

Kong News



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Creation of "King Kong" monster is a tribute to the genius of the men who make movie magic

He may not be the handsomest movie star in Hollywood history, but he certainly is the biggest and hairiest, standing 40 feet tall and covered with acres of fur. He is a star in his own right, according to producer Dino De Laurentiis.

He is King Kong, the greatest movie monster of them all.

He wasn't even born a year ago. But he was alive in the minds of Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson, who had been hired by the producer to come up with a mechanical monster big enough to fill the screen in a multi-million dollar contemporary version of the classic "King Kong" story of beauty and the beast.

If Kong has any nationality, he is an Italian-American. Rambaldi is one of the most famous special effects designers in the Italian film industry, and Robinson, a Hollywood native, is a two-time Academy Award winner for "Earthquake" and "The Hindenburg."

Discussions among Rambaldi, Robinson and De Laurentiis led to an agreement that Kong had to be monster-size and mechanical, having moving arms and legs. The original intention was to have an aircraft company build King Kong from the designs evolved by Rambaldi and Robinson, but when it became necessary to rush the film into production, the decision was to have Kong coming alive on a Hollywood backlot.

Work on the Kong monster began in January, 1976, months earlier than had been originally anticipated, and at his birth on that day, he was just a pile of aluminum and wires waiting to be shaped by the skilled hands of a hundred craftsmen assembled in the workshop by Robinson.

The dimensions of Kong, a tribute to the genius of the men who make

movie magic, are staggering. He weighs 6½ tons. His skeleton is metal, mostly aluminum. His inside contains 3,100 feet of hydraulic hose and 4,500 feet of electrical wiring. His chest is 20 feet wide and his arm span is 20 feet.

He is fully functional, the first such creature conceived by Hollywood. His arms can move in 16 different positions. He can walk and turn at the waist. His eyes and mouth move. He is a very human monster, terrifying when aroused, but with the soul of a romantic lover.

The secret to his ability to move is in the proportional balance in the hydraulic valves, according to Robinson, who believes Kong should retain some of his mystery and not everything about him should be made public. But the master builder said these valves are operated by wires running through a crane to a control panel operated by six men.

While marveling at the mechanical wizardry of her ardent pursuer, Jessica Lange, who spends much of the film literally in his hand, had

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Having fallen 107 floors from the top of the World Trade Center, King Kong finds peace at last, in death.

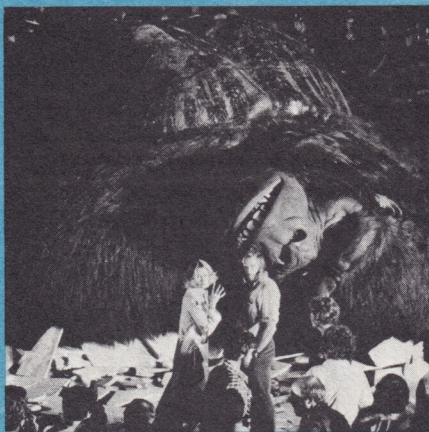
Climactic "King Kong" New York City filming was an exciting event witnessed by thousands

The 30,000 persons who took up every inch of cement in the plaza of the World Trade Center on a hot night in June proved that New Yorkers are still ape over King Kong.

Answering an advertisement in the daily newspapers to come see the filming of Dino De Laurentiis' contemporary version of "King Kong," a Paramount release, they arrived in droves by bus, car, subway and on foot, lining up patiently outside the barricades three hours before the start of shooting, waiting to see one of the most memorable death scenes in movie history.

Only 5,000 New Yorkers were needed, but six times that number showed up to be in the background for Dwan's (Jessica Lange) emotional farewell to her ardent, hairy pursuer. In size and numbers it was the biggest night of movie-making for New York and a fitting start for the city's Bicentennial summer which was to include such other extravaganzas as Operation Sail and the Democratic National Convention.

Though the company had provided security guards, fulfilling its arrangement with the New York Port Authority, the crowd was more than they could handle if it decided to get rowdy. But director John Guillermin and his assistants discovered what others found in New York during the summer of 1976: a festive, congenial



Jessica Lange and Jeff Bridges are dwarfed by the gigantic king of beasts.

by Lorenzo Semple, Jr.) was not diminished by the fact that the 40-foot mechanical monster was taking a brief vacation in Hollywood while his cousin, a 40-foot model, was used for the death scenes in New York. Alive or dead, Kong is Kong, whether moving or prone on the cement, and the more exuberant souvenir hunters in the crowd made off with patches of Kong's fur plus an eye before the shooting ended at the Trade Center.

Kong was brought to New York in ten separate pieces stored in three vans that traveled more than 900 miles a day to get him to the Big Apple on time for his swan song off the 107-story high Trade Center.

Not everyone in the city was pleased by Kong's new location. Fans of having Kong back at the Empire State Building protested his transfer by dressing up in ape suits and took to the observation deck carrying signs denouncing the monster's disloyalty to the older building.

It took 2,000 pounds of horse tails from Argentina to get Kong properly covered. Ten people in Hollywood working for 72 hours each managed to sew 1,500 panels of horses' hair into 300 yards of netting that wrapped around Kong's massive styrofoam frame. The hair on Kong's chest and chin had to be punched into place, each strand individually by hand.

When Kong was put together in New York, his principal caretaker, Michael Dino, who was in charge of the fur-making, climbed up on his chest to replace patches that had fallen off in the transcontinental shipment. Anyone connected with Kong, especially one who could walk all over his chest, became an instant celebrity to New Yorkers, and Dino

in one afternoon signed 150 autographs.

An idea of the scope of the "King Kong" caper in New York, beyond the height of the monster and the size of the nightly crowds, were the number of workers and equipment moved across the country in preparation for the New York location shooting.

It cost more than \$1 million for the New York filming. A 30-member cast and crew was brought in from Los Angeles, as were army jeeps, command cars and ambulances. Hired in New York were 425 extras, many National Guard reservists and Army, Navy and Marine recruiters to be used in the scene where Kong is trapped by a military force on the roof of the Trade Center.

The logistics of deploying this small army around New York were worked out in the production headquarters located in the Sheraton Motor Lodge on 12th Avenue by director Guillermin, producer De Laurentiis, executive in charge of production Jack Grossberg and New York unit production manager George Goodman. Several months earlier Grossberg had handled the negotiations for use of the Trade Center, reaching terms equitable to all sides.

But not every contingency could be foreseen. When the date of the company's arrival in the city had to be changed, some military units, which were to be employed, backed out. In a matter of hours the expert



As thousands watch, the powerful Kong gasps his last mighty breath.

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atmosphere, so different from its reputation as a haven for muggers and other unsavory characters.

In that one memorable night, those New Yorkers performed beautifully for Guillermin, a sea of humanity swirling around the stricken monster and this incredible moment was captured by the director who had three cameras panning the plaza.

The enthusiasm of the crowd at being in "King Kong" (screenplay

production team put together its own company of soldiers out of civilian extras and students from a local military school.

Also employed for scenes at the Trade Center were 60 of New York's finest policemen and 30 firemen.

The actors and production team arrived quietly enough early in June. They expected some attention to their arrival, but not what overwhelmed them at the Trade Center.

Responding to the newspaper advertisements, about 5,000 people did show up the first night. But with them came scores of newspaper reporters, television cameras and magazine writers. Kong stretched out on the plaza became the most photographed scene in New York for the next 24 hours, which induced the tremendous horde to show up the second night.

None felt cheated by the spectacle

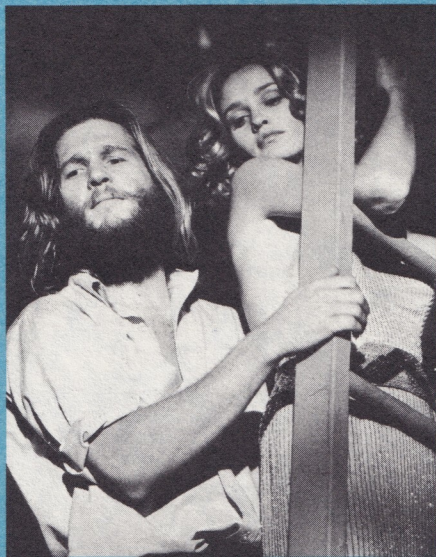


The mighty Kong has tumbled from the top of the World Trade Center. A bereaved Jessica Lange screams in anguish.

unfurling before them. A beautiful young woman in a stunning silver gown sobbing out her grief over the death of her friend; her lover, a romantic Princeton anthropologist fighting his way through the mob to get to her; the stricken Kong, blood seeping from his wounds; the thousands of exploding flashbulbs; the guards holding back the crowd, and the impatient reporters trying to get the biggest story in New York.

From the 12th floor of the Trade Center where the company maintained a small production office the throng below, milling and edging closer to Kong, resembled eddies crossing the surface of a rapidly moving river. Barricades and a line of police and national guardsmen were all that stood between Kong and the crowd. It was enough, though at times it appeared to be very fragile protection for the most valuable piece of property in New York that night.

Standing in an unenviable position between Kong and the crowd was



Jeff Bridges and Jessica Lange elude the rampaging King Kong.

Jessica Lange. She was at first startled by the wall of faces pressing down on her and wondered briefly what would happen if the line of police protection crumbled. But she soon realized that crowd was not hostile and she heard friendly voices complimenting her beauty and courage.

Miraculously, considering the size of the crowd, there was no physical damage to the Trade Center, its plaza or the neighboring streets. But the night's activity left cast and crew very hungry and the catering bill for the New York filming came to \$27,000.

The Trade Center was not the only location for the company in New York. The cameras and cast were taken to a pleasant residential street in Queens just over from the 59th Street Bridge, which with skillful lighting and the cooperation of the residents in the block became a street terrorized by the approaching Kong, cars and homes abandoned by fleeing owners, leaving alone in the street Jeff Bridges and Jessica Lange, frantically going among the cars to find one with a key in the ignition.

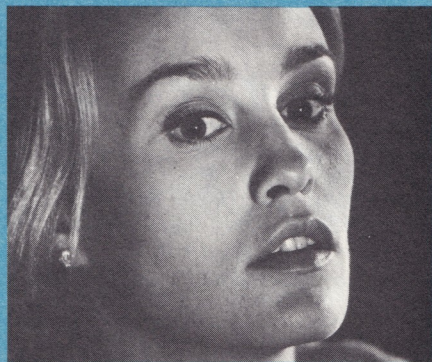
Also in Queens, a park near the East River, the Queensborough Bridge and an elevated subway station figured in key scenes of Jeff and Jessica fleeing Kong, crossing the bridge on a motorcycle and climbing down a ladder to get away from the monster.

In Manhattan, the chase continued off Wall Street in Hanover Square where Jeff and Jessica took shelter in a restaurant, only to have Kong's massive hand come in through the door in search of his lost love.

While the first unit worked with Kong and the principal actors, a second unit did location shooting

along Fifth Avenue, in Central Park and on the steps of the famous St. Patrick's Cathedral to get crowd reaction to Kong's passage on his way to the Trade Center.

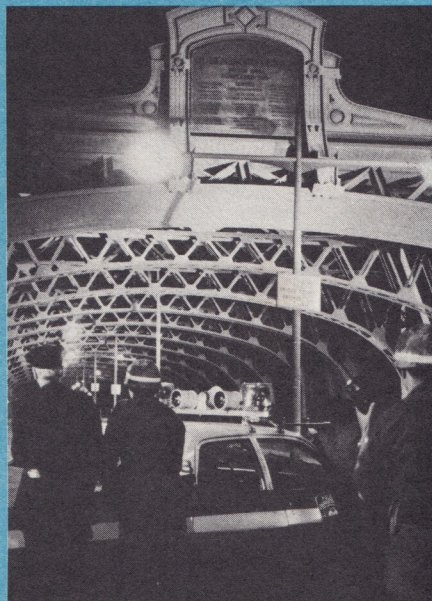
It was a good time to get crowd reaction since it was the week before the Bicentennial Fourth of July and the city was filling rapidly with visitors wanting to see the tall ships from around the world sail up the Hudson River. Few had a better spectator seat than the "King Kong" production. The offices looked down directly on the river.



Jessica Lange is the beauty the beast pursues.

When the production closed down in New York, King Kong was the reigning champion. His story was headlined not only in the Big Apple but across America. He had made prime time news shows on the three major networks. He had been photographed from every conceivable angle by amateurs and professionals. He had been pawed and petted by a thousand hands. He remained an endearing symbol of the greatest city in the United States.

And to the magic of motion pictures.



The police hope to stop Kong as he rampages across the Queensboro Bridge.



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King Kong

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Creation of "King Kong" monster is a tribute...

(Continued from page 1)

legitimate fears about Kong getting carried away and crushing her in his palm. She was reassured by Robinson that safety devices had been installed in Kong's fingers so that they would be prevented from closing completely on her. Still, it took several lift-off trials before Jessica became convinced she was in a friendly hand.

After the wires and metal took shape and became Kong's skeleton, the next job was to see if he were functional. Everyone held his collective breath as the levers were pulled. Miraculously, he was up doing what his builders had hoped he would do. His hips swung. His legs twisted in and out and bent at the knees. His ears twitched and his lips pulled back revealing his gums and teeth. Kong was alive!

But he would not go naked into the world. Michael Dino, a famous custom wigmaker for stars of stage and screen, was hired to cover Kong.

First, he came up with 34 samples

of various kinds of hair. While doing this, he visited several zoos to get an idea not only how gorillas looked, but how they acted. "Gorillas are gentle, fierce animals," he noted. "But Kong had to be special, and after studying them closely, I saw that gorillas had a sympathetic side."

Horse tails were decided upon for Kong's hair, and 4,000 pounds were imported from Argentina. To keep the hair color uniform, some of the tails were bleached and tinted. Next a hundred people began the painstaking process of weaving the strands of hair into four kinds of netting, a job that took months. When the hair was secured into hundreds of panels, each was then glued on huge pieces of latex which in turn were glued on a plastic mold that covered the metal frame.

Finished, Kong went immediately to work for director John Guillermin in the screenplay by Lorenzo Semple, Jr. But being basically bionic and too huge for the average-sized soundstage, he went to pieces, a hand here for one scene, a leg on

another soundstage for a different scene, his massive head in a third place, so that all of Kong was in use all the time, although only sometimes was he in one piece.

And he has an active role in the film. He snatches Dwan (Jessica Lange) from a sacrificial altar, fights a gigantic snake to save her, crashes through a huge wall to get to her, falls into a pit, ends up in the hole of a supertanker, gets transported in bondage to New York City and then does his own version of Cook's tour of the Big Apple trying to get back to his lady love, ending up on top of the World Trade Center.

The mechanical Kong's only disappointment was that he didn't get to make the trip himself to New York City. His alter ego, a 40-foot styro-foam model, was taken there instead to play the death scene on the plaza at the Trade Center. No matter that he was unmechanical, a fact told to New Yorkers. They still came out by the thousands to see Kong in his swan song.