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KING KONG (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

KING KONG (1933): This is not a review so much as a bunch of random comments.

Kong is never called "King Kong" in dialogue. Within the story, the title appears only on the theater marquee.

Overtures to movies used to be a thing. Now they're replaced by ads.

The Morse code at the beginning says, "VVV A RADIO PICTURE VVVVV" and syncs with the appearance of the letters of "A Radio Picture" as they appear on the screen.

Orville Goldner (one of the credited technical staff) wrote the book THE MAKING OF KING KONG.

As everyone now knows, the "old Arabian proverb" was written by that old Arabian, Merian C. Cooper.

I had always thought the ship was docked in New York, but the book claims it was Hoboken, and the opening shots do appear to be from the other side of the river.

One of the things you can start to notice after many viewings is the glimpse into the trivia of everyday life in 1933. For example, when Englehorn and Riscoll light matches to light a pipe or a cigarette, Englehorn strikes the side of the cup holding the matches, but Driscoll uses his fingernail, and then holds the lit match for at least ten seconds. It is clearly a wooden "strike-anywhere" match of the sort we don't see anymore, or at least very widely, and for good reason. As one site notes, "Strike anywhere" matches light easily, even when unattended, such as in the mail during shipping." As a result, they are heavily regulated.

We also see (reasonably authentic scenes) of the Depression.

Apples tended to sell for a nickel, so Denham's payment of a dollar is quite impressive.

Everyone wears hats (or caps). It's not just because it's winter; it was just what everyone did. (One movie I saw recently from that period had construction workers wearing hats.)

The ship does indeed seem to be overpopulated (as a character in the first scene notes).

Denham's recounting of the "Beauty and the Beast" has no resemblance to the familiar fairy tale; in Denham's telling, the Beast is strong until he met Beauty, then he "went soft, he forgot his wisdom, and the little fellas licked him."

The position "2 south, 90 east" is in fact far west of Sumatra, and there is nothing for thousands of miles southwest; the closest land of any size is Mauritius, about 2000 miles in that direction.

The wall was built so long ago that "the people have slipped back, forgotten the high civilization that built it." Denham also refers to "centuries". So is Kong that old? Is he the last of a long line? (The sequel says not.) We see no other giant apes, and apes are not solitary creatures.

How did knowledge of Kong get to other islands? Apparently Englehorn had heard of it.

Ann's reactions during the screen test anticipate what Denham is going to ask for. For example, he tells her to look amazed, but she looks frightened rather than just amazed. Then he says that there's a chance if she could scream, which would normally cause Ann to scream, but she knows not to at that point, but to wait until he tells her to.

In the fog near the island you get a shot of the whole ship. It's clearly not big enough to hold Kong.

As someone pointed out, the villagers are limited to the peninsula on their side of the wall, so it is not clear how that many people can find enough food, fresh water, clothing materials, etc.--not to mention enough girls to sacrifice. Harry Harrison claims we see no boats or canoes, so they can't survive on fish. In fact, we do see outriggers, first on the beach when Denham lands, and later when the natives come out to the Venture. And Ann refers to them when they first land on the island. Still, it doesn't look like enough to support all the people we see.

How does Ann keep the same hair length and hair style after more than six weeks at sea?

The birds we see at the beach are cartoons, not stop-motion animation.

Driscoll claims nobody knows who built Angkor Wat. Even in the 1930s I suspect archaeologists had figured out when it was built (12th century), and concluded it was built by the ancestors of the current inhabitants of that area. It's not as if the area was completely deserted of people.

Someone (Bradbury? Harryhausen?) relates going to Nias (Island) and trying out some of the phrases from the phrases from the Nias islanders. Thus is drawn the line between filmmakers who hire linguists to write foreign language dialogue and those who just make it up as they go along.

I love the way Ann wears high heels when going to the island.

While the DVD doesn't subtitled the islanders' language, the novelization does, so it is easier to distinguish words.

Why Denham thinks he won't be noticed when he is in a clearing in the direct line of sight of the chief is a mystery.

The natives are clearly African rather than southeast Asian. (In "The Myth Goes Ever Downward", Paul Di Filippo talks about the dearth of Samoan extras in Hollywood at the time, but Samoans would be equally wrong geographically--Skull Island is *west* of Sumatra in the middle of the Indian Ocean, not east in the Pacific.)

How do the natives manage to pick just the spot to come to on the ship to be able to capture Ann over the railing?

Charlie might be a bit of a stereotype, but at least he is not used for comic relief.

One wonders where the natives got the fur for all the Kong costumes in the ceremony. Were there other giant Kongs they killed? Were there also normal-sized apes on the island?

The tracking shot from the rear of the procession to the gate makes the viewer feel they are actually there as part of it.

Thank goodness Cooper didn't go for the super-phallic bolt across the gate that DiLaurentis did.

Where did the giant gong come from? The islanders don't seem to have any metal-working capabilities (or enough raw material).

As Robert Silverberg notes in "The Magic and Mystery of Kong", Kong's lower canines make no sense.

Note that Kong seems to have two differently shaped heads: one squarish (in close-ups) and one more elongated (for the full-body shots).

Kong also has nothing in front to identify him as male (and no cleft in back either). Is it possible that Kong is actually female?

Kong clearly knows how the fastening on the pillars work, indicating a high level of intelligence.

At this point, Driscoll apparently takes charge, over Englehorn or Denham.

We start to see the influence of Gustave Dore, with jungle scenes in which the foreground is in shadow and the background well lit, almost in a frame formed by the trees. (In spite of this, the foreground is remarkable well-lit considering it is supposedly nighttime and the characters all talk about how dark it is.)

The stegosaurus was considerably larger than stegosauri were.

The stegosaurus tail rattle (and the T-rex tail wave we see later) were adopted by Ray Harryhausen in his stop-motion animation. (Harryhausen worked with O'Brien on MIGHTY JOE YOUNG.)

If the swamp is shallow enough for them to push the raft with poles, how does the entire brotosaurus submerge to get under the raft?

If you are escaping from an animal whose head is high off the ground, why would you climb an exposed tree that would put you at exactly that level?

We see more Dore images as we travel across the island.

No one is really quite sure what the creature crawling up the vine is when Driscoll is hiding in the cave.

If the dinosaur Kong fights is supposed to be a Tyrannosaurus rex, it has one too many fingers on its forelegs (three rather than two). If it was an allosaurus, on the other hand (pun intended), the fingers are correct. Most sources say it is a T-rex, but that is probably only because that is a better-known dinosaur. The book claims merely that it is a carnivorous dinosaur.

We now know that the jaw strength of a T-rex (or an allosaur) would be such that Kong could not have wrenched the carnivore's mouth open the way he did.

The scene with the waterfall at the left of the screen (right after Driscoll has returned to the village) was duplicated by Peter Jackson in his 2005 version.

The scene in the cavern where Kong fights a sea serpent is a tour de force of multiple exposures: the main action is the stop motion of Kong fighting the serpent, while in the upper left there is a cut-out with film of a live-action Ann, and in the lower right another cut-out has a live-action film of Driscoll. The depth of field is such that Ann is farther back and is at times obscured by Kong, while Driscoll is always closer than Kong.

The sea serpent inexplicably has legs.

Not as evident on the small screen but visible on a theatrical screen is the wall and the village in the background when we see Kong on his "penthouse patio". On the small screen, you can see it best when Driscoll and Ann are descending on the vine.

Pteranodons could barely lift their own weight, let alone pick up a hundred-pound woman. Pteranodons lived in the late Cretaceous. Pterosaurs also include pterodactyls, which lived in the late Jurassic.

Even after weeks at sea, the sailors refers to Ann as "the lady" rather than by name.

Apparently the gate was merely a symbol, since it survives Kong's onslaught for all of fifty seconds.

Coconut bras were never a part of Polynesian, or south or southeast Asian culture. They seem to have been invented as a way to come up with something to satisfy modesty requirements of photographs, movies, etc., that appeared to be indigenous. They would be incredibly uncomfortable in real life.

Several of the "Kong rampage" scenes were cut in later releases as being too violent, but have been restored.

He's always be king of his world" is as close as the dialogue comes to calling him "King Kong". "King Kong" was what the lights said on Broadway.

The tickets were "20 bucks"--was that for one or two? Either way, it was a lot cheaper than HAMILTON.

Driscoll says it's the first time he's worn an open-front suit. Sailors' uniforms buttoned all the way to the neck.

How did Denham get Kong back to New York? (Remember, the Venture wasn't large enough to hold him.) And how did he get Kong from the ship to the theater without anyone seeing Kong? And how did he convince reporters to hold off taking photographs until they were on stage?

Again, the scene of Kong dropping the woman was excised in later releases.

How does Kong manage to find Ann in New York? And how does he climb buildings while holding her?

Why does Ann try to escape Kong's grip when to do so would mean a fall to her death?

Several people escape from the El train; you can see them fall out of the windows which are now on the bottom side of the train and run away.

It becomes full daylight rather quickly from the time Kong escapes to when the planes are attacking.

[-ecl]

KING KONG (non-film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In July 2007, we were traveling to the Canadian Rockies and we drove to Cardston, Alberta. Our destination here was the Remington-Alberta Carriage Museum, but we made a quick stop when we came unexpectedly upon a silhouette sign of a giant ape. It was the sign for the Fay Wray Fountain. Fay Wray was born at Wrayland southwest of Cardston in 1907, and the fountain was built/named during her visit to Cardston in the 1990s. The "King Kong" connection in Cardston has not been exploited as much as Vulcan, Alberta's name has, though, and there is no Kong Kong statue, or Skull Island Restaurant, or Carl Denham Movie Theater.

Cardston is the "Mormon capital" of Canada, known for its Temple (the oldest outside the US and the only one in Canada until the 1990s), and was founded by Charles Ora Card, Orson Scott Card's great-grandfather.

(A photo of the Fay Wray Fountain can be seen at <http://leepers.us/FayWrayFountain.jpg>.)

Photos of Vulcan can be seen at http://leepers.us/vulcan/vulcan_pics.htm.)

[-ecl]

Tsundoku (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Tsundoku](#) in the 08/08/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

Adding this word to my vocabulary. [-gmg]

Evelyn responds:

Aren't we all? [-ecl]

Fake Endings (letter of comment by Gary McGath)

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE DEVIL RIDES OUT](#) in the 08/08/25/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

Haydn used that trick in his 90th symphony. It comes to what seems like a typical emphatic ending, pauses for four measures during which the audience will doubtless start applauding, and then resumes quietly in the "wrong" key, building to the real ending a minute and a half later. [-gmg]

The Fear of Death, Agnosticism, and Atheism (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Hal Heydt, Scott Dorsey, and Tim Illingworth):

In response to [Hal Heydt's comments on a fear of death](#) in the 08/08/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

As I understand the terms, you can't really be "between" atheist and agnostic. To be atheistic means not to believe in a god. To be agnostic means to think the question of a deity's existence can't be resolved. An agnostic can believe that there's a god in spite of that lack of evidence, or not.

The main point is that being atheistic doesn't require affirmatively believing in the non-existence of a god. Someone who has never been exposed to the idea of gods and hasn't come up with it independently would be an atheist.

Personally, I don't fear death (the state of being dead), but I do fear dying (the process). [-gmg]

Hal replies:

I don't know whether or not the existence of one or more deities can be resolved. I do know that, at least to my satisfaction, that it has not been. To date, despite great efforts by many people over many centuries, there is a profound lack of evidence or demonstration FOR the existence of a god or gods. So far, this makes the probability of such existence extremely low, so--at present--my default position is that god(s) do not exist.

So....you tell me. Does that make me an atheist or an agnostic...or some fuzzy state in between the two that has not yet had a quantum collapse?

As for death... In the specific instance, I would never have experienced dying. [-hh]

Scott Dorsey responds to the question:

Perhaps it makes you actually a god, but you don't know it yet? [-sd]

And Tim Illingworth adds:

You are Emperor Claudius and I claim my 5 million sesterces. [-ti]

Gary suggests:

Both. You say you don't know whether the question can be resolved. That's the agnostic position. You also say your default position is that god(s) do not exist. That's the atheist position. The two aren't mutually exclusive. [-gmg]

[And in response to never experiencing dying]

Sounds to me like the best way to die, given that we have to. [-gmg]

UNEARTHLY STRANGER (letter of comment by Jay Morris):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on UNEARTHLY STRANGER](#) in the 08/08/25 issue of the MT VOID, Jay Morris writes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "(Also, the claim is that the aliens don't blink, except they do.)" [-ecl]

The only time I noticed any blinking was at the dinner table and I think Julia was playing upon the line "Thank you Kindly Sir she said" and John follows up with "as she waved her wooden leg aloft". This was evidently a saying at the time. [-gmg]

Evelyn replies:

I was specifically looking for blinking, and caught it a couple of times, including once when Julia was at her desk with no one else in the room to see her. [-ecl]

RUMOURS (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In a follow-up to [his comments on RUMOURS](#) in the 08/08/25 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

Nowhere as weird as his other films. [-pd]

Evelyn notes:

Well, I did say, "RUMOURS is Guy Maddin's latest film, and may be the most normal Guy Maddin film I've seen." [-ecl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

KING KONG by Edgar Wallace and Merian C. Cooper, novelization by Delos W. Lovelace (Bantam, no ISBN) is a little unusual for a novelization in that there are a lot of differences from the film. This is because Lovelace was working from Ruth Rose's first draft of the script.

So the book has the ship's name as the Wanderer, not the Venture, and has it docked in Hoboken rather than in New York. The cook is "Lumpy", not "Charlie" (and isn't Chinese). (Jackson restored the name in his 2005 version.) The monkey is "Ignatz" rather than "Iggy". (It's possible that the filmmakers decided to pick a less German name, I suppose.)

The first dinosaur encountered on the book is more a therapod than a stegosaurus. Lovelace also seems to think that "triceratops" is the plural of "triceratop". He also has a character describe the triceratops as "another of Nature's mistakes," but since it survived as a species for about two million years, it wasn't an immediate mistake.

The animal that crawls up a vine to attack Driscoll is a spider rather than a lizard. It is possible that it started out that way, but that Willis O'Brien thought the spider would be too difficult/expensive/time-consuming to animate.

There are a few "racially insensitive" comments. Ann at one point says, "Probably the natives will be as friendly as reservation Indians." Denham uses the term "a Chinaman's chance", and Englehorn refers to the native men as "bucks".

I also read KONG UNBOUND edited by Karen Haber (Byron Preiss, ISBN 978-1-4165-1670-5), a collection of essays about Kong that came out in 2005 to ride the coattails of Peter Jackson's KING KONG. (It's labeled "Official Movie Merchandise" along with a logo for the movie.) Some of the more interesting articles include Robert Silverberg writing about the dinosaur inaccuracies, Harry Harrison writing about various plot holes, and several about just what the attraction of Kong for Ann was based on. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The fundamental flaw in God is that He will say that He requires the sacrifice of Isaac/Isma'il; the fundamental flaw in man is that he takes his knife in hand to do God's bidding.

--Russell Hoban, PILGERMANN

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