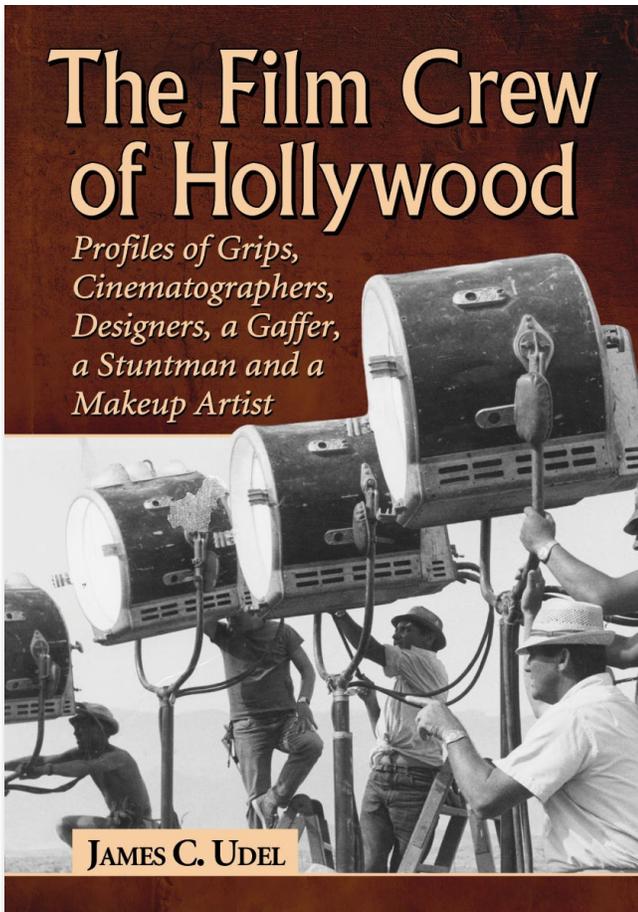


Book Review



James Udel's *The Film Crew of Hollywood*

by Pauline Rogers

Those wanting a glimpse of Hollywood before bottom-line and franchise filmmaking ruled the industry will cheer James Udel's new book, *The Film Crew of Hollywood: Profiles of Grips, Cinematographers, Designers, a Gaffer, a Stuntman, and a Makeup Artist*. A long-time member of Local 80 and former columnist for *Below the Line*, Udel pays tribute to two iconic cinematographers: William Fraker, ASC, and Richard Kline, ASC, as well as the other artists from the era (1945–1980). Drawing on lengthy interviews with makeup artist Dan Striepeke; key grips Carl Manoogian, Tommy May and Gaylin Schultz; stuntman Gene LeBell; gaffer Earl Gilbert; production designer Albert Brenner and automotive designer George Barris, Udel recounts stories of creativity (and chaos) behind a broad range of iconic productions, from *The King and I*, *Catch 22*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and *Forrest Gump* to *Mr. Novak*, *Hawaii Five-O* and *The Stuntman*.

What does Udel hope his readers take away from recounting “a time where arc lights ruled the night and shiny boards filled the shadows”? In his own words: “Listening to this last generation of greats tell their stories of artistic providence, well-planned mechanics, and paying dues, one can only hope that the next wave of film-folk will be as enlightened as I have been by these extraordinary experiences.”

The book shines a light on crewmembers who maintained creative partnerships that spanned their careers – like Manoogian, who worked many years with Jerry Lewis. The pair taught everyone on the set that, as Lewis said, “film is for fun.”

“A perfect example,” Udel recounts, “was the first day of shooting on *Who's Minding the Store?* when Manoogian and a grip buddy dressed as female mannequins on display in the window of the department store set. Looking through the finder while checking the shot, Lewis said nothing for about 30 seconds, then barked to his DP, W. Wallace Kelley, ‘Looks great, Wally, except for the two knock-kneed gorillas in the back. Can somebody stick a lampshade over Manoogian’s head, please?’”

Other tales include the “simple trick” of using a rippling mirror technique to duplicate a building tremor for the initial action sequences in *Earthquake*. “When it was shown in dailies, everyone applauded when it crumbled,” Manoogian told Udel. The building he destroyed – Universal’s Black Tower – housed the studio’s executive suites.

Not all stories are so light-hearted. When stuntman Gene LeBelle worked second unit on *Million Dollar Mystery* with another legend, Dar Robinson, Dar’s full-tilt run toward an embankment went very wrong. “No controlled slide,” Udel explains. “He careened off the road and over the embankment, falling 40 feet.” With no emergency personnel on hand, it took two hours for Robinson to receive medical help, which came too late. LeBelle, the first one to reach his friend, is still angry about the incident to this day.

Udel even delves into Hollywood politics. While talking to makeup artist Striepeke (long time partner with Tom Hanks) about his landmark work on the “talking” apes for *Planet of the Apes*, Striepeke recalls the time President Eisenhower arranged a tour of the studios for Nikita Krushchev, nearly causing an international incident. Krushchev’s reaction to the high-kicking line in *Can-Can*: “Filth of American entertainment.”

Udel notes at the end of Richard Kline’s chapter that the cinematographer’s mantra was, “Be daring, but just don’t get caught!” Here’s hoping Udel continues his “daring tales” from Hollywood’s past to help inspire and inform the next generation.