — the sunlight heralding the arrival of civilized man in a primitive domain. But once they go beyond the big wall and into the jungle, daylight only partially penetrates the mist and dense foliage, and the light of civilized man is reduced to a few meager torches. That we are in a jungle of the mind is underscored by the extensive use of background matte paintings and studio sets. No jungle on earth could compete with this dark, tangled, foreboding world created by human imagination. Kong is king of this domain of darkness, and even when he ventures beyond the wall, darkness accompanies him: his attack on the native village and his New York rampage are nocturnal. Light is his foe: the first time he is subdued, the flash from the bomb lights up the beach; the photographers' flash bulbs rouse him again; and the airplanes attack him at sunrise. The underlying cause of Kong's downfall is his fascination with light-haired, light-skinned Ann Darrow. The dark-haired, dark-skinned natives, some of whom wear ape costumes for a ceremonial dance, are equally fascinated with her. "Blonds are scarce around here," notes Carl Denham.

**Frank Jackson**, is a free-lance writer presently based in Dallas.



DAVID HANEY

Symbols of consciousness and unconsciousness parallel the symbols of light and darkness. The prehistoric beasts which attack the men are symbols of the unconscious: they are much larger than man, and frequently threaten to swallow him up (in the uncensored version, even Kong tastes a few people). Life in the jungle is one battle after another; chaos seems to rule. But that may be a superficial judgment: Anton Ehrenzweig's books (*The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* and *The Hidden Order of Art*) presume that the unconscious has an order all its own, which the conscious mind cannot fathom. This may be an acknowledgement of the popular phrase "the law of the jungle." On Denham's map, one notes that the land beyond the wall takes up most of the space on the island. The human settlement on the peninsula is miniscule by comparison. This geographical configuration is analogous to Freud's psychiatric dictum that the conscious mind is just the tip of the iceberg. Indeed Freud "mapped" the unconscious and conscious minds in a similar diagram, which appears on page 14 of *The Ego and the Id*. This may be a far-fetched analogy, but it becomes more intriguing when we note that the mountain which dominates the island is called *Skull Mountain*. The analogy is further amplified by the immense wall which "represses" Kong and the other beasts of the jungle. It is also worth noting that Kong — the unconscious — can be summoned at will by the natives' gong — just as we voluntarily fantasize or give ourselves up to sleep (dreams). But just as Dr. Jekyll loses control and involuntarily gives way to Mr. Hyde, so does the uninvited Kong return to wreak destruction. "There's something on that island that no white man has ever seen!" exults Denham, and he could be referring not just to Kong, but to the vast netherworld of the unconscious, which civilization largely represses. Civilized man is an intruder on the island where Kong and the unconscious reign; Kong is an intruder on the island (Manhattan) where civilization and consciousness reign.

Just as man must fight Kong, who represents an earlier stage of human evolution, so must Kong do battle with his evolutionary ancestors (reptiles). Kong is humanized wherever possible. Like primitive man, he utilizes simple tools. His facial expressions encompass a wide range of feelings. He is often an inquisitive child, as when he plays with the broken jaws of the tyrannosaurus and the limp body of the serpent after slaying them, or when he sniffs his hand after unwrapping Fay Wray in the uncensored version. As a result of these endearing moments, Kong's death is tragic: the audience does not cheer when Kong dies. Of how many movie monsters can this be said?

When Kong climbs to the top of the Empire State Building (in 1933, the world's tallest building — hence, the pinnacle of civilization), his ascendance symbolized the overthrow of the conscious mind, a temporary regression in man's evolution. Dino DeLaurentiis' decision to use the World Trade Center for his contemporary remake displays a tacit understanding of the symbolic importance of the climax. The airplanes — capable of achieving greater heights than any building — are the only representatives from civilization that can return Kong to his rightful place: the ground floor. The ancient Greek equivalent of this story is the myth of Icarus. Overreaching don't pay, as Huck Finn said.

The sexual implications of **King Kong** are overt: references to beauty and the beast occur in the epigraph, Denham's post-mortem speech, and at various other points in the film. If females do have rape fantasies, as many psychoanalysts assert, then **King Kong** would come near the top of the list. But Ann Darrow victimizes Kong as surely as he does her. After all, Ann survives; Kong does not. Before she enters his life, Kong loves 'em and leaves 'em — at least, that is a delicate way of describing what he does to the maidens who have been sacrificed to him. But when Kong falls for Ann (intentional pun), it marks the establishment of a pair-bond, a primary relationship in all human societies. Or as anthropologist Weston LaBarre put it in successive chapter headings for his book *The Human Animal*, "Father Comes Home to Stay"... "And Makes It Legal." Throughout the film Kong and Jack Driscoll engage in a struggle for dominance in a burlesque of human courtship. Though Driscoll does not actually kill Kong, the airplanes were his idea.

Some of these speculations may seem preposterous to the skeptical reader. It's the iceberg phenomenon surfacing again: imagine such escapist fare containing more powerful symbolism than an art film! But many first-rate minds have explored the meanings behind the legends and folklores of other cultures; we should dignify our own products with no less respect.