

King of the Kongo: What we have and what we're looking for

Before we start, let me say that this is a complex project. The lip reading is hard. I've done my best to boil this down to simple terms. If you feel you know the details, feel free to skip ahead, but most of the questions you will have should be answered here. If you have questions that you would like clarified, please email me at drfilm@earthlink.net. Write SOUND in the subject line please. Please email me here with your ideas on what the sound is and please let me know what your name/group is so I can give you credit in the restoration when it's finished.

King of the Kongo was a cliffhanger serial in 1929. These were very long movies that were shown in 20 minute segments over a number of weeks. This one is over 3 hours.

Kongo was the first cliffhanger serial that had sound. The sound was recorded on shellac records or discs. It was synchronized by starting the projector and the disc at the same time using a special motor.

The film is 10 chapters of two reels each. Each reel is about 10 minutes. (Chapter 1 is three reels since it establishes the plot.)

By 1933, sound-on-disc had been replaced with optical sound, which is still used today. *King of the Kongo* was never reissued with optical sound. Had it been reissued, it would have been reprinted for television, and we need to do this by doing this now.

When this was made, it was difficult to record sound, so there were many films that were called "part talking." This is one of them. It has one or two talking sequences per reel, and the rest was music with sound effects and intertitles, like a silent film of the time.

We have the entire picture portion of this film, but not all of the sound. We have the script that was on deposit for the New York censor. Unfortunately, this is an early version of the script and it does not reflect the final dialogue that made it into the film. Additionally, there are sometimes talking sequences in the script that are not in the film, in combination with talking sequences that were recorded that are not in the script. It's hard to work out.

What we are doing is using helpers to read the dialogue that the actors are actually saying so that we can have modern actors re-record this dialogue and make the film complete. Attached to this is a pretty detailed outline of the plot and characters.

If you can read the actors' lips and tell us what they actually said, let us know, and then you or your group can get credit in the final restoration.

You don't want to wade through three hours of stuff, so I've split this into the sections we need. You'll also find PDFs of the script for each scene. You'll find it useful to print these out to have in front of you while looking over the videos.

I've repeated each scene a couple of times with a little bit of black in between so you know when things restart. The scenes in Chapter 1, Reel 1 come from a degraded print (all that survives) so they may be harder to do than some of the later ones.

Movie serials, by their design, were action oriented and sometimes hard to follow. I've included a fairly detailed outline of what went on so you can acquaint yourself with the action and the characters. I hope this will help.

This is pretty hokey, so why preserve it? There are several reasons. It's historically important as the first sound serial. It's the first large speaking part for Boris Karloff in a movie. In 1931, Karloff would originate the flat-topped Frankenstein monster in sound films, which is what he's remembered for today. Finally, this serial, with gorillas and dinosaurs, seems to have been a sort of loose inspiration for *King Kong* a few years later, and particularly its sequel, *Son of Kong*, which takes place near a ruined temple with a large gorilla and a stash of jewels. *King of the Kongo* has not been seen in complete form since perhaps 1933 or 1934.

This restoration is important enough that the Library of Congress and Museum of Modern Art (New York) have donated substantial time and materials to it.

We need the following:

Chapter 1, Reel 1, two sequences.

First sequence: [Script](#) [Video](#)

Second sequence: [Script](#) [Video](#)

Chapter 1, Reel 2:

First sequence: NO SCRIPT [Video](#)

We do not appear to have the script for this at all. It's a very short sequence in which Mooney, Macklin, and Drake are talking. Mooney hands Macklin some papers, which appear to be maps. I suspect that they are talking about a dinosaur that's in the court. Drake has just seen it and Macklin is dubious. This one will be hard. Drake has referred to this as a dinosaurus in some other titles. Be aware that this might be what he's saying.

Chapter 3, Reel 1

First sequence: [Script](#) [Video](#)

Chapter 3, Reel 2, two sequences.

First sequence: [Script](#) [Video](#)

Second sequence: [Script](#) [Video](#)

Chapter 7, Reel 1, one sequence

First sequence: [Script](#) [Video](#)

King of the Kongo Outline Chapter 1-3.

OK, this is confusing and rambling because the serial itself is confusing and rambling. Anyone who appears in a shot that you might encounter has a picture associated with him. Look at www.drfilm.net/help for the scripts.

If you are confused or need help deciphering something, feel free to email me at drfilm@earthlink.net (make sure to make the subject say "sound" so I'll see it.)

Episode 1, Reel 1:



Larry Trent (Walter Miller)



Head of the Secret Service (Richard Tucker)

Larry Trent of the Secret Service is briefed by his boss, the head of the Secret Service (Richard Tucker). The chief does not reappear in the film and we have all of his sound, so I have not included an image.

There are a number of missing agents from the Secret Service who have been either killed or gone missing when exploring an outpost on the Congo river (it's spelled variously as Kongo or Congo in various places.) There is a gorilla who seems to ward everyone off, and he seems to be at the beck and call of some other person. The gorilla may be a trained gorilla. The gorilla and his master are the King(s) of the Kongo.

One of the disappearances is Larry's brother, so he has a personal stake in it. Larry is sent to Africa to investigate the disappearances. He meets several interesting people in lots of amazing stock footage. (These are movie clips that were shot for other

productions and incorporated here to save money.) We see more stock footage of Angkor Wat to represent the temple. Larry's brother has found a locket that seems to come from the lost temple of Nuhalla, deep in the heart of Africa.

Inside the temple, in a room full of local plunder, Macklin (Boris Karloff) and Drake (Larry Steers) discuss the impasse they have had with not finding the jewels hidden in over a year. Drake is about to give up and dislikes Macklin's leadership but they agree to keep going after getting word of the caravan bearing Larry. Drake threatens Macklin to get their prisoner to talk, since the prisoner seems to know the location of the jewels.

We see the chained prisoner struggling to get free as another gang member, Mooney (William Burt) threatens that the gang have found a way to make him talk.

END REEL 1

REEL 2 (We do not have the sound for this one)

Mooney closes the vents above the prisoner's dungeon and the gorilla comes out of his room, apparently freed by Drake.

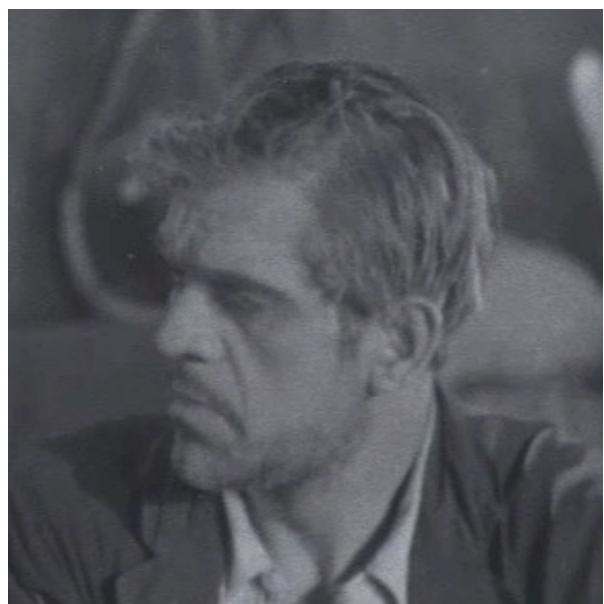
Wild animals stalk Trents safari, including the gorilla.

The natives see the gorilla and flee because they are scared of it.

The gorilla, rather unconvincingly, swings out on a vine and bumps into Larry, knocking him out. A gang of thugs, led by Mooney, are waiting to rob him and the loot carried by the safari. As the gang scurries off, hands full of loot, the safari comes back to revive Larry.



Drake (Larry Steers)



Macklin (Boris Karloff)



In the temple, Drake and Macklin discuss whether there actually is a treasure hidden inside. They also discuss that the gang believes there is a dinosaur living somewhere in the temple, which we see in a flashback. They are joined by Mooney, who we have seen wandering around somewhat.

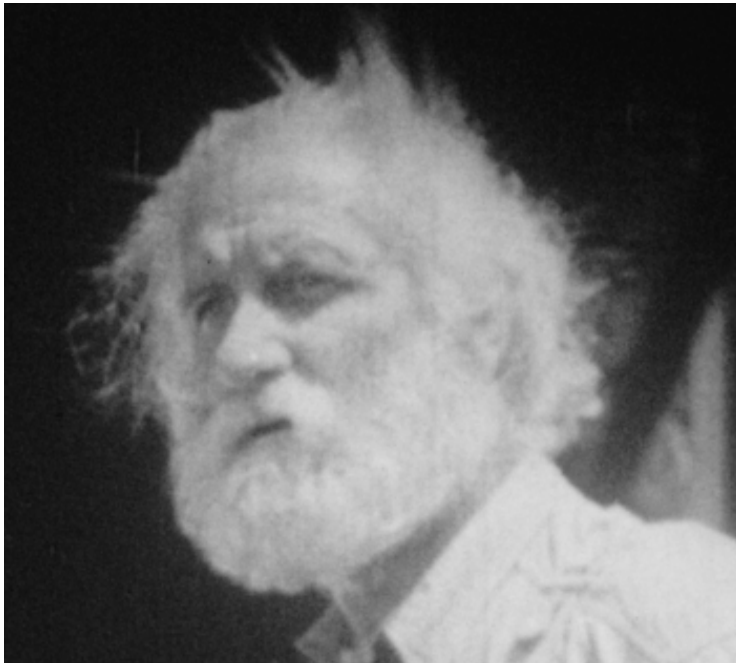
Mooney tells Mack and Drake about the caravan/safari (he calls it a train) and notes that there were some valuable pieces in it.

Macklin calls in the gang (digging outside) to come in for a briefing.

Mooney (William Burt)

REEL THREE (We have the sound for this reel)

Larry gets to a trading post where he meets Trader John (Lafe McKee):



Trader John tells him of a group of ivory smugglers who are in the old temple. The natives won't go near it. They had a talisman (looks like an ankh) that protected them

from the dinosaurs who live in the temple. Also hidden in the temple is a cache of jewels that are hugely valuable. The locket that Larry has seems to come from cache of jewels. The missing Secret Service men were pursuing the jewels before they were either killed or kidnapped. The gorilla was apparently involved in this. The natives don't like the gorilla either.

John's assistant is the goofy Commodore (Harry Todd):



The Commodore is a strange guy who is found often wandering around in the temple and dispensing weird nonsensical advice. We're not sure who's side he's on.

Drake comes into the trading post.

Meanwhile, young Diana Martin (Jacqueline Logan, the only female in the cast) has come to find her missing father in the temple. She's been clued in by Father Ricardo (the only cast member always in priest's robes) that her father, who abandoned her at birth, is somewhere nearby.

Ricardo might know the identity of her father, but is bound by his oath as a priest not to reveal it.





Father Ricardo (John P. Lockney)

Diana believes that her father is in the temple, but Ricardo tells her not to go: it's too dangerous. She goes anyway. Meanwhile, Larry decides to go himself.

Larry is chased down by a lion and falls into a trap with the fierce beast. A leopard or cheetah jumps down on Diana and starts to attack her.

CLIFFHANGER CHAPTER 1

Chapter 2—Terrors of the Jungle

Rather improbably, Larry escapes from the lion, and, equally improbably, Diana shoos off the cat that had been attacking her.

Diana and Larry decided to go to the temple together. As they travel, they run into natives. Diana has long ago befriended them.

Larry asks them to take the couple to Nuhalla (the name of the temple.) The natives refuse. Nuhalla is bad magic for them. They take Larry and Diana to see the chief, Dakka.

Inside the temple, the Derelict (Gordon Russell) has a conversation with Macklin.

He discusses the terror he felt at the dinosaur and refuses to go down to that area again.

We see the dinosaur in flashback. (it's the same shot of the dinosaur from the previous chapter, so I guess it's important to establish that there are dinosaurs here)

Macklin throws the Derelict out of the room and Drake comes in. They discuss Larry and Diana coming to the temple.



Derelict (Gordon Russell)

END OF REEL ONE

REEL TWO

Diana and Larry arrive at the village with the natives. They meet a young woman with a child.

This woman is identified as Nuni in the script, but I believe she is Poppy Ruth Davis, billed as Poppy in the credits, referred to as Kolla in another chapter (they say Kolla's baby is sick). Perhaps too much information, but the film doesn't always make sense internally and I am hoping this may be of some help if we see different names referred to.

Larry and Diana watch things going on at the village via the use of stock footage, which is interesting given the fact that it was empty when they went into the hut.

The chief, Dakka, arrives. They discuss the gorilla, the government man who was lost and that Diana shouldn't go to the temple. Dakka does not want to go to the temple and says that the government man had found jewels in Nuhalla.

We have a flashback to the government man, who we can see is the prisoner at the trading post, where we see Trader John, Macklin, Drake, and the commodore. We've glimpsed the prisoner already. He's in the dungeon inside the temple.



The prisoner, also the government man (Richard Neil)

Diana is convinced her father is in Nuhalla, and though she's been asked to stay with the natives, she leaves to go with Larry. The natives have tied down her elephant, which she has been using to travel (I don't make this up, I just report it.)

The elephant escapes, Diana leaves, and Larry is attacked by the lion again.

Incredibly, he wrestles it away and shoots it.

Hearing the shot, Diana finds Larry and meets up with him. The elephant runs free but is apparently on his way to Nuhalla (don't ask me how).

Inside the temple, Mooney tells Macklin that a trap has been set for Larry. Drake hears this and goes to the room where the gorilla seems to come from, removing the chain again.

The couple arrive at Nuhalla, but can't get inside. They wander around for a bit, atop a wall that surrounds the temple.

The gorilla comes out, the prisoner yells out at Larry and Diana, and suddenly they look down from the wall they've been walking on to see that they are surrounded on a moat full of crocodiles. The gorilla comes out on the wall as well, and he opens a door that lets a cheetah loose. The cheetah stalks Larry and Diana.

Startled by the cheetah, Diana falls off the wall ledge and apparently into the pit of crocodiles. Larry follows her. The cheetah pounces, but they've already fallen.

END OF CHAPTER 2

Chapter 3 (we don't have sound for this)

Reel 1

Larry and Diana have, fortunately for them, fallen on another precipice just outside the pit of crocodiles and are safe. The gorilla moves on and the cheetah leaves (I don't know why).

The elephant arrives just in time to boost Diana and Larry up into the temple again, and he uses his massive strength to pull the iron bars out of a window securing the temple.

The gorilla wanders around with Mooney, and the Commodore, who has come into the temple, throws some shrapnel out of a window near the gorilla. Is he signaling the ape or trying to hit it? We don't know.

Mooney follows Diana and Larry's tracks.

In the plunder room inside the temple, the Derelict complains about Mack pushing too hard and the dinosaur, etc. He's complaining to Blackie, the guy in the black hat. Macklin comes in and scolds him sternly for being ungrateful and seeding foment.

Mooney bursts in and tells Macklin that Trent and the girl are in Nuhalla. Macklin is upset that the girl is there.

NOTE: The script indicates a trap for Blackie that isn't in the film, so bear in mind the dialogue is not correct for a bit.

The group disperses to go after Larry and Diana.

As the pair are walking around, The commodore pulls a lever and Larry falls through the floor to a secret compartment and is knocked unconscious. The men circle in on him.

The gorilla sneaks up on Diana and she faints.

Macklin sees this and goes crazy, whipping the gorilla furiously.

END OF REEL 1.

The commodore inspects to see if Diana is really fainted. He slinks off to avoid Macklin, who picks up the girl and carries her away.

In the plunder room, the gang shuffles Larry inside and knocks him back to consciousness. Macklin is not there initially.

Mooney searches Trent and can't find anything but a trinket. Macklin comes in (without Diana) and examines it, saying that it must have come from the Nuhalla stash. He asks Trent where it came from and he refuses to answer.

Larry jumps on Macklin to wrestle him but the gang pull him back. In the struggle, Macklin spies that Larry has a map stuck on his back. Macklin takes it.

The gang shuffle Larry out and Drake comes in to confer briefly with Macklin.

Diana awakes in a room that we will later discover is Macklin's quarters.

The gang shove Larry into another room and lock him in.

The commodore goes down to visit the mysterious prisoner. The commodore tells the prisoner that he is missing a lot of dinner parties by not telling where the jewels are.

Drake and Macklin, armed with the map, start looking anew for the jewels.

Larry sees a jacket and pulls out Secret Service number 17, the number of his missing brother.

The commodore drops a rope through the window to Diana and she escapes by climbing rather clumsily up the rope and leaving.

Drake examines the map and walks down to where the dinosaur is. He sees it and runs off in terror.

Diana runs through the temple, afraid. She lifts a secret grid and frees Larry.

Mack and the gang, at Drake's request, go down to see the dinosaur.

Larry crawls up the rope to escape and has a discussion with Diana in our second dialogue scene in this reel.

Larry and Diana walk off through the same corridor where they had seen the gorilla.

The gang sees them and gives chase. Larry throws the rope around a column and then jumps downward with Diana to evade them.

Their ruse works, but then they discover they are in a pit with lions. The Commodore pulls up the rope so they are stuck there.

END OF CHAPTER 3.

Chapter 4

Larry and Diana escape the lion pit and move back to the trading post. Larry recovers the map and hides it in his room.

Larry consults with Trader John and decides to send back to the Secret Service for help. The Commodore intercepts the help request and tears the note up.

Macklin and the Derelict come into Trent's room as he is sleeping. They want to find the map. The gorilla comes in through the window and tries to strangle Trent. A mysterious hand grabs the map.

END OF CHAPTER 4

Chapter 5

Diana intervenes and shoots at the gorilla as it flees, missing it. Trent resolves to get to the temple and investigate further. Diana, concerned for his safety and hers, urges him to split the map with her, necessitating that both pieces be present for the jewels to be found. Trent agrees and tears the map in half.

Drake shows up at the trading post in a sling, complaining that Diana's bad shots went through his hut and winged him. (Hint for the dense: Drake is actually the gorilla wearing an ape suit and Diana hit him.) Against advice, Trent goes to the temple to investigate, leaving Diana present at the trading post. Macklin's men ambush him to try to get the map.

END OF CHAPTER 5

Chapter 6

Trent escapes. Drake agrees to take Diana to the temple against Trent's wishes, and she leaves a note for him, which Trader John and Macklin see. Macklin sends a note to the men in the temple (via a cheetah courier!) that Trent has the map. Drake tries to put the moves on Diana, but she is focused only on finding her father. The Commodore arrives in the temple and tells Drake that the gang want to see him. The gang tell Drake that they want the map and he explains he's trying to schmooze it out of Diana. They want none of this and go after her themselves.

Diana, cornered, wads up her half of the map and throws it out of a second story window so that the thugs can't get it. Larry Trent happens across it before the men get it, and he rejoins the two pieces. Macklin arrives and fights Trent for the map. The two men grapple over a pit of lions. They apparently fall into the pit with the lions.

END OF CHAPTER 6

Chapter 7

Unaccountably, Larry and Macklin did not fall into the lion pit, even though we'd seen it in Chapter 6. Larry knocks Macklin out and leaves. Macklin is rescued by the gang.

Diana continues her search for her father. She comes across Macklin, who claims to know Diana's father, and tells her to leave Nuhalla. He tells her that her father has left and that his main desire was to present her with a fortune as compensation for his deserting her as a child. THIS IS THE SCENE IN CHAPTER 7 WE DON'T HAVE. (Hint for the dense: Macklin is actually Diana's father and doesn't want to admit it because he's a crook, a typical 1920s plot device.)

In the struggle, Trent has dropped the map, but the Commodore retrieves it. For some reason, he drops it in the grid over the prisoner. The prisoner retrieves it and buries it. Drake, spying that Trent is about, rigs a wire to make a deteriorating archway fall on Trent as he moves past it. It falls on him and he is trapped under the stones.

END OF CHAPTER 7

Larry brushes himself off and wanders out of the stones. The Commodore helps him find his way out.

Larry crawls through the rubble, avoiding another lion and eventually comes across a loose stone where he encounters the prisoner.

Somehow it needs to be established that these men know each other and that the prisoner is Larry's brother Tom (although he is clearly referred to as JOHN in some of the Chapter 10 dialogue).

And just to finish up, in case you care:

Trent has found the talisman of the local tribe and he gives it to Diana, who runs back to the village to get help from the tribesmen, who are hesitant, but agree when she returns the talisman to them. They run back with the priest and Trader John. Macklin captures Tom and Larry Trent, strings them up to shoot them if they don't tell where the map is, but the Commodore cuts them loose and they escape.

I must have missed something (and maybe it's in the dialogue here or it was just too dark in the prints I found), but Drake gets the map and tracks down the jewels. He's followed by a local guy, but Drake kills him to keep the secret. Macklin hears the shot but is distracted by a gang member telling him that the tribal warriors are storming the temple.

They have a shootout. Macklin goes back to his room to retrieve some papers. Drake finds the jewels, but has to leave them because of the shooting. The Commodore, following Drake, sees the jewels and takes them. Trader John has arrived with the priest and Diana by this point, and the Commodore gets the jewels with Trader John.

For reasons only the screenwriter can understand, the gorilla attacks Diana as she is going through some papers in Macklin's room. Macklin sees this, and gives the gorilla a bear hug to stop him. The gorilla picks up a gun that Macklin drops and shoots Macklin with it! Macklin threatens to expose the gorilla, speaking right to his face as if he understands.

Macklin crawls off, gravely wounded.

Trent and the priest arrive and wrestle the gorilla, having seen (apparently) Macklin save Diana from the gorilla. Trent wrestles with the gorilla, who (for some reason) doesn't just shoot Trent. Trent pulls off the gorilla's head, and it's, gee whiz, Drake in the gorilla suit. Both Trents and the priest subdue Drake.

Trader John and the Commodore haul off the jewels but are frightened off by a dinosaur. The native chief, holding the talisman, grabs the jewels. The dinosaur is, unaccountably, warded off by the magic talisman. The chief returns to the room where Drake, Diana, Tom, and Larry are. He hands them the jewels.

Trader John and the Commodore, close behind, arrive as well. Drake informs them that Trader John is actually the leader of the gang, that the Commodore is the go-between between Drake and the gang. Trader John gets a shotgun and tries to take the jewels but Trent stops him and John, the Commodore, and Drake are taken away by a soldier. Macklin, dying, crawls back into the room, asking for help.

They carry him back into his room and the priest attends him. Trent tells the native chief that he can have the jewels. The chief doesn't want them, saying he's content with the talisman and that the white men should have the jewels because they were killing each other over them. Diana and Trent decide that they want to donate them to a museum. The priest calls for everyone to come in. Macklin has a painfully long soliloquy in which he tells Diana that he wants to have Trent and Diana together, he tells everyone that this is what Diana's father would have wanted, he apologizes to Trent and asks for forgiveness, but never admits to being Diana's father. The priest refuses to divulge anything, citing his responsibility to keep confidences.

We cut to much later, when the jewels are on display in a museum, and Larry and Diana are married. THE END.