

CINEMA STUNTS

K R CRIPWELL

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Collins English Library Level 3

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K R CRIPWELL

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Introduction

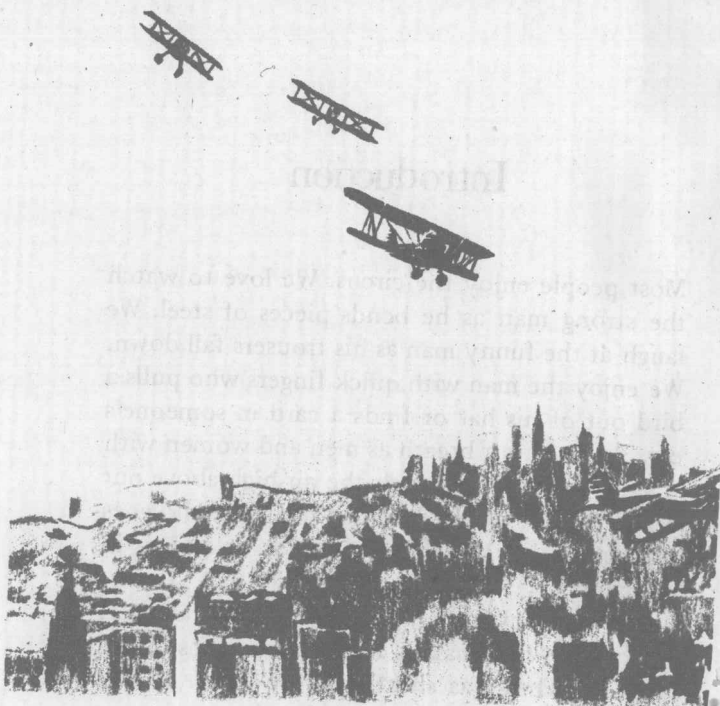
Most people enjoy the circus. We love to watch the strong man as he bends pieces of steel. We laugh at the funny man as his trousers fall down. We enjoy the man with quick fingers who pulls a bird out of his hat or finds a card in someone's ear. We hold our breath as men and women with strong bodies fly through the air high above our heads. We are afraid for the brave man who goes among the lions with only a stick or a chair in his hands.

We enjoy all the excitement and the danger.

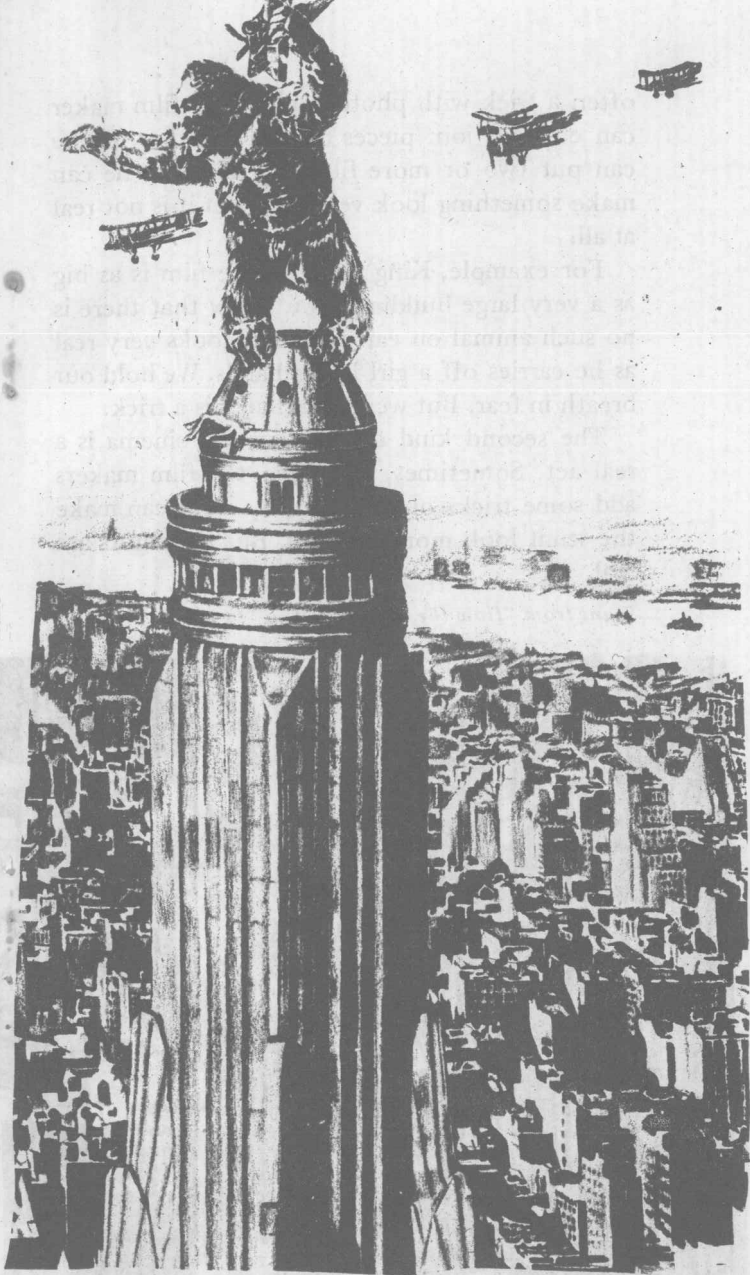
The first film-makers often made films of circus acts. That was shortly before 1900. In this way they were able to show the circus to many more people than ever before.

In the cinema these circus acts are called *stunts*. We call the men who do the stunts *stunt-men*.

There are two kinds of stunt in the cinema. The first kind is the trick stunt. This is very



The film "King Kong" (1933) didn't use real stunts — it used 'stop action' photography. They made several small models of Kong himself for this film. They photographed a model, moved it, then photographed it again. This was done many times. Then the photographs were joined together. It looked as if Kong was real and moving.

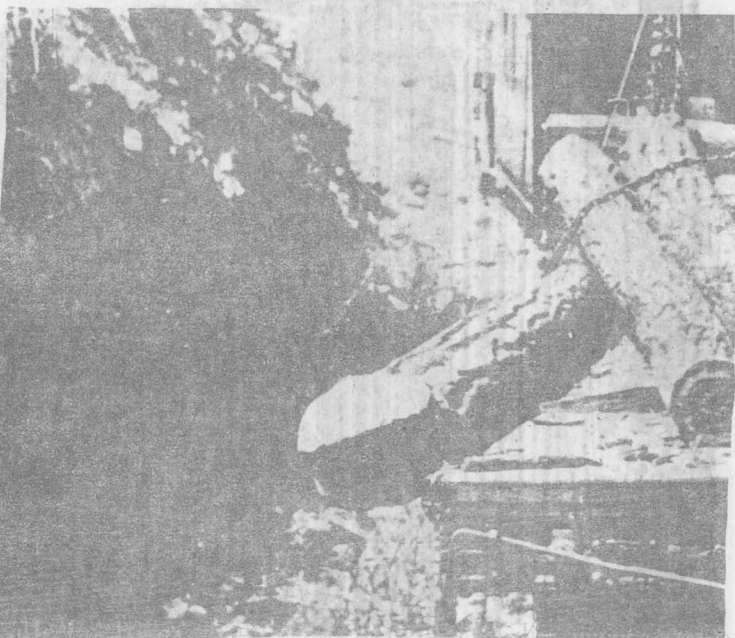


often a trick with photography. The film maker can cut and join pieces of film together. Or he can put two or more films together. So he can make something look very real. But it is not real at all.

For example, King Kong in the film is as big as a very large building. You know that there is no such animal on earth. But he looks very real as he carries off a girl in his hands. We hold our breath in fear. But we know that it is a trick.

The second kind of stunt in the cinema is a real act. Sometimes, of course, the film makers add some tricks of photography. This can make the stunt look more exciting. But the stunts are real.

Stunt from "How the West Was Won" (1963)



These stunts need quick brains and strong bodies. They are often very dangerous.

A good example of this kind of stunt is in the film *How the West Was Won* (1963). At one point in the story there is a very exciting fight on top of a train. The train is carrying trees from the mountains. One of the men climbs over the trees towards the hero. They shoot at each other.

The bad man does not see that he is in danger. As the train goes around a corner the rope around the trees breaks. He holds on with only one hand. He nearly falls. Then the train goes around a second corner. The tree with the man on it crashes back against the other trees.



Will he be hurt?

Will he fall?

Will he die?

Slowly he pulls himself up on top of the trees. There is blood all over him. He sees his enemy ahead and takes another shot at the hero.

It is a most exciting stunt. It was a very dangerous one too. The film makers planned the stunt very carefully and there were no accidents.

But accidents can happen. Just after they filmed this scene the trees on the train moved again. They hit a stuntman and he fell under the train. Only his quickness saved him from death. He was in hospital for a long time afterwards. In the end he lost his leg.

Sometimes a stunt is funny and we laugh. Sometimes it is exciting and we hold our breath. Now this book is going to describe and explain some of the greatest stunts in the cinema. It tells the story of some of the best stuntmen in the cinema. It is the story of quick brains, strong bodies and bravery.

It is also the story of real acts and not tricks. The book will not describe the use of trick photography in the cinema.

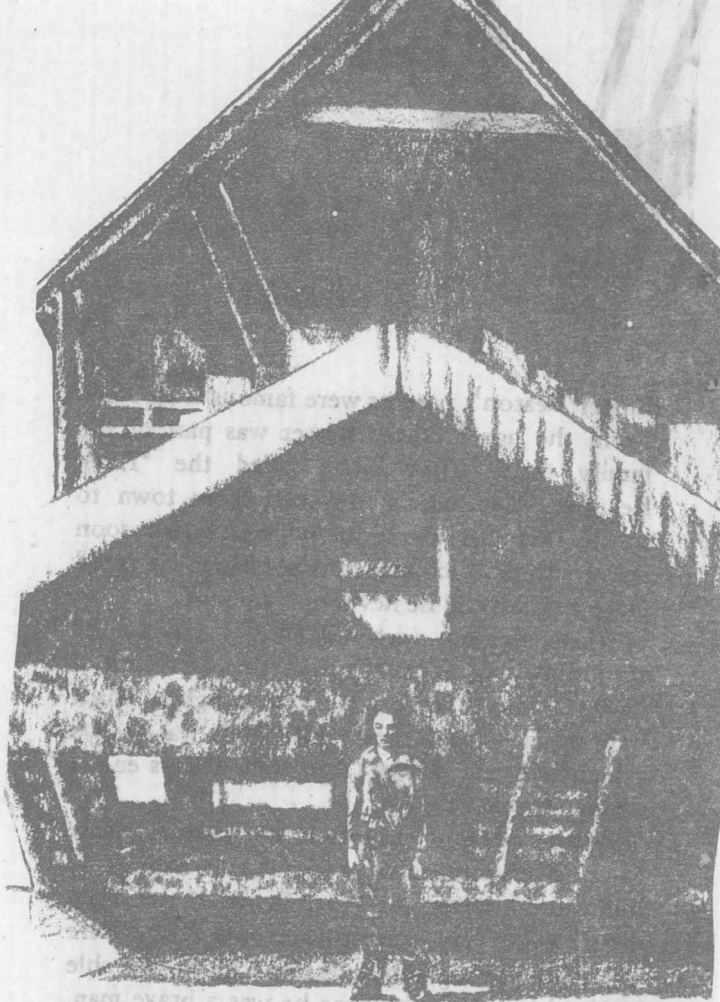


1 Buster Keaton

Buster Keaton's parents were famous stage stars. From the age of three Buster was part of the family team. They were called the 'Three Keatons'. The family travelled from town to town. Their act was a funny one. Buster soon learnt stunts which made people laugh. He could jump and fall and he never hurt himself.

When Keaton was still under twenty he started making films. His first films were full of violent action. There were lots of fights, which were usually over a pretty girl. There was always a bad man and a hero. And they always ended with a chase.

Buster Keaton was often the hero in these films. Everything always seemed to happen to him but he never got hurt. Some of the 'accidents' were very dangerous stunts. They were not trick photography. Buster Keaton was able to do these stunts because he was a brave man. And a careful one.



Keaton, with the house falling on him, from "Steamboat Bill Junior" (1927)

In 1927 Keaton made a very funny film. In this film he walks into a town as a violent storm shakes it. He stands in the middle of the street. He does not seem to feel the storm all around him. Strong winds pull up trees and blow off roofs. A house behind him begins to fall. He is in the way. This must be the end of our hero.

But no.

There is an open window in the wall. The window falls over Keaton. The wall misses him by inches. And he walks away unhurt.

This is not trick photography. It really did happen. Here is Buster Keaton's own description of the stunt.

"I asked them to build the front of the house first. It was a building with a tall V-shaped roof. So we could make the window very high up in the roof. A window on the second floor of a house is usually four metres from the ground. But this one was about six metres from the ground. They put the front of the house on the ground and built the window around me. There was a space of five centimetres above my head, from my arms and at the back of my feet. They marked the shape of the window on the ground. Then they marked the place for the back of my feet.

"Then they stood the wooden wall up again. They fixed the bottom of the wall carefully to the ground. Now they finished the house. They

put the front on and painted it. Then they built all the rooms behind the front wall. So when the wall falls forward you can see the inside of a building.

"Then we put up our wind machines with their big motors. We had six of them and they were quite powerful. They could lift a truck right off the road. But if the wind hit the building in the wrong place, it could fall badly. And I was standing right out in front.

"But it's a one-take scene and we got it that way. You don't do these things twice."

It was a very dangerous stunt. The wall was very heavy. Five centimetres between life and death!

In 1923 Buster Keaton was in a film about two rich families who both want a beautiful girl to marry one of their sons. But both families want to kill Keaton when he falls in love with the girl. The story is full of chases.

At one place in the story Buster rides a tree down a river. The river is full of rocks and the water moves very fast. It is very dangerous.

They fastened a steel rope to the tree. Three men held the rope. Buster climbed on to the tree and the cameramen began to film the scene. When he was in the middle of the angry water, Buster heard a noise behind him. It was the steel rope as it broke in half. The tree was now free. Buster jumped off because he was safer in the