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Jen O'Dell
Hollywood's hottest, new star shares her fitness secrets! p.26

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Jennifer O'Dell, star of TV's *The Lost World*, shares her insights on training, nutrition and the secret to looking good in a buckskin loincloth



Southern California-native Jennifer O'Dell is beautiful, vivacious and well-versed at battling hairy apemen. Not just in L.A., but on the set of *The Lost World*. The nationally syndicated series is based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic account of a British expedition team marooned in a prehistoric South American rainforest, frozen in time. O'Dell, a certified spinning instructor and self-proclaimed fitness buff, practices what she preaches. In addition to cannibalistic primates, she routinely confronts aggressive dinosaurs and oversized insects. Regular training combined with a commitment to a healthy lifestyle helps the actress deal with a rigorous work schedule and maintain her lean-and-mean physique. We asked the action star about her success strategies on and off the steamy jungle set.

Interview by
Joseph A. Arangio, M.S., C.S.C.S.

Photography by
Jason Ellis

MM: Where are you from?

O'DELL: I was born in Southern California and moved to Hawaii when I was about 2 years old. We moved back to the mainland when I was 8—so I've basically lived in California my whole life.

MM: How did you get into acting?

O'DELL: My mother helped me get into acting when we moved back to California. On my first audition, I was booked for a national commercial. I immediately fell in love with acting. I did several more commercials when I was younger, and then I got out of the business for a little while. My mother let me grow up, go to school and be a regular kid. She was very supportive—she drove me to L.A. often so I could audition.

In high school, I got back into theater, musicals. After high school, I led the 9-to-5 lifestyle. I moved to San Diego, did some secretarial work—it allowed me to run out to an audition during a lunch break. About five years ago I moved to L.A. and met my best friend, who happens to be my agent. She helped me get a lot of exposure, which allowed me to earn a spot on *The Lost World* about three years ago. The series has been a wonderful experience—we begin shooting the fourth season in June.

MM: Give us a quick overview of *The Lost World*.

O'DELL: The show is based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's book, *The Lost World*. He is most famous for the Sherlock Holmes murder mysteries. This group of



explorers arrives, in search of a lost world of dinosaurs and other strange beings, and they come across my character. They become my surrogate family; they live on the plateau with me. I help them survive the ruthless jungle conditions of the plateau and in turn they help fulfill my need for a family. It's a split between *Indiana Jones*, *The X Files* and *Star Trek*. The writers have a lot of fun creating the script for each episode.

MM: Describe your character in the show.

O'DELL: Veronica is a strong, independent woman who has matured quite a bit over the past three seasons. Her parents came to The Lost World in search of a remote Amazonian plateau. They disappeared when she was young, so she had to fend for herself from an early age. She lives in a hut at the top of a fig tree.

My character is like the female version of Tarzan—she swings from vines and runs around in a tiny loincloth. She doesn't know much about the real world, yet she knows the difference between right and wrong. It's this morality that helps her stay alive. She is naïve when it comes to love and relationships. She's a true survivalist. Her intelligence and survival skills have enabled her to deal with supernatural beasts and other dangers over the last 12 or 13 years.

MM: Does Veronica's untamed personality show up when you're not in front of the camera?

O'DELL: (Laughs) Absolutely. She's made me a stronger person. My character on the show has a lot of Jennifer O'Dell in her. I am an extremely independent woman—my mother will attest to this fact. I have a problem asking for help because I don't like to impose on other people. I'd rather just do it myself.

MM: Walk us through a typical day on the set.

O'DELL: I wake up at 3 a.m., about an hour before I get picked up for work, and hop on the spin bike. I needed something that would keep me in shape at home—a high-cardio workout that is easy on my joints. I have bad knees from years of softball. I played catcher so I was constantly in a squat position. The doctors told me to build the muscles around my knees, so I started to lift weights and spin—now my knees don't hurt as much as they used to. So I started taking spinning classes and eventually got certified so I could learn how to do the programs at home, on my own.

After about 45 minutes on the bike, I'll jump in the shower. The ride to the set lasts about an hour, plus another hour to go through wardrobe, makeup and hair. We shoot about eight to 10 pages of script each day—over the next 12 hours. We do about two to three fight

scenes per week. After an hour-long car ride home I take a shower, go over my lines for the next day and sleep. Overall, I work 70 to 80 hours per week.

MM: What's it like to work in an Australian rainforest?

O'DELL: I get the opportunity to shoot in the most beautiful locations in the world. It rains quite often and as a result, the jungle is lush with vegetation. In the first season it rained 90 out of 130 shooting days. There are a lot of bugs and snakes. I take vitamins and other supplements like garlic oil, which is excreted through my pores to keep the bugs away—but fortunately not my co-workers.



The doctors told me to build the muscles around my knees, so I started to lift weights and spin—now my knees don't hurt as much as they used to.

MM: Most of the time you're wearing little more than a buckskin loincloth. How do you maintain your lean and muscular physique?

O'DELL: Spinning has really helped me out. I've always been very lean in my upper body, but my lower half has been problematic. My mother is pretty curvaceous—so I am not supposed to be thin. I love food, too. I've always been working out seriously for a couple of years, but it wasn't until I got the part on the show that I really got in shape. When I did the pilot and saw the tiny outfit that my character had to wear, I got serious. I worked harder than I have ever worked to become Veronica. Now I'm in the best condition of my life.

I spin three days per week for 45 minutes each session. I also do yoga two to three days per week. I train with my strength and conditioning coach two to three days per week. Every year I'll focus on a body part that I want to get into shape. Last year was legs; this year it's my midsection. So I really concentrate on these areas.



MM: How often do you train with weights?

O'DELL: I meet with my strength and conditioning coach for a circuit-training workout for about an hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. When I lift weights my muscles feel great. I start with a three- to five-minute warm-up on the treadmill to get my heart rate up and break a sweat. I never used to sweat when I started working out a few years ago—basically because my body wasn't as physically fit. My body adapts to the exercises quickly, so we change the training routine every week. Frequent exercise variations help my muscles stay strong, plus it keeps me interested in the workouts.

MM: What do you do to maintain your cardiovascular prowess?

O'DELL: I have to do a lot of cardio to reduce my body fat. Sometimes after weight training I'll go for an hour-long hike. I can spin for five days per week, and maintain my heart rate at around 160 to 170 beats per minute, but this is not the best way for me to reduce my body fat levels. Instead, I'll keep my heart rate at 130 during weight lifting—this is a more effective way for me to reduce body fat. Resistance training with free weights helps me build muscle, which in turn helps me boost my metabolism. When I have more muscle my metabolism increases, and I burn more calories all day long.

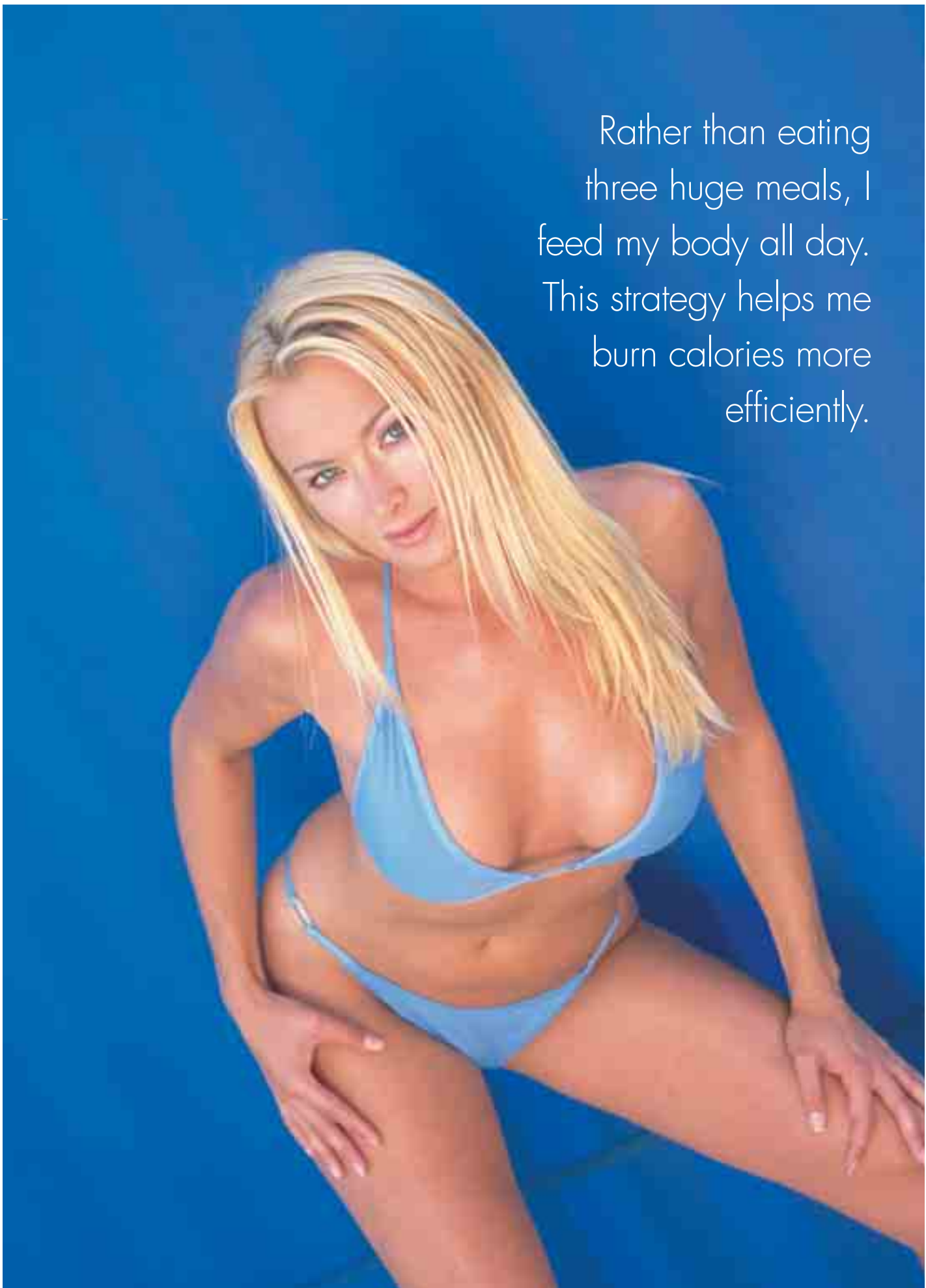
The spinning also helped me build my glutes and get rid of the cellulite on the back of my legs—I have made good improvements in my legs over the past three years. Best of all, spinning wakes me up in the morning and gets my brain working.

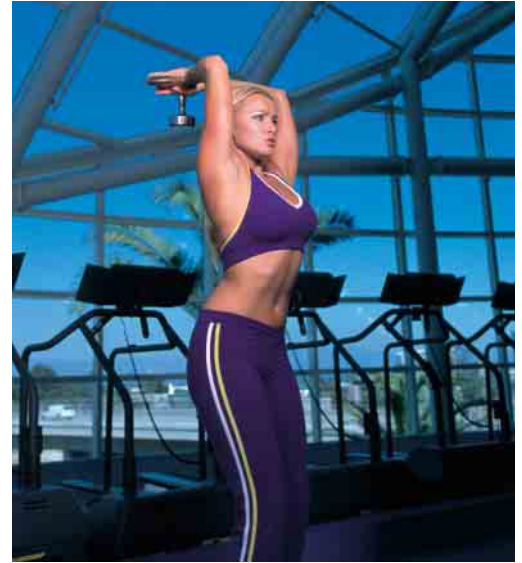
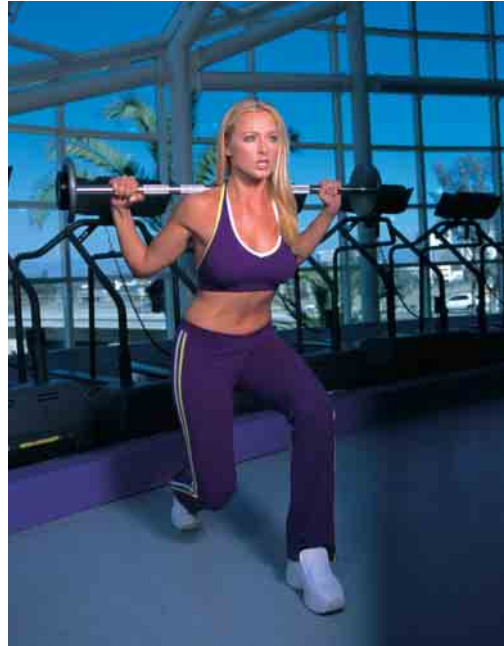
MM: Describe your nutrition strategies.

O'DELL: I'm lactose intolerant, and I can't eat wheat products. Since I inherited a slow metabolism, I try to avoid starches—breads, pasta, potatoes, rice, grains—these foods make me feel sluggish. Instead, I get my carbohydrates from fruits and vegetables.

I'm a meat-eater—I love a nice piece of filet mignon. I love chicken, ground turkey and fish, too.

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three huge meals, I
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This strategy helps me
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efficiently.





MM: How often do you eat during the day?

O'DELL: I eat between four and five meals each day. On the set, I eat every three hours—6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon and then again at 3 o'clock in the afternoon before we go home. Since I wear a tiny outfit on the set, I eat small portions, frequently throughout the day. People look at me in awe, "You're constantly eating!" Yes I am, but my portions are very small, about the size of my clenched fist, and I avoid heavy carbohydrate foods. Rather than eating three huge meals, I feed my body all day. This strategy helps me burn calories more efficiently.

MM: How do you reward yourself for sticking to a portion-controlled nutrition schedule?

O'DELL: I'm not the type of person who orders a whole pizza for myself. Fast food tastes good, but it makes me feel ill—it upsets my stomach. I eat the way I do because my mind and body function better when I eat small, portion-controlled meals every few hours and avoid the junk. The body is like a car. If you go to the gas station and fill your car up with 87 octane, the engine will ping and rattle. Higher-octane fuel will help your car's engine run better. Feed the body low-octane foods, like sweets

and processed carbohydrates, and you will not perform well. I have a sweet tooth, so every now and then I'll have dessert—just a modest portion, though. I don't deprive myself of my cravings. Instead, I practice moderation.

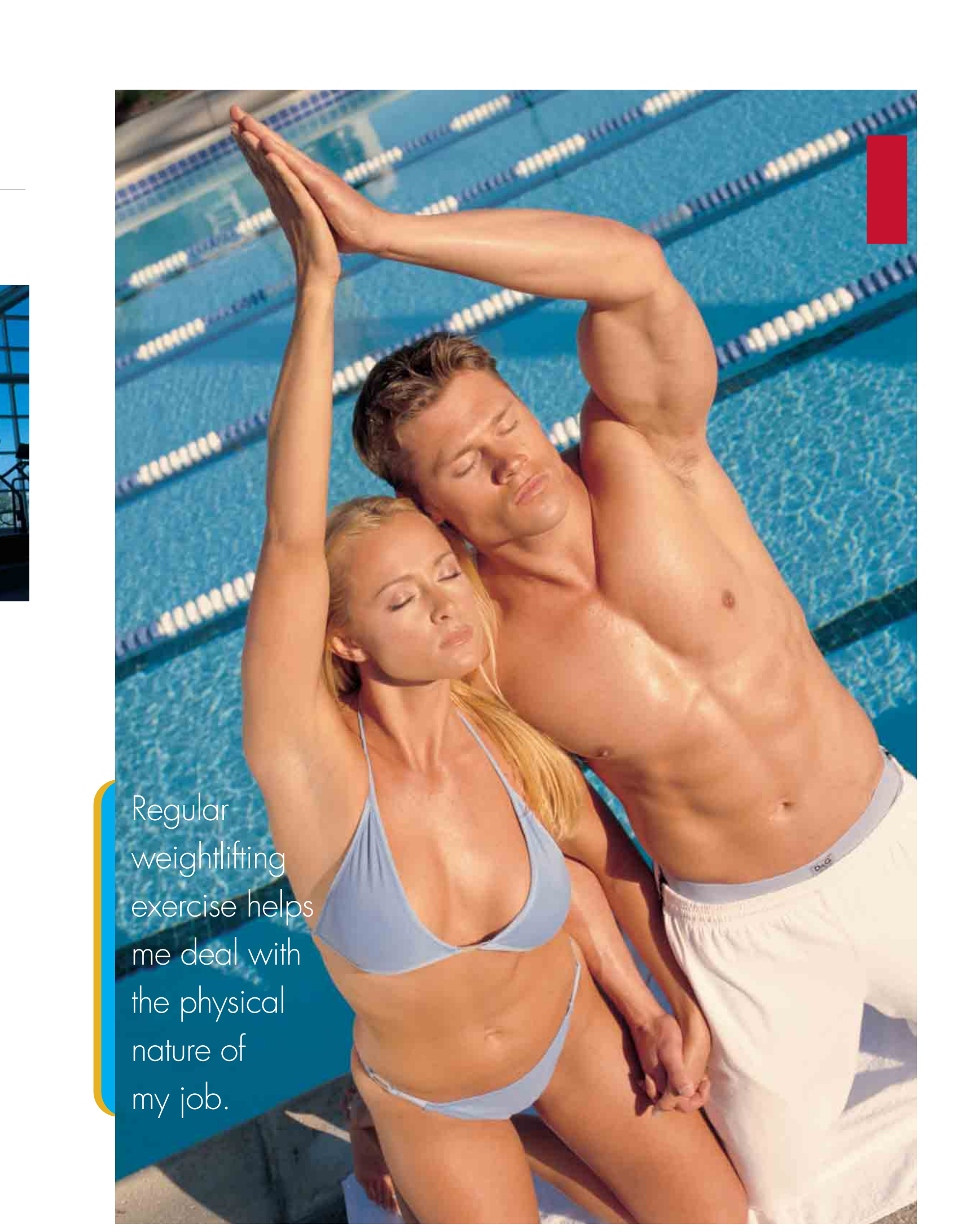
MM: How do you recover after a long day on the set or a tough workout?

O'DELL: I am exhausted at the end of the day, so sleep is a high priority to my recovery process. I make sure that I get eight hours of sleep every night. If I have down time on the set, I will go to my trailer and take a quick nap. Plus, I take three days off from training each week. I have a hard time sitting still.

I get two deep-tissue massages each week because of all the fight scenes I do. We really go at it with the stunt people. I am on my feet all day long. On Sundays, I treat myself to the spa. I'll sit in the jacuzzi or get a facial as a reward for a long workweek.

MM: How does your exercise regimen prepare you for the show's action scenes?

O'DELL: My morning spin session gets me ready for the day. I've always been into sports and dancing. The



Regular weightlifting exercise helps me deal with the physical nature of my job.

fight scenes are like dance choreography. I work together with the stunt guys to help design the fight scenes. I'll bring hand weights on the set to warm up my shoulders—I've dislocated my shoulders in the past. I also need to keep my neck muscles strong. When we simulate a knockout punch during an action sequence, I've got to forcefully throw my head and neck back when my character gets punched in the face.

We do stick fighting, sword fighting and kick boxing on a regular basis. Sometimes the script requires that I swing from a vine—resistance training gives me the muscular strength and endurance to hold myself on the rope while I swing around a tree. To get the right shot, I often have to repeat the scene 10 times. Regular weightlifting exercise helps me deal with the physical nature of my job.

MM: How does regular training affect your confidence levels?

O'DELL: Training helps me feel better. I know that I look better, so my confidence is better—this comes across on camera. Ninety percent of acting is confidence. I have learned that you must believe in yourself to be successful.

MM: What makes you happy?


O'DELL: Happiness, for me, is not only the fulfillment of doing what I do for a living, but doing

it very well. Actually, I get a lot of satisfaction when I reply to fan mail. I'll sign a photograph for someone, and they'll write back expressing their appreciation that I responded to their letter. It makes me feel good to know that I am making someone else smile.

MM: Where do you see yourself in five years?

O'DELL: I would like to stay with *The Lost World* for as long as possible and then evolve into feature films—especially after the success of the show. I have a lot of experience doing stunts and fight scenes. I would love to do an action film—I have so much fun working on the series. In fact, working on the show is like shooting an hour-long action movie in less than two weeks.

MM: What are the most important things that you've learned in your life?

O'DELL: First, find your passion and do what makes you happy. The reason that I act is because it makes me happy and I know that I'm good at it. It's what I want to do for the rest of my life. Second, always believe in yourself. I was fortunate to get this part because it was difficult for me to get a serious role. In the end, I earned the job. Finally, recognize who the significant people are in your life and let them know that they are the most important people in your life. Over the past few years I've come to realize how important my family is to me. 

O'DELL TRAINING SECRETS

1

Always change your workouts to maintain your enthusiasm.

"I like to swim, walk on the beach, take hikes in the mountains and ride my bike around town. My strength and conditioning coach helps me change my resistance training exercises on a weekly basis."

2

Get help.

"My strength coach provides me with the knowledge and expertise necessary to help me make the most of my time spent in the gym."