

## "KONG - The Eighth Wonder Of The World" (Again)

### THIRD MILLENNIUM HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW & NEWS

Peter Jackson's "KING KONG" (2005) - review by K. D. Kragen, KaveDragen Ink.

Hilarious, Peter Jackson: "We can't get Fay, she's working on a picture over at RKO" (*King Kong*, 2005). That's great! What a line! And there are scores of other great lines, scenes, literary Kong allusions and musical strains giving homage to the original 1933 film--whole bunches of 'em. At the end of the movie, at the very tail end of the credits, Jackson's dedication acknowledges his indebtedness to Willis O'Brien, Edgar Wallace, Merian C. Cooper, Robert Armstrong, *et al*, closing with "...and to the incomparable Fay Wray" (1907-2004).

Bravo! Peter Jackson, you pulled it off. Despite its few defects--especially the ending that drags on too long (the spaghetti western back-and-forth between Kong and Anne, reminiscent of the drawn-out Frodo-Golom Mountain of Doom conclusion of *Lord of the Rings III*)--nonetheless, a great movie, a faithful re-rendering of one of the greatest films of all time.

Jackson even closes with Denham's famous last line (from the 1933 version with Robert Armstrong): "Oh no, it wasn't the airplanes. It was beauty killed the beast." From the three hour film's beginning, with some well thought-out backstory on Ann (Naomi Watts) and life in the Depression, to the place where Carl Denham (Jack Black) finds the desperate and beautiful Ann with a stolen apple in her hand, Jackson tries hard to take us back to that place audiences in movie houses around the country sat in, back in 1933. And he does a marvelous job of it.

Two major departures from the original film mark Jackson's vision: one, the degenerate Skull Islanders; two, Ann's shifting relationship with Kong. Concerning the former, we have no idealized "noble savages" in Jackson's version of *King Kong*. The Skull Islanders are truly the most degenerated, degraded humans imaginable, as if a hundred generations of "The Lord Of The Flies" had reigned over the island, with the theme from Conrad's *The Heart Of Darkness* weaving in and out of the plotline (recalling Coppola's Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now*). The irony Jackson plays on here is: having long ago lost any humanity, what the island savages do to Ann, Carl Denham does to Kong (in New York), even to binding Kong in chains to sacrificial pillars just like those to which was bound the original Ann (Fay Wray). Maybe that scene is a little overboard in the stage production, even to having the performance and music mimic the original 1933 sacrificial festival on Skull Island; yes, maybe it was a little over the top--though I'm not sure. Civilization only glosses over the barbarity that indwells us all. the Skull Islanders are happy to sacrifice Ann to their god, Kong, whom they *love to fear*; Denham and his gang are happy to sacrifice Kong, along with their own humanity, to their gods, wealth and fame. Is that the overarching theme of Jackson's *King Kong*? Sure, I think so.

What of Ann's shifting relationship with Kong? It is a development which for some may be the most striking departure from the original film. Atop the mountain hideout with Kong, Ann shifts from Fay Wray's version of "Beauty" in the 1933 film--screaming all the way to New York--to Helen Mack's version of vaudeville actress Hilda in *The Son Of Kong* (also 1933); in that movie, Hilda develops a close friendship to the somewhat smaller giant ape, Kong's son, a relationship more like one might develop with a favorite horse or a loyal Saint Bernard (also like the relationship between Jill Young, played by Terry Moore, and Joe in the 1949 "Mighty Joe Young"). In Peter Jackson's film, Ann changes from the terrified victim of a "horrible Moby-Dick-like force of nature" to awe then respect then a humane kindness, approaching Kong as one might gentle a wild stallion or relate to a mad king (*King Lear*).

Now to Jackson's drawing out the Empire State Building scene way too long. He should have kept this human-animal connection between Ann and Kong a little more subtle. Ann's repeated refrain, "It's beautiful," just gets silly at the end, as Kong slips away into beastly oblivion. If Jackson had not gone overboard on this Ann-Kong relationship, it might have succeeded; as it turns out, I am not sure I buy it. However, there does seem one strength to Jackson's version of Ann Darrow that might be better than in the original film: Ann does show a strength of character that was at the time a mark of those who rose above the hardships of the Depression. She exhibits that "trooper" resiliency which often did characterize hard-working Americans in the 1930s. In this sense, the change in the Ann-Kong relationship, despite the over-acting on the part of both, may mitigate the film's faults.

Successfully remaking films that have become movie legends is nearly impossible. There will never be a remake of *Casablanca*, a work of film art that stands alone. No one can remake *Forbidden Planet* or *Metropolis* or *To Have and Have Not* or *Bladerunner*. Remakes of the *Time Machine*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and even *War of the Worlds* were ultimately flawed to the point of failure. The remake of *Lost Horizon*, with Sally Kellerman, Liv Ullmann, Peter Finch, George Kennedy, Michael York, Olivia Hussey, Charles Boyer, was undoubtedly the worst film any of them ever "acted" in. A few remakes have worked moderately well, for example, *The Planet Of The Apes* and *The Last Man On Earth* (*The Omega Man*).

But, Jackson pulls it off with *King Kong*. He accomplishes what I believe he set out to do, successfully redo what many consider to be the greatest monster movie of all time, creating a grand new work of art from an older, nearly perfect work of art. *Bravo e grazie mille!*

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## RESOURCES

Makoto Fujimura's insightful blog on the question "Could *King Kong* be a better film than *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*?" [How the Beast Stole Christmas](#)

Official website of Jackson's [King Kong](#)

Fansite [Kong Is King](#)

Fay Wray on the web [The Fay Wray Pages](#)