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PLUS

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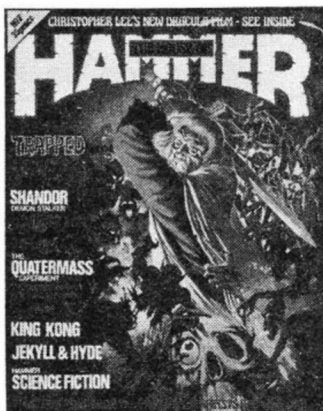
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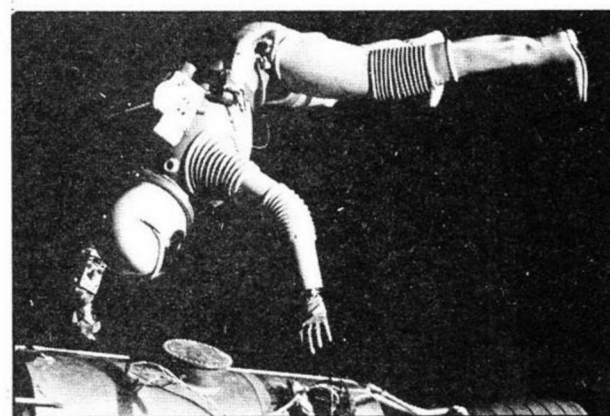
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King Kong



THE NEW KING KONG
review by John Brosnan

THERE'S a scene in the Dino De Laurentiis version of *King Kong* where one of the characters points to the trail of damage left by the rampaging Kong and asks his disbelieving companion: "What do ya think did that . . . a guy in a monkey suit?" And the answer to that, I'm afraid, is a resounding YES! For, despite all the publicity to the contrary, the new *King Kong* is just a guy in a monkey suit—one that sometimes resembles a costume left over from Toho Studios in Japan.

The original Kong, as you all must know, was a number of models, ranging in size from about 6 inches to a foot, and was brought to life by stop-motion photography (i.e.; the models were adjusted by hand between each frame of film that was shot, and the result was then combined with the live action). Now model animation is a very expensive, time-consuming process and, even though it gives the best results, modern film makers tend to avoid using it, with the exception of Ray Harryhausen.

Yet the 1933 *King Kong* is the most famous example of model animation in the history of the cinema and one would have thought that De Laurentiis wouldn't have dared to re-make it if he hadn't intended to somehow surpass it in that same field. But no—he claimed he was going to out-do the original by using a *full-size* model.

In fact, one of the publicity blurbs accompanying the film says: "The Kong that looms on the screen is an ingenious 40 foot mechanical monster, weighing 6½ tons, able to cover 15 feet in a single stride, electronically controlled by a complex hydraulic valve system that can roll his eyes and give 16 separate movements to his hands." Yes, and my name's Fay Wray. As far as I could see the 40 foot model was only used in one sequence, and it looked terrible—in other words it looked like a 40 foot mechanical model—and it didn't even match up in appearance with the guy in the suit. I will admit, though, that the mechanical hand, which features prominently in the film, is an impressive and realistic piece of engineering.

Of course, the big question is—how does the film as a whole compare with the original? And the answer to that is—not very well. On the credit side De Laurentiis has a better cast and a better script—some of the dialogue is genuinely funny—but his overall story is much weaker. And as a film the original Kong is much better constructed, it moves at a faster pace and has many more thrills. For instance, after the sequence where Fay Wray is grabbed from the altar by Kong, the film moves at neck-break speed right the way through to the end, whereas in the De Laurentiis version everything almost comes to a grinding halt several times during the remainder of the film. Once again the fault lies with the limitations of the special effects—many of the great set-pieces of the original, such as Kong's fights with the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and the pterodactyl, are missing . . . even that great moment when Fay Wray and Bruce Cabot attempt to escape from Kong's mountain lair by climbing down the vine, only to have him reel them in like fish on a line.

But in the new film many of the thrills have been replaced by great dollops of bathos, the emphasis being placed on the tragedy of the situation rather than the spectacle. The original



Kong had pathos too but it wasn't dwelt upon at the cost of slowing down the film—the makers were well aware that if you asked your audience to seriously consider the situation, a love affair between a girl and a 40 foot ape, you would simply be inviting them to recognise the absurdity of the whole thing rather than just sit back and enjoy the ride—so they pulled out all the visual stops and, almost by accident, ended up by producing one of the cinema's great works of art. The De Laurentiis team, however, tried to have it *all* ways: they tried to make a spectacle, a spoof, a tragedy and an allegory about the "rape of the environment" by big business . . . and ended up by producing a big zero.

But despite all the above, I have to admit the new *Kong* is worth a visit, and if you can manage to block out all memories of the original while you're viewing it, you might even find it

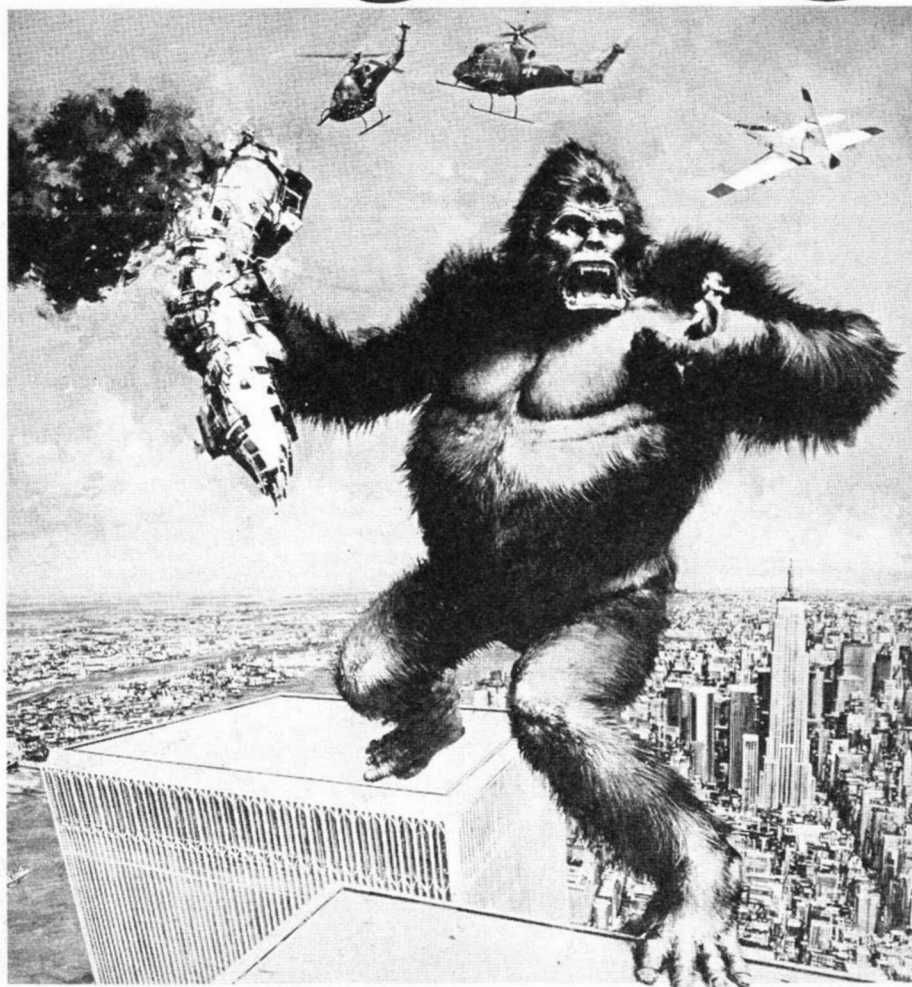


rather entertaining. As I mentioned before, there are lots of good, funny lines and the cast is excellent, in particular Charles Grodin as Wilson, the cynical oil company executive who is determined to bring back "the big one" at all costs, even though it's not exactly what his company had in mind.

Jeff Bridges is fine as Prescott, Kong's rival for the girl, and, surprising as it may seem, Jessica Lange makes an adequate substitute for Fay Wray. She's an updated version, of course—in skimpier costumes, more calculatingly ambitious, and with a tendency to waffle on about astrology (she tells the bemused Kong that he's an Aries) but with an obvious streak of vulnerability that all true damsels in distress need to be successful. Pity she couldn't have been teamed up with the *real* King Kong instead of that guy in the monkey suit.



King Kong



THE STORY

In a competitive rush to explore every conceivable spot on Earth for hidden sources of oil, the Petrox Company has sent into Micronesia an expedition headed by Fred Wilson (Charles Grodin) and scientist Bagley (Rene Auberjonois) to investigate a report of rich underwater oil deposits off fog-shrouded Skull Island.

Before leaving port, Wilson's ship picks up a stow-away, Jack Prescott (Jeff Bridges). A Princeton University zoologist, he is drawn to Skull Island by ancient reports of a prehistoric monster living there.

On his discovery, Wilson is unimpressed by Prescott's credentials, and accuses him of being a spy for a rival oil company. However, their confrontation is disrupted by the picking up of a lifeboat. Inside is a lovely young woman, Dwan (Jessica Lange), who was on her way to Hong Kong with a film producer when the boat blew up, leaving her the sole survivor. With its extra passengers the ship sails on to Skull Island.

After coming ashore in small landing crafts, the Petrox crew plus Wilson, Prescott, Bagley and Dwan make their way over rugged mountains to a village resting at the base of a huge wall. After watching a native ritual—in which warriors chant "Kong . . . Kong . . . Kong" as a sacrificial girl is carried to a gate in the wall—Prescott is convinced a monster-sized primate lives on Skull Island. Wilson remains sceptical.

But later, whilst fishing from a rowboat, Dwan is

captured by the natives who carry her through the Wall to Kong's sacrificial altar. From the jungle comes the sound of something crashing and as the natives go wild, Dwan looks up to see a 40-foot ape in front of her. As she swoons, Kong gently lifts her off the altar.

As soon as they hear of this, while Wilson remains on the ship, Prescott heads a rescue party. But disaster strikes when an angry Kong shows up as the men are crossing a deep ravine. Prescott and one other survive the ape's attack, and while the other returns to the beach to inform Wilson of events, Prescott goes on alone.

Kong, by now smitten with Dwan, is expressing his deep love by crooning to her when a giant snake slithers up to them. In a death struggle, Kongs kills the snake, but while distracted in combat, Prescott makes off with Dawn. The raging ape gives chase.

Back at the Wall, Wilson and his men have dug a pit filled with canisters of chloroform (something all oil tankers carry?). Prescott and an exhausted Dwan just make it through the gate when it is bolted. Kong smashes down the gate and, overcome by the fumes, falls into the pit.

Knocked out and chained, Kong is put in the hull of the supertanker as Wilson tells Prescott and Dwan of his plan to introduce Kong to the public in New York. Both balk at the money-making scheme, defending Kong's right to remain in his natural habitat. But

Wilson is not to be put off, and the ship heads away for New York.

On deck, Dwan and Prescott embrace and her scarf floats down to the imprisoned ape. Kong goes wild with passion and is stopped from demolishing the boat only by Dwan's soothing words.

Prescott will have nothing to do with Kong's exploitation, but Dwan is contractually bound to appear in the circus at a New York park. So, when they reach America, before thousands of spectators, Kong is brought in concealed under a huge Petrox gas pump.

Dwan, resplendent in a silver gown, is on the specially constructed altar when the pump is lifted, revealing Kong. Flash bulbs begin exploding and Kong, thinking Dwan is in danger, breaks his steel cage.

Amidst the turmoil, Prescott whisks Dwan to an elevated subway and Wilson is left weeping on the ground. Kong, in pursuit, wrecks the train and follows them to a Manhattan bar, where his giant hand scoops up Dwan.

Kong's ape instinct makes him seek shelter above the ground. So, in the concrete jungle of New York, he seeks safety with her atop the city's tallest building. The World Trade Centre, Kong straddles the twin towers as army helicopters swarm over him. As long as Dwan is in Kong's hand, they will not fire but—in the classic tradition of beauty and the beast—Kong makes the ultimate sacrifice to save the woman he loves, and thinking her in danger, lowers Dwan to safety. Immediately, the army attacks and Kong plummets to the ground.

As hordes of reporters descend on Kong's body, his last sight is of Dwan standing near him in tears. Prescott walks away from Dwan, knowing that they could have stayed together only if Kong had lived. His death would only remind them of the cruelty and deceit that went into taking Kong from his jungle paradise.

The Cast

Dwan Jessica Lange
Prescott Jeff Bridges
Wilson Charles Grodin
Captain Ross John Randolph
Bagley Rene Auberjonois

Technical Credits

Directed By John Guillermin
Produced By Dino De Laurentiis
Screenplay By Lorenzo Semple, Jr.
Music Composed and Conducted By John Barry
Miniature Designer Aldo Puccini
Costume Designer Moss Mabry
King Kong Technical Advisors Rick Baker
William Shephard

King Kong Creators:

Designer Carlo Rambaldi
Special Effects Glen Robinson
Moulding Don Chandler
Stunt Co-ordinator Bill Couch
Running Time 134 minutes approx. Certificate A



