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TIME



**HERE
COMES
KING
KONG**

A LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

"Kong is a tough interview," reports Los Angeles Correspondent Leo Janos. "In fact, he makes some legendary tough ones that I've encountered, like Marlon Brando and Katharine Hepburn, seem easy." For this week's cover story on the making of the 1976 version of *King Kong*, Janos talked with Producer Dino de Laurentiis, Director John Guillermin and many members of the film's cast and crew of thousands. They were no difficulty. The hard job, literally, was making contact with Gorilla Mime Rick Baker, who stood in for the 40-ft. "audioanimatronic" Kong in scenes that were shot in miniature.

When Janos came upon Baker on a Paramount sound stage last week, the actor was still in full Pongidaean regalia: from hairy ape costume down to the special contact lenses he wore to simulate the smoky, mysterious eyes of a gorilla. "You need eye contact with a person you're interviewing," says Janos. "And those apelike eyes were chillingly disconcerting." He finally decided to talk with Baker after hours, when they could meet man to man, so to speak. Sighed Baker as his interviewer departed: "Now you know what it must have been like to be King Kong—so powerful and so lonely."

Janos has been covering the show-business beat for two years, working on cover subjects as varied as Jack Nicholson and Mary Tyler Moore. He came to TIME in 1968 after serving as a speechwriter for L.B.J. and then Veep Hubert Humphrey. Says Janos, a former Houston bureau chief who has also reported on space shots and astronauts' moon walks: "Even a superspectacular like *Kong* is pale stuff compared with watching a rocket lift off at Cape Kennedy."

The cover photograph and color pictures that accompany our *King Kong* story were taken by John Bryson, former assistant picture editor of LIFE magazine, who was on the set for much of the last year. Richard Schickel, who wrote the story, is a movie historian as well as a critic. In fact, he has just completed a nine-month stint as coproducer and writer of *Life Goes to the Movies*, a three-hour TV retrospective of movies made between 1936 and 1972, which will be shown on NBC Oct. 31. "I saw hundreds of old movies for the LIFE project," says Schickel, "and was reminded that there was an innocent exuberance in the making of them that showed up in the final films. Today's movies tend to have the smell of cost accounting." But, after seeing an hour and a half of the '76 *Kong*, Schickel reports: "The people who made it weren't counting pennies and were clearly having fun. Their enthusiasm shines through."

DE LAURENTIIS, JANOS & FRIEND

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Ralph P. Davidson

INDEX

Cover Story_____64	Environment_____63	Music_____78
Color_____65	Forum_____6	Nation_____10
	Law_____75	People_____47
Art_____76	Medicine_____71	Press_____48
Books_____83	Milestones_____87	Sexes_____88
Cinema_____79		Show Business_____64
Economy		Theater_____87
& Business_____50		World_____25

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"From thy full-moon wedding with the creature who touches heaven, lady, God preserve thee."

According to the marvelously clever, yet touching script for the new \$24 million film version of *King Kong*, this starkly poetic, spookily enigmatic warning was found—drawn in blood, naturally—on the thwart of an empty lifeboat discovered adrift in the South Pacific in 1749. Next to it, natch, there was a "likeness of some huge slouchy humanoid thing."

Chills. Shuddery anticipation, as Jeff Bridges, playing the Princeton paleontologist who is but the first of millions who will soon believe that Kong lives, speaks this line in the wardroom of an oil-company ship. The vessel is exploring the ocean's remoter reaches in search of a petroleum strike that the expedition's comically cynical leader (Charles Grodin) is convinced will turn the energy crisis around.

Like the first *King Kong*, produced 43 years ago, the new version plunges one quickly into the heart of that special critical darkness indigenous to the movies. On the face of it, nothing could be more preposterous than this story of the love affair between the oddest couple in popular culture: a blonde whose beauty is matched only by her dimness of mind (at least in the original) and an ape who is 40 ft. tall, fierce of mien and manner, yet at heart just a big adolescent, bumbling spectacularly through the throes of his first—often literally crushing—crush. At best it is low camp, at worst a lunacy that should have sent people howling into the night long before Kong hauled himself to the top of the Empire State Building for the climactic battle with the biplanes that is one of the great iconic sequences of movie history.

Yet somehow it worked, back in the early days of talking pictures, and damned if it does not look like it is going to work again, in a supposedly more sophisticated age. The ultimate triumph of special effects over common sense? A weird sexual charge, heavy in portent, reassuringly innocent in presentation? A comic strip rendering of a myth dredged up out of the collective unconscious and splashed so boldly on the screen that the audience is awed into acceptance by its sheer audacity? Or is it, finally, just an act of primal showmanship, a Barnum-like invitation to admit to ourselves that we are all members of the great fraternity of suckerhood and simply revel in the release of cultural inhibitions that admission sometimes encourages?

Big unanswerable questions those. It is perhaps ungrateful even to ask them, so excellently is the first hour and a half of the film playing to carefully selected audiences. The tiny groups huddled in a cavernous screening room on the MGM back lot feel the beginnings of that rarest of reactions—the warm glow that comes over people in the presence of a confidently conceived, exuberantly executed work of popular movie art.

Last week Producer Dino de Laurentiis offered this sample of his Christmas-trade epic to the National Association of Theater Owners Convention in Los Angeles and drew a rave response. Already he has recouped his entire cost in the form of advances from these shrewd and, currently, very gloomy entrepreneurs. The theater owners devoted the rest of the week mainly to alternating spasms of anger and depression. Hollywood, they say, is not giving them anywhere near the number of films they would like to have; most of those that do come down the pipes continue straight on down the tubes shortly after opening.

Ever willing to clutch at straws, movie people have been more than anxious to clutch at the hairy hide of the wonderfully exploitable gorilla who is not only house-high but has a soul as well. Ever since production was announced, *King Kong* had the potential to be what the industry annually requires, a "big bopper," as they say in the trade. A gen-

uine big bopper is something on the order of *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist*, *The Sting* or, to name the film most like *Kong*, *Jaws*. It should generate domestic grosses of \$50 million to \$100 million and, almost as important, a public excitement that spreads from the particular film to movies in general. Such a sequence reassures film people that the huge risks inherent in their game need not be in vain and that they are not presiding over the final agony of an industry that has been in decline for over a quarter of a century.

Thus, whether there is a full moon out that night or not, the wedding of "the creature who touches heaven" with an audience that is bound to touch the tens of millions is a devoutly wished-for consummation. It begins Dec. 17 with *Kong's* simultaneous release in an unprecedented 1,200 U.S. theaters and is something movie folk anticipate with tremulous excitement. It can only grow more giddy as the \$15 million promotion and advertising campaign mounts in fury during the coming weeks.

All of this is swell for the producer; for Paramount, which put up \$6 million in return for the U.S. distribution rights; and for the rest of the backers, mostly European bankers. But the really good news—assuming the last half of the picture is as exciting as the first—is that the movie lives up to its potential. *King Kong* looks to be a dream of a bopper.

Looking back now, with principal photography long since completed and Director John Guillermin supervising the finishing touches on the 2-hr. 15-min. final cut, it is difficult to see how anyone could have doubted the outcome. Yet *Kong*

COVER STORY

HERE COMES KING KONG

has been fraught with perils—mostly having to do with the technical problems of bringing it off—that have bent minds and budgets ever since it went into production last January.

No one ever doubted the strength of the material, however goony it sounds when outlined on the printed page. *Kong* was the invention of one of Dino de Laurentiis' spiritual forebears in the movie business, a pioneer aviator and movie-maker named Merian C. Cooper. He knew instinctively that what the *Beauty and the Beast* legend might lose in subtlety by converting the beast into a gigantic ape it would gain in raw power: such a creature is capable not merely of defiling his human bride but of killing her with sexual kindness should he accidentally lose control of his basically good and innocent nature. Cooper also understood that lots of wow special effects would distract people from dwelling morbidly or censoriously on the erotic implications of his tale.

BELOW, KING KONG IN A FIERCE HUMOR. AT RIGHT, HE PROFFERS TENDER ATTENTIONS
TO A FRIGHTENED, AFFRONTED JESSICA LANGE.



Photographs by John Bryson.



COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP: KONG STOMPS THROUGH A TERRIFIED SHEA STADIUM CROWD; NATIVES OFFER BEAUTY TO SOOTHE THE SAVAGE BEAST; IN PURSUIT OF JESSICA, KONG TRASHES A MANHATTAN BUILDING; THE KING FALLS FROM A WORLD TRADE CENTER TOWER, A COVER BOY TO THE END.



How right he was. *Kong* opened just after F.D.R. closed the banks in 1933. Even so, it grossed \$90,000 during its first four days' run in New York and has sustained its popularity through an infinite succession of re-releases in the decades that followed. More important, it achieved the legendary status of classic kitsch, the charm of which remained undimmed by innumerable el cheapo rip-offs and overexposure on TV. The great monkey has become a pop culture staple in everything from cartoons to ad campaigns. Even before the movie's release, kids who could not possibly have seen the old *Kong* are eagerly awaiting the big fella's new incarnation. As for adults, even members of the testy, loyal cult that has grown up around the original film, how can they resist an à la mode *Kong*, coming at them off a wide screen with all the latest in special-effects techniques?

Special effects, of course, lie at the heart of the movie's appeal. Yet it may be that for all the ballyhoo about mechanics, the real secret of *Kong's* success will lie in the intelligence with which the screenwriter, Lorenzo Semple Jr. (creator of TV's *Batman*), approached the problem of updating *Kong*.



DIRECTOR GUILLERMIN CONTEMPLATING HIS 40-FT. STAR

"I just slap my head and say, 'Oh my God, this is an inspiration! I remake the old Kong. I give them quality.'"

"I'm not saying *Kong* is a serious film—with quotation marks around serious," says Semple. "What I am saying is that I think the script was just serious enough—without any snide winking at the audience. The trick was to walk a delicate line between screen romance and high camp."

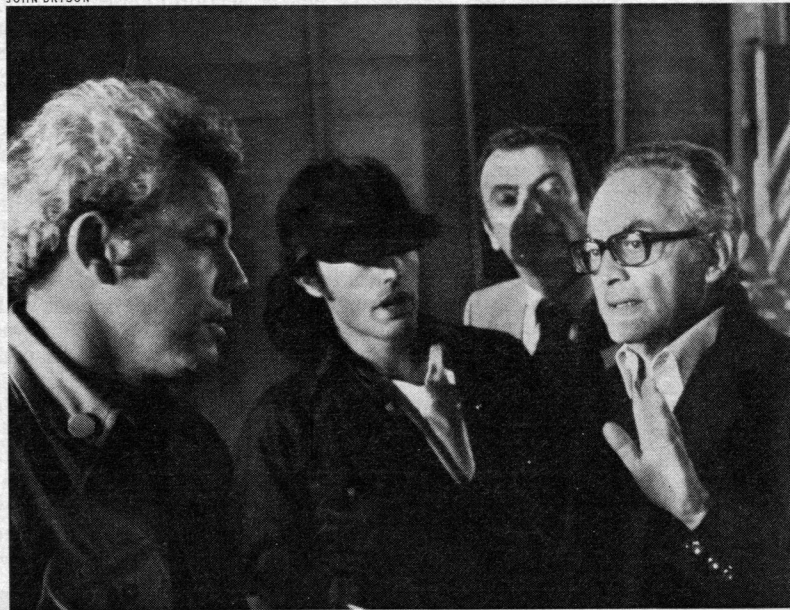
Delicate may sound like the last word to apply to *King Kong*, but that is the quality that springs to mind as the completed portions of the new film unroll. Semple has retained the original plot line; all the major incidents everyone remembers are still present, believably updated. But the talky, simple-minded exposition of the original has vanished. Characters have been given at least two dimensions (one more than they had in 1933) and some genuinely witty lines. The movie is on to itself. It knows it is trafficking in absurdity. What matters is that this ironic self-awareness does not shatter the drama or the audience's growing sympathy for both the terrified girl whom the natives capture in order to sacrifice her to their ape god, and the befuddled creature who cannot help loving her unwisely, not to say impossibly.

Still, one cannot avoid the fact that it is word about the film's spectacular effects that has attracted most of the pre-release interest in *Kong*, and will surely bring in the people early in the run. And, of course, troubles with the hardware have created most of the drama during *Kong's* filming. Indeed, it is fair to say that if there is something like a common

denominator in the big bopper genre, it is special effects. Among the important elements drawing people to films as diverse as *The Exorcist*, *Earthquake* and *Jaws* was the sheer movie magic they featured. From the start it was generally, and to some degree falsely, understood that the new *Kong* would stand or fall on how realistic the big monkey would seem on screen. Producer De Laurentiis, being no fool, has stressed the expense of his efforts to satisfy the shrewdest eye as to *Kong's* believability, while playing up the drama of doing so against a self-imposed deadline of release before Christmas 1976.

That deadline arose out of De Laurentiis' passion for the picture, an obsession that came upon him suddenly one morning a couple of years back, when he still had his headquarters in New York. It was Dino's duty to awaken his daughter Francesca, then 15, to get her off for school, but as often as he performed that task he failed to notice the old movie poster in her room. Then one morning he had to return a second time to shake her into wake-

JOHN BRYSON



PRODUCER DE LAURENTIIS (RIGHT) WORKS OUT PROBLEMS WITH STAFF

fulness, and that was the day he saw the poster—which advertised the original *Kong*. "I just slap my head and say, 'Oh my God, this is an inspiration.' I remake the old *Kong*."

His instinct was sound. "I study the big-box-office movies in the last 30 years," says De Laurentiis in an English fractured by enthusiasm. "Nearly all are family movies. I see *Kong* as the greatest love story ever made, a picture for everyone." The trouble was, when Dino fell in love with *Kong*, almost everyone he went to for financing told him he was crazy, that the only interest in *Kong* was purely nostalgic and that \$10 million—his first, modest budget estimate—was too much to risk on that quasi-emotion.

But it is usually a bad idea to argue with De Laurentiis' instincts. They have served him well for 57 years. The son of a Neapolitan pasta manufacturer, he quit school at 13 to work as a salesman for his father, gravitated to movies first as an actor, then—quite quickly—as a producer. Eventually he produced Fellini's first two international hits, *La Strada* and *Nights of Cabiria*, stealing a portion of the latter's negative to prevent the director's including a long monologue that De Laurentiis was convinced slowed the picture down.

It was the sexy *Bitter Rice*, starring Sylvana Mangano, who became his wife, that made Dino his first fortune. He used the money to build Dino Città, his film studio in Rome. Thereafter he plunged big on spectacles like *War and Peace* and *The Bible*; tides of money ebbed and flowed. Four years ago, he moved his operations to the U.S. The reason: "I begin

SHOW BUSINESS

to sniff trouble in Italia. I no like what I smell in the politics or the economy." He now says that his only mistake was not moving a decade earlier. "No other country makes room for foreigners. An American go to Europe to make movies, he be shut out. But European come here, everyone say, 'O.K., let's see what he can do.' My God, how wonderful!"

There have been flops, of course, like *The Valachi Papers*, but with *Serpico* and *Death Wish* De Laurentiis has made killings as well as an admirable reputation as a man who is as good as his word if he makes a verbal commitment (and a bad enemy to someone who breaks his word). Says Paramount Boss Barry Diller: "Ever since Dino arrived on the scene, the major studios have had to be much more on their toes. Dino moves fast and makes all his own decisions—none of this corporate delay for him." If *Kong* hits big—in the *Jaws* category—De Laurentiis could make \$100 million.

That would suit him fine since he lives baronially, if quietly, in a huge hilltop estate in Beverly Hills, recently purchased from a member of the Doheny family. He has the mandatory electric gate and swimming pool, and a dining room table that could very nearly accommodate the *Kong* cast. But money is not as much fun to him as the game in which it can be made or lost. Says an associate: "Dino is never happier than in a *King Kong* situation, where the stakes are enormous, where he can win or lose everything."

It was doubtless the appeal to his gaming instinct that caused him to enter into negotiations with RKO for rights to remake the original while rounding up a portion of his financing. Then in June 1975 Universal released *Jaws*. It was a picture about a giant creature, and it started producers—notably Universal—thinking about other big-animal properties, like *Kong*. Universal also entered into negotiations with RKO and thought they had a deal when the sale to Dino was suddenly announced. Hurt feelings—and lawsuits—ensued. Both sides advertised start-shooting dates of Jan. 15 of this year, thinking to scare the other off. Says De Laurentiis: "We need four months to get ready to shoot, but I gotta show Universal that I'm ready when they are."

Eyeball to eyeball, Dino blinked briefly by proposing that he join forces with Universal to make the picture. "But they want their script. She is just a remake of *Kong*, set in the 1930s. I say, 'No, we gotta do the picture in modern day only.



BUILDING FULL-SCALE KONG'S SHEA STADIUM CAGE
3½ tons of aluminum, 1,012 lbs. of horsehair and \$1.7 million.

I do mine, you go to court.' " They did and eventually settled for a tidy 11% of De Laurentiis' take.

De Laurentiis is not likely to miss Universal's share too much. What he must begrudge his rivals, however, is the hasty start their maneuverings imposed on him. To be sure, Lorenzo Semple had been set to work on his script some months before. Dino had signed British Director John Guillermin, 50. It was a shrewd choice. Guillermin had demonstrated his ability to handle large-scale action on *The Towering Inferno*, as well as more intimate projects like *Guns at Batasi*. Hard-driving and hot-tempered, Guillermin is a technical perfectionist. According to associates, he is also a man temperamentally suited to withstand the frustrations of a production that was, as one of them puts it, "just day after day of *coitus interruptus*." Everything—notably the mechanisms that controlled Kong and parts of Kong—kept breaking down.

The schedule forced Guillermin to start shooting before anyone had a clear conception of how Kong should look and how he should be made to work. Though the new *Kong's* technicians correctly hold the first *Kong's* special effects—magnificent for their time—in high esteem, no one wanted to duplicate what had been done then (as well as in hundreds of inexpensive monster pictures since): build a miniature model of the ape, place him in scaled-down sets, animate him through the use of stop-motion photography, and then blend this footage with that employing live actors. From the first, De Laurentiis had, characteristically, leaned toward the colossal. When he was talking Guillermin into signing on for the project,



THE MIGHTY KONG'S CONTROL BOARD, WHICH REQUIRED 20 MEN TO OPERATE
"It was just day after day of *coitus interruptus*."

he had cried, "For you, John. I make 100-ft. monster."

Well, almost. On Stage 17 at Metro there rests a creature 40 ft. tall when fully assembled, supported by a 3½-ton aluminum frame, his flesh made of latex and covered by 1,012 lbs. of horsetail hair purchased from an Argentine supplier, every hank of which was sewn into place individually. His innards consist of 3,100 ft. of hydraulic hose and 4,500 ft. of electrical wiring. He is animated by a team of 20 operators each working a lever that controls a single movement. The cost: \$1.7 million. Though this mighty construct was used extensively in only one sequence, he was worth every penny. "He's Dino's Fort Knox gold," says a production associate, since he served as an earnest of the producer's realistic intentions. And it is impossible to tell in the finished product where his work ends and that of more mobile and manageable representations of Kong take over.

Most of the action sequences, in which audiences see Kong rampaging around his jungle habitat or tearing around New

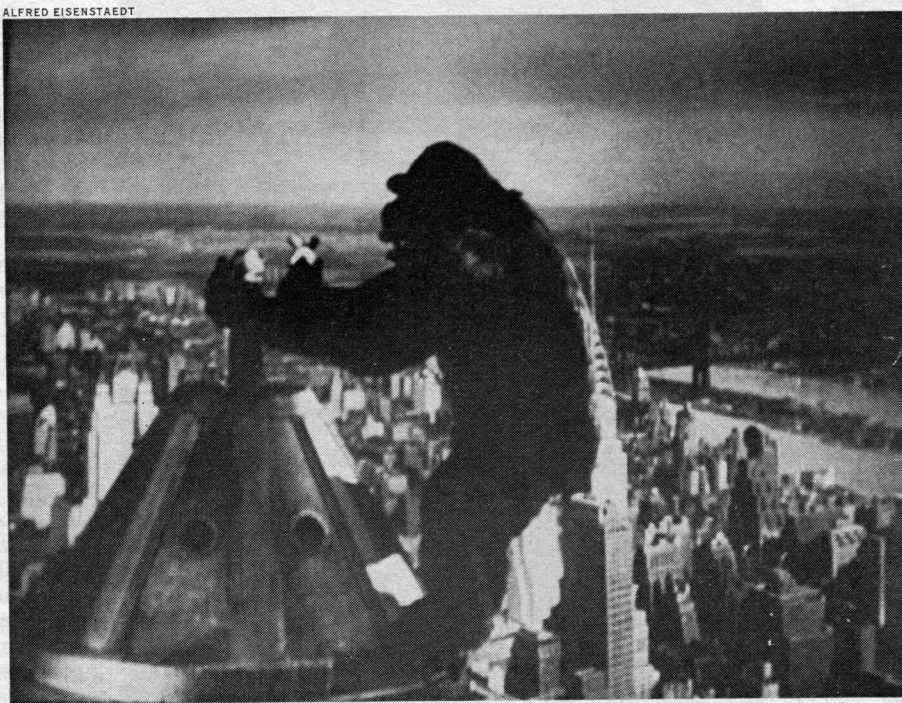
York, were done by a man in a monkey suit. He had five different masks to wear, depending on Kong's basic mood in the shot. The masks could be made to change expression—but not by Baker. Hydraulic facial "muscles" tug the features into smiles, frowns and full-scale rage. Kong in a lustful mood is a little masterpiece of technology, all controlled by a technician. Baker could not even let his own eyes be seen by the camera. "That's always been the giveaway," he says. "You can always tell a man's in the monkey suit by looking at the eyes." Therefore, he wears contact lenses that simulate a gorilla's orbs.

Possibly the most remarkable piece of Kongcraft, however, is the giant arms employed mainly to pick up and caress Jessica Lange, 27, the model-turned-actress who plays his inamorata, Dwan. The hands are 6 ft. across and the arms weigh 1,650 lbs. each. They were designed and built separate from the complete Kong body and suspended from a crane in order to lift Lange 30 or 40 ft. into the air. Again, hydraulics were used to manipulate the huge fingers, and there



FAY WRAY IN THE 1933 KONG

Even members of the original, loyal cult await the big fella's latest incarnation, which is coming on the wide screen.



THE FIRST KONG ABOUT TO MEET HIS FATE ABOVE MANHATTAN

York, were done by a man in a monkey suit. He is Rick Baker, 25, a makeup man responsible for, among other things, aging Cicely Tyson to 100-plus in television's *Miss Jane Pittman*. "Slightly dippy about gorillas," admits Baker, he began making great ape costumes as a kind of hobby long before he signed on to create Kong's face and form for De Laurentiis. Baker was pressed into service *subito* when Dino's son Federico, 21, who has screen credit as executive producer, advertised in the Hollywood trade papers for "a tall, well-built black man" to play the monkey. The ad infuriated civil rights groups and created the film's major publicity gaffe. At that point, Baker slipped into one of his own creations and began playing Kong on sets scaled so that the 6-ft. Baker would look like a 40-ft. ape against them.

Baker's intensive study of these creatures paid off. Says Guillermin: "I spent long weeks at various zoos studying gorillas, especially how they move. I was stunned when Rick put on that suit. It was just damned eerie, because he was a gorilla in every move and gesture."

Rick enjoyed it too—most of the time. "I guess disappearing into my gorilla suit and thumping my chest has something to do with a transference of power. You really do feel pretty powerful down in there." Of course, it was not all mangoes and bananas for him. The temperature went over 100° inside his latex and bearskin outfit, and Baker sweated off 5 lbs. every working day. Then, too, he was not responsible for

was great concern that they might lack fine motor skills and accidentally crush Lange. Like all the other Kong paraphernalia, they were not ready until the production was well along, and Guillermin had about run out of surrounding material to shoot. Finally the huge paws were ready, and De Laurentiis was summoned to the set to witness a test. Amidst high excitement, the great arm extended in the producer's direction and then the middle finger slowly uncurled and extended itself in the gesture recently granted respectability by the Vice President of the U.S. De Laurentiis broke up. Unfortunately, however, so did the giant arm—freezing, finger up, for a week. There were other delays. Once the mechanism began "bleeding" hydraulic fluid all over the stage. That breakdown cost two weeks.

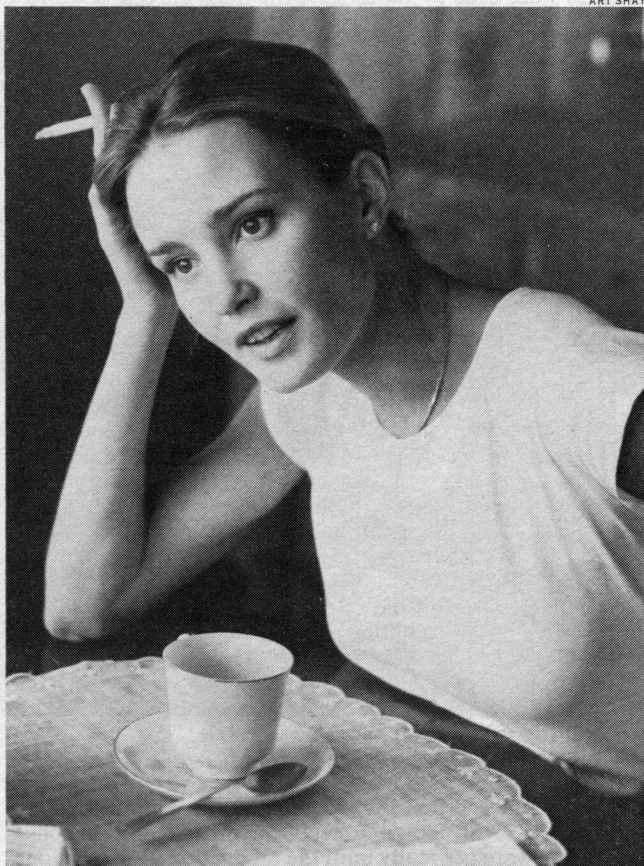
In the end, Lange had only a couple of bad times while caught in Kong's grip. Once the pursuing hand came down too hard on her, crushing her painfully against the jungle floor. In another sequence, when Kong is in a playfully amorous mood and is stroking Lange's face and shoulders, he is supposed to tap her lightly on the head. One of the technicians miscalculated and landed her a blow that caused the actress to see stars. Mostly, however, the gizmo worked amazingly well. Says Lange: "I got very close with the guys who were working the hand. I got so totally relaxed that sometimes I'd go up there and take a nap." Others who worked on

the picture commend Lange as a girl as gritty as she is pretty, gamely controlling her natural anxiety at being swept through the air, at considerable height, by an unpredictable and manifestly less-than-perfected contrivance.

The effect of these sequences is as awesome as the trouble they caused, especially in the fussy business of seamlessly melding ape and human footage—essentially by employing sophisticated double-exposure techniques. This marrying of trick and conventional photography is still going on, but the available samples indicate that the illusions work—wondrous conjurer's tricks performed on a broodingnagian scale.

The rest of the production values match the special effects. Kong's South Seas habitat was a remote spot in the Hawaiian Islands—where a honeymoon couple went to sleep on the beach one night, convinced they were removed from all worldly intrusions. They were awakened, alas, at dawn by the arrival of Dino's minions in four helicopters.

He stopped at nothing. Nine thousand extras? Get them!



ACTRESS LANGE VISITS HER PARENTS' HOME IN LAKE NEBAGAMON, WIS. "I got very close with the guys who were working the hand."

A supertanker to transport Kong to New York? Hire it! Everything about the production matched the proportions of its title character, except for one refreshingly small disaster: the infestation of the 40-ft. Kong by fleas.

Perhaps the most successful of Dino's last-minute improvisations was the casting of Jessica Lange in the old Fay Wray role. Streisand almost signed on, then backed away. Cher would have been acceptable, but was visibly pregnant when production started. Then began a search for an unknown, which followed another mythical pattern: the fashion model flown out from Manhattan for a test; a first meeting with an unimpressed producer; the discovery by the director that she had one of those faces the camera loves; the producer's quick reversal of opinion; a hasty contract signing by a girl from Cloquet, Minn., who has now made good.

Lange benefits from some of Semple's best lines. Unlike Fay Wray in the original, who was mostly called upon to scream and faint, Lange plays a sexually hip chick, a movie starlet who literally drifts into the picture as a castaway from

a wrecked yacht on which she was cruising with a movie producer who had promised her a part. Once she gets over the shock of Kong's first spectacular pickup, she treats him like all the apelike movie moguls she has had to fend off. She tries helplessness ("I can't stand heights"), anger ("You god-dam chauvinist pig ape"), some impromptu analysis after striking out at her captor ("It's a sign of insecurity, like when you knock over trees"), even guileful seduction ("I'm a Libra, what are you?"). Eventually she and Kong actually begin to build a... well, a relationship, something that was never made explicit between Wray and her big boy.

Kong, too, has greater charm than he did 43 years ago. He no longer gnaws distractedly on human beings as he did when he got anxious in the original. One of his best moments occurs when Lange, trying to escape him, falls in a mud puddle. Tenderly he picks her up and trots her off to a waterfall for a shower, dunks her in the pool below for a rinse and then, still cupping her in his paws, blows her dry with several mighty breaths.

Lange does a sort of muted Marilyn Monroe imitation in these scenes, but there is an underlying quickness and humor in her characterization. Considering that she played most of her big scenes with a thing, not an actor, and that sometimes she worked to no more than a mark on the wall where the ape would be in the finished picture, her accomplishment is considerable. "We've signed her for 700 years," says Paramount's Diller, exaggerating slightly. Lange, who for some time had led a wandering sort of existence as an art student, dancer and model, has invested some of her *Kong* salary in a home on Lake Nebagamon, Wis., where her parents now live. Just as Dwan stands on the brink of stardom at the end of *Kong*, so does Lange.

But then, so does the whole crazy venture. Perhaps the craziest thing about it is that it finally works not merely because De Laurentiis spent money on it like a man possessed but because he had, besides unlimited nerve, an unsuspected cultural impulse driving him.

For years, the earnest little film magazines have been trying to explicate Kong's appeal. He has been persuasively portrayed as a political as well as a sexual symbol. If he is monumentally powerful, he is also totally innocent, a not entirely farfetched projection of nations and races that the capitalist countries have for years exploited. In the new *Kong*, the oil company executives want to exhibit him as a symbol of corporate might, just as the movie producer wanted to exploit him as a freak in the original. It is Kong's awakening to this outrage as much as his need to find the girl that sends him to his last stand atop—this time—the World Trade Center. That final destructive binge could be seen—and lines in the script lightly suggest it—as a projection of Western fears of what might happen if the Third World should develop its potential power and strike back.

It is the innocence of Kong, whether seen politically or sexually, that overcomes resistance to his fantastical presence and involves the viewer in his strangely touching fate. De Laurentiis is not the sort of man who spends much time with film journals or in critical exegeses of his projects. But from the start he has had an instinctive understanding of Kong's strength. When he is in full cry on this subject, one feels a bit like cheering him on, as one does when Kong takes off on his final tear. Dino is, after all, the representative of a misunderstood, often unloved species: the movie producer.

But when he allows his highly emotional commitment to this project to show, one cannot help but hope the film's second half lives up to the promise of the first half, cannot help hoping no one shoots him from his perch atop the dream edifice he has constructed. "No one cry when Jaws die," Dino says, his voice rising in passion as he develops his theme. "But when the monkey die, people gonna cry. Intellectuals gonna love Konk; even film buffs who love the first Kong gonna love ours. Why? Because I no give them crap. I no spend two, three million to do quick business. I spend 24 million on my Konk. I give them quality. I got here a great love story, a great adventure. And she rated P.G. For everybody."