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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
09/12/25 -- Vol. 44, No. 11, Whole Number 2397

Table of Contents

[SON OF KONG](#) (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[3I/Atlas Interstellar Object](#) (comment by Gregory Frederick)
[WEDNESDAY](#) (letter of comment by Daniel Kimmel)
[Silent Films at Boskone and Elsewhere](#) (letters of comment
 by Scott Dorsey, Tim Illingworth, Gary McGath, Hal Heydt,
 and Paul Dormer)
[This Week's Reading](#) (MOBY-DICK) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

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http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

SON OF KONG (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

(A few weeks ago I commented on KING KONG (1933), so I decided to do SON OF KONG as well.)

The "NRA" mentioned at the beginning is not the National Rifle Association, but the National Recovery Administration.

This at least recognizes that Denham would be sued by hundreds of people for the damage caused by Kong.

The boat is definitely docked in New York this time, on the East River, since we see the Brooklyn Bridge in the background.

They sail to Colombo, Singapore, Semarang, Makassar, Lombok, and Dakang (which is 1753 miles from Skull Island). All of these are real places except for Dakang.

Hilda is no Fay Wray, but she does seem more real. Even Denham notes her "personality". And she clearly an animal lover, since her first thought is to free the animals so they can escape the fire.

The local population seems more racially authentic than that of Skull Island.

Where would the supposed treasure on Skull Island have come from?

Where did Denham get the money to give to Hilda?

We see basically the same evolution of the shipboard romance as in KING KONG.

This has the familiar trope of the mutinous crew, but somehow they just put Englehorn, Denham, Hilda, and Charlie off in a lifeboat.

And the mutiny is couched in terms of the Russian Revolution ("we're through with bosses", references to the bourgeoisie, etc.).

They land inside a cave/tunnel, which Peter Jackson duplicated in the 2005 version.

The styracosaurus is a more reasonable size than the stegosaurus in KING KONG.

Little Kong's "humorous" gestures are merely annoying.

Why there is a sudden combination typhoon and earthquake isn't clear--the two phenomena are not related.

How does Little Kong know when to release Denham?

How do they manage to attract the attention of a ship so far away? I suppose it's possible that someone on the ship is scanning the ocean, but it seems unlikely.

Why would Denham and Hilda getting married mean they should get only one of three shares instead of two of four?

[-ecl]

3I/Atlas Interstellar Object (comment by Gregory Frederick):

The 3I/Atlas interstellar object is really strange. Most comets have more water ice compared to CO2 but this object has more CO2 in it compared to any other comet ever seen. And it has much less water ice than comets usually have so it does not have a long tail made of sublimated water ice. This tail is seen as a typical comet heats up during its approach to the Sun. It does have a very large coma made of CO2 though. Mars orbiter may try to image the object as it will pass very close to Mars. Also the core seems to generate a great deal of energy. Article is listed below.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/4-powerful-telescopes-agree-interstellar-025023118.html>

[-gf]

WEDNESDAY (letter of comment by Daniel Kimmel):

In response to [Paul S. R. Chisholm's comments on WEDNESDAY](#) in the 09/05/25 issue of the MT VOID, Daniel Kimmel writes:

Correction: Enid is a wolf, not a vampire. [-dk]

Silent Films at Boskone and Elsewhere (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Tim Illingworth, Gary McGath, Hal Heydt, and Paul Dormer):

In response to [Gary McGath's comments on silent films with organ accompaniment at Boskone](#) in the 09/05/25 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

Boskone still does this. This year Boskone ran only a short NACA film and the 16mm film from Worldcon with our own Gary McGath accompanying on synthesizer, though, and not a full silent feature. We hope to have a feature in February.

For years, John Kiley joked with us that when he died we would have to start running transitional films (films that were still acted and composed like silent films, but with some dialogue added). When he did die in the early 2000s we ran WHITE ZOMBIE with Bela Lugosi. [-sd]

Evelyn responds:

With no slur intended to Gary, a synthesizer is hardly the same as a full-size pipe organ. I know that Boskone 29 (1992) showed AELITA with live accompaniment by the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra. This had its pros and cons. The accompaniment was good, but the fact that there was a twenty-minute intermission between reels (for the band to rest) was not so good. [-ec]

Tim Illingworth adds:

John Kiley was also the organist at the Garden, thus making him the only person to play for the Red Sox, the Celtics and the Bruins. [-ti]

Gary McGath responds to Scott:

I'm glad to talk about this whenever you're ready. The only reason I stopped accompanying silent films at Boskone was that a lot of silents were still under copyright then, and Kino in particular charged expensive licensing fees.

Some early sound films didn't have musical scores, and adding live accompaniment is a possibility. I've heard of the 1931 FRANKENSTEIN being done this way. However, it's still in copyright. [-gmg]

Hal Heydt notes:

That copyright should run out the end of next year. (To the best of my knowledge, corporate held copyrights run for 95 years. I will admit to being fairly surprised that The Mouse Kingdom didn't get that extended a few years ago.) [-hh]

Evelyn adds:

And (probably) the 1931 DRACULAs as well (both the Lugosi and the Villarias versions), though see comments at <https://nerdlypleasures.blogspot.com/2025/01/universal-studios-dracula-and.html>

Actually, some claim the Villarias version is already in public domain because the copyright was not renewed. On the other hand, the restored version may be covered by a separate copyright. On the gripping hand, supposedly someone at the copyright office said that a restoration cannot be copyrighted, because it's an effort to return the film to its original state. [-ec]

Scott adds further explanation:

The problems are first of all that some of the older silent films are still in original copyright, but also that the restored and reconstructed versions are individually copyrighted.

So... Boskone (or maybe Arisia, it's hard to tell) owns a 16mm print of METROPOLIS which they bought from Blackhawk Films in the seventies. The Blackhawk prints come with rights conveyed, so they can show that to anyone without paying any royalties.

But... the new re-edited version of Metropolis sold by Kino Lorber is still in copyright because of the restoration work... and it is much easier to follow the plot in the restored version. (It still has a lot of important stuff missing though.)

So, we can show a poor and fragmentary version but we can't show a more complete and better-looking (but still far from original) version without paying rights.

There *are* some old 16mm prints and public domain video transfers of many great silent films, though. Some of them are available through the Library of Congress although their impending budget cuts may sink that. [-sd]

Gary adds:

Yes, "More than 95 years old, out of copyright" is a simple rule that turns out not always to be true. The copyright boundaries for restorations are often unsettled law. I've been stopped 3 times on YouTube for alleged copyright violations on silent films with my accompaniment. Twice the other side gave in; the other time I didn't find it worthwhile to fight it.

In Europe there's the additional complication that movie copyrights tend to be tied to individuals rather than corporations, and the clock starts ticking only when the last copyright owner dies. [-gmg]

Paul Dormer writes:

I've seen Eisenstein's ALEXANDER NEVSKY shown with a live orchestra performing Prokoviev's score. [-pd]

Hal notes:

A couple of bits of trivia about that film...

The helm that Nevsky wears is a direct copy of the historical original. They borrowed the actual helm from the Hermitage museum to make the copy used in the film.

Prokoviev wrote the music for the battle on the ice before it was filmed. The battle was choreographed to match the music. [-hh]

Paul also adds:

And they hired strong swimmers as extras--filmed in summer.

At about the same time, Arthur Bliss was hired to write the music for THINGS TO COME. H. G. Wells was insistent that the music be written first, but he reckoned without the final editing. The result was some jarring key changes in the industrial montage, so they got someone to dub tam-tam crashes to cover them. [-pd]

Evelyn adds:

Along those lines, Mark and I once went to an outdoor performance of Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" at Monmouth Battlefield, with live cannon. These days orchestras apparently use recordings of live cannon when they are performing

indoors. [-ecl]

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

Okay, once again I'm punting the column and giving you another chapter's-worth of commentary on MOBY-DICK. (Well, two, actually, because Chapter 5's commentary is so short.)

CHAPTER 4: The Counterpane

Much has been made of: "Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife. ... For though I tried to move his armâ€”unlock his bridegroom claspâ€”yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death should part us twain." And certainly Melville does emphasize the similarity to a marriage bed (even to the "till death do us part" aspect), but it is just as possible that he does this to point out the incongruity of it all rather than hint at a secret homosexual subtext.

Ishmael comes from a family in which he has a stepmother and hence is a somewhat second-class child. This is similar to his Biblical namesake, who was the "illegitimate" son of Abraham and his servant Hagar. I put "illegitimate" in quotes because I am not sure the word really expresses the connotations in Biblical times. There was less stigma attached on men fathering children with their servants or slaves, but those children were nonetheless lower in status than those whose mother was married to their father.

When Ishmael was sent to his room as a child, he fell asleep in the afternoon, he later woke up and relates, "I opened my eyes, and the before sun-lit room was now wrapped in outer darkness." This is just one of *many* references to black, or darkness, presumably to contrast with the whiteness of the whale. It is worth noting that while Biblical references connect darkness and blackness with evil, almost all the incidents of *actual* darkness and blackness in the novel are either benign or positive. The Spouter Inn is very dark, yet it provides a meal and a bed for Ishmael. Queequeg is dark, yet he is portrayed almost entirely in positive terms and is ultimately the means of Ishmael's salvation.

In the morning, Queequeg climbs naked under the bed where soon "he was hard at work booting himself; though by no law of propriety that I ever heard of, is any man required to be private when putting on his boots. But Queequeg, do you see, was a creature in the transition stageâ€”neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manners. His education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate ... If he had not been a small degree civilized, he very probably would not have troubled himself with boots at all; but then, if he had not been still a savage, he never would have dreamt of getting under the bed to put them on." One of the themes in MOBY-DICK is transitionâ€”as the Pequod travels further from home (and civilization), many of the crew undergo transitions in the reverse of Queequeg's supposed direction. Ishmael thinks of Queequeg as transitioning from primitive to civilized, while the crew goes from civilized to primitive.

When Ishmael sees Queequeg shaving with a harpoon, he thinks, "Queequeg, this is using Rogers's best cutlery with a vengeance. Afterwards I wondered the less at this operation when I came to know of what fine steel the head of a harpoon is made, and how exceedingly sharp the long straight edges are always kept." One might think Ishmael is referring to Wm. Rogers, who was a silversmith starting around 1825, and whose name is currently a trademark of the Oneida Company. (My parents' good silver was Wm. Rogers.) But harpoon points are steel, not silver.

At breakfast, Ishmael sees "a brown and brawny company, with bosky beards." "Bosky" means "having an abundance of bushes, shrubs, or trees."

CHAPTER 5: Breakfast

Ledyard is John Ledyard, Connecticut-born explorer who traveled with Captain Cook, crossed overland from Paris to Irkutsk and back, and died on an African expedition. Mungo Park was a Scottish explorer who made several expeditions into Africa.

Each died on one of his voyages.

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

A man ought to read just as inclination leads him;
for what he reads as a task will do him little good.
--Samuel Johnson

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