

SCRIPT VERSION ORIGINALE / ANGLAISE
“A L’OMBRE DE KING KONG”
(TWO KINGS AND A KONG)

10.00.00.00 Générique début :

Arte France et /und
la Compagnie des Taxi-Brousse
présentent /zeigen

A l’ombre de King-Kong
Im Schatten King Kongs

Un film de / ein Film von
Serge Viallet

Avec / mit
Louise Vincent

10.00.24.00 - OFF

King Kong plays a very special role in the story my life.

My mother was nine months pregnant at the time and my parents must have thought they were going to a relaxing afternoon at the movies .

The first time King Kong came on the screen, the audience went buzook, and my mother started having contractions, it was panic! They got her upstairs into a little closet next to the projection room...

10.01.09.00 – Rose at home

...and that’s where I was born. At a matinee of the Roxy Theater, New York City, New York on March 3, 1933. Just as – or so I was told – King Kong... You remember that part when he was running after the crew, and then he bent over and he scooped up Fay Wray in one hand, and she started screaming her head off ?

... My parents named me Rose, but my middle name’s Fay. Rose Fay Hauscke.

Some people are born under the sign of Capricorn. Me ? I was born under the sign of King Kong.

My mother was scared of her own shadow, and wouldn’t have been caught dead at the Roxy if she had seen the trailer. And I wouldn’t have been born at the movies. My parents never told me about Schoedsack and Cooper. And it was their movie that literally provoked my birth. Oh I admit it. I got hooked on those two guys.

What a life they’d led...

10.02.40.00

To begin with, Schoedsack and Cooper were adventurers. Real adventurers. Yes Sir ! For fifteen years they circled the whole globe with a camera in hand. Yep. I want you to meet Mr. Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack!

Shorty to his friends. I could never understand why - he was 6 ft. 5 in his stocking feet. The strong, silent type. Kind of like Gary Cooper, don’t you think?

And my Cooper is Merien Cladwell Cooper. And Here he is in Sudan.

This was a little earlier, in Iran.

Cooper was a real Southerner.

You know, all my life I worked the front desk of a downtown hotel in Washington, D.C. and if it weren't for these two kooks I'd still be there.

They brought adventure to my life

10.04.04.00 – Rose showing photographs

Kevin Brownlow gave me lots of photos. He's a film historian, used to stay at the Harrington. I always gave him the same room, 327.

Cooper once said, "Schoedsack is the bravest man I ever met. He doesn't know what fear is." Cooper knew what he was talking about. Anyway, these are the two crackpots responsible for *King Kong*.

Schoedsack and Cooper were born right after the movies were born, Schoedsack in 93 and Cooper in 94 – 1893 and 4. They grew up in an America where movies, movies had just begun bringing the whole world to our backyard...

10.05.06.00 – Archives – Children / Buffalo Bill Cody

When my Dad was a boy growing up at the beginning of the 20th century, the cinema was already a part of their lives.

They were the generation of Americans who loved the circus. My father's brother ran off with the circus to see the world. And he wasn't the only one.

Movies - like the circus and road shows before them – showed them a world they could otherwise only dream about.

Why even Buffalo Bill Cody, whose Wild West Show had toured the entire country, even he became fascinated by the cinema. Cody got involved in the movies at the ripe old age of 70! Imagine.

10.06.07.00 – Rose showing photos

Schoedsack got a very early start in movies. In 1917, he was only 24 . He was already a very successful cameraman in the Mack Sennett studios.

10.06.27.00 – Extract : “Her Fickle Fortune”

I don't know how he got to Hollywood. He got into cameras by working as a mechanic. I know one of the last movies he worked on for Sennett as a cameraman was called “Her Fickle Fortune.”

I think a guy like Schoedsack must have felt penned in at the ‘production-line’ way of doing things at the of Sennett studios. He needed fresh air. When the First World War broke out, he signed up as a cameraman in the Signal Corps, and went off to France!

10.07.43.00 – Rose at home

As for Cooper, well he was what you might call ‘a tough guy,’ moody, quick-tempered. But he was also generous, and loyal to a point of fanaticism. His views about women though, well, they were a mix of southern gallantry and Oriental contempt.

Cooper dreamed of adventure and aviation. But in 1917, he was a simple foot soldier in the failed American expedition to punish Pancho Villa. But he wanted to fly. So when he returned from Mexico with the rest of Pershing’s army and war broke out in Europe, Cooper immediately went to France.

The two might have met then, but they didn’t. Why? Because Schoedsack was trudging through the mud with his camera in northern France while Cooper was flying overhead.

But he didn’t fly for long. It nearly cost him his life! While on a reconnaissance mission over German lines, his plane was attacked. His copilot was seriously injured, but Cooper did manage to land the heavily damaged plane – unfortunately, *behind* enemy lines. And that’s how he spent the rest of the First World War in a German POW camp.

The stories of the war were horrible. It marked my Uncle Stephen for life. A piece of flying shrapnel decapitated his best friend right before his eyes. Years later, the look in those eyes still frightened me.

Schoedsack and Cooper survived this gruesome adventure in one piece

10.10.10.00

The brutality of this war had an image.

Now, when Schoedsack and Cooper set out for France and the First World War, they must have seen this Army recruitment poster. It was everywhere. It was in train and bus stations, on the streets, on the docks...everywhere. Now doesn’t that look a heck of a lot like King Kong? Well, doesn’t it? And this poster is dated 1917.

10.10.54.00 – Archives Charlie Chaplin / Liberation

While Schoedsack was lugging his camera through the mud and Cooper survived a POW camp in Europe, back home the war effort continued. People flocked to see movie stars pitch government war bonds. They helped raise an incredible amount of money, you know.

It gave the people the chance to see their favorite stars up close and in the flesh - for the first time! Imagine. The ravishing Mary Pickford, the ever so charming Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., the incredible Charlie Chaplin’s non-stop energy.

Who could have known that ten years later Chaplin would be competing with Schoedsack and Cooper for the very first Academy Award.

1918. The war is over. American streets were alive with peace celebrations. Schoedsack and Cooper are still in Europe, but still haven’t met. Cooper’s in Paris, hanging around ‘bohemian Montmartre’ with a friend.

10.12.34.00 – Rose showing photos

Cooper’s in Paris, hanging around ‘bohemian Montmartre’ with a friend. Yes, Coop was passing through Paris on his way to Warsaw to sign up to fight the Bolsheviks with the Polish Air Force.

I hope he liked Paris. Because in a year he'd be a POW - again, this time in Moscow.

Shorty – I like calling him Shorty – Shorty leaves the Signal Corps with no intention of going back to the studio. He signs up with the Red Cross and like Coop, is headed for Poland.

1919. Bingo! They meet. Now imagine : Vienna, 1919. A deserted train station. Shorty sees this strange little American – thin as a rail, scarred, wearing a sword, a sailor's sword on his belt. And as he draws closer, he notices that he's got two different kind of boots: French on the right foot, German on the left. They talk. They lie and brag about their war experiences, become friendly. And they talk about their dreams. And they talk about travelling. And they talk about filming their travelling and they go to Warsaw and then – poof! – they loose each other.

10.14.09.00 – Archives : Salisbury's expedition

Cooper latched on to adventure wherever he could find it. Three years later, he was second mate on Captain Edward Salisbury's expedition around the world. When a cameraman quit, Cooper quickly sent for Schoedsack. Together, they filmed Haile Sellassie, the future Ethiopian king and his warriors.

Each had found a partner. Yes sir. For the next fifteen years, these two were inseparable, creating a future together - by the seat of their pants.

10.14.59.00 – Rose at home / Archives of NYC

This is when they start dreaming of a film they could choose, make together and control. Its basic story is about man's struggle against a hostile natural environment.

But first, Cooper went back to New York to research and to raise money for the project.

At the American Geographical Society, Cooper read everything he could get his hands on about migratory tribes in Turkey and Iran. And he managed to borrow \$5,000 from his father and brother.

Then, Cooper ran into Marguerite Harrison, a woman with a mysterious reputation as adventurer, sometime journalist - and occasional spy. He'd met her during the dark days in Moscow, when he was a prisoner. Anyway, Harrison proposed to put up the rest of the money! - provided the two agreed to bring her along. Shorty was not thrilled, but Harrison prevailed. Kind of like the way Fay Wray goes off with those movie guys at the beginning of *King Kong*, if you ask me.

Schoedsack and Cooper didn't have a clue as to where they were going to shoot that film. They left New York in October and by March they still didn't have two feet of film worth while. And that's October... six months. Six months on the road and nothing to show for it.

10.16.41.00 – Archives with Mrs Harrison

They wandered from Europe to Turkey, and then went on to Syria and Iraq – Marguerite Harrison in tow. Along the way they shot a lot of film, too much - some of it picturesque, some of it cute, most of it not worth a hoot ...

Madame Harrison soon discovered that traveling with Shorty and Coop wasn't exactly a tea party. After enduring much hardship, they fell – quite by chance, I should add - upon the Bakhtiari, a Persian tribe fighting for its survival that was about to undertake its annual migration. At last, they had a subject for their film.

10.17.41.00 – Rose at home

The tribe's great trek began in mid-April 1924.

The first few days were routine, of not much use to the film. But then, the BIG SURPRISE. Schoedsack, who had gone ahead with a group, sent a message back to Cooper: "Coop, I shouldn't say this before we start shooting, but I have seen that which we have walked for miles to find. Be here before sunrise tomorrow. This is it!"

10.18.31.00 - Extract of "Grass"

"On one side of this river are five thousand people with all their worldly goods, and perhaps fifty thousand animals. I said, 'It can't be done'. But I knew it could and would be done. The tribes have been crossing it twice a year for centuries."

Cooper wrote that in his diary before crossing the half-mile wide, icy cold and dangerous Karun river.

Goats can't swim, so they were the only animals to cross on rafts along with the women and children. Cooper wrote, "We crossed with the goats."

When I think of their work together, these are the kind of images and adventures I think of.

A few weeks later, Coop wrote, "The Bakhtiari dug a zig-zag trail through the snow to cross the Zareh Kuh Mountains, removing their cotton shoes because the soles were made of pressed rags and disintegrated when wet. The cold cracked their feet and they left blood stains in the snow."

A quick inventory revealed an insurmountable problem. They couldn't finish the film. There'd be no end to the story.

10.20.44.00 – Rose at home

They must have been pretty damned angry, and rightfully so, to have run out of film. They must have thought it was all over, that they'd never direct another film. It had all come crashing down because of a few measly feet of missing film. They came back to New York with their tails between their legs. And they had to sell photos of the expedition to pay for the editing of the film.

10.21.14.00 – Archives of NYC

In rented space in New York, they patched together an end to what they called their "damned curse" of a movie. They split three ways the \$1000 they made from a series of radio interviews about the trip.

And then, Lady Luck smiled on them again. When *Grass* was previewed at a New York charity gala, the critics were impressed, and Paramount bought the film!

Shorty and Coop's first film opened at the Criterion. Paramount asked them to add footage of themselves for the opening sequence, which they quickly shot, and Paramount agreed to finance their next film. Suddenly - bingo - they had a future.

A jungle movie! The far East! Live tigers! Why not? But this time *without* Madame Marguerite Harrison.

10.22.15.00 – Rose at home

Anyway, she didn't want to come along. She'd had enough the first time.

No, but it really is too bad because this was going to be the greatest. It started off with a stop-over in Paris, which is not bad for a start. Paris again.

10.22.35.00 – Archives of Paris

Paris was the only place they would find the entirely metal camera they'd need. A tropical climate would swell the wooden casing and ruin the film in Shorty's camera.

So they went to Paris to see Monsieur Debie, who built them.

10.22.55.00 – Rose at home

And they're off to the ends of the world. They started in Singapore, then made their way north to Thailand, a country they knew absolutely nothing about. A language they didn't speak. And yet they stayed there for over a year. They lived there, they worked there and they finally got the film they'd dreamt of made.

10.23.21.00 – Extract of “Chang”

Schoedsack and Cooper often said that making *Chang* was their greatest adventure .

It's a series of family scenes interrupted by the sudden violence of the jungle.

How did they manage to pull it off without getting themselves or the villagers they filmed eaten alive?

10.24.11.00 – Rose showing photos

Kevin Brownlow told me 'every sequence of that movie was planned to seize the audience by the hair.' Thanks to Shorty.

Another major player in that plan turned out to be Bimbo, the little monkey – hmm – little monkey. Bimbo was one born actor. All you had to do was film him and write the scene after, which made him perfect casting for the Shorty-Coop's style! Especially in the scene near the end when the family escapes and Bimbo runs away like a bat out of hell. It's something right out of a terrified child's nightmare.

How did they find the animals, invented the story, worked with the Thai villagers who played the various roles ? I wanted to find out.

They got me day dreaming about going there myself, to walk in their footsteps and see what they had seen. And when my colleagues were trying to drum up an idea for a retirement gift for me, well they organized everything thanks to their contacts – a car, a driver-guide type person for ten or twelve days... hotels... everything. Talk about a gift. Wow!

10.26.02.00 - Thailand

When I got to Bangkok, I quickly learned that *Chang* had a reputation as the first film ever made in Thailand ... When I asked, no one had ever seen the film. They knew it had been done in the county of Nan. But that's all. For a few days I was just turning around in circles. I was pretty low. I could find nothing in Bangkok that reminded me of Shorty or Coop or the film. Not a thing!

My guide, Mister Boonsri, understood there was only one thing to do – take me up North to Nan.

From the second day on, the road began winding through the jungle. We saw almost no one. But from then, at last, I felt I was following Shorty's and Coop's footsteps.

The boys certainly hadn't driven.

No, there weren't any roads. Back then, the trip could only be made by foot, on horseback or up the river. I knew Shorty had come first, alone, to scout the region. Tigers had attacked nineteen people just before he'd reached Nan.

I don't know in what season Shorty traveled. I certainly hope it wasn't the rainy season. The whole region smells... so sweet. But as soon as the rains let up, the insects make this incredible racket!

Just after Boonsri told me we were getting close, we started seeing bamboo huts much like the ones in *Chang*. And the river –that's where I guessed Shorty and Coop must have filmed the scene when they catch that horrible lizard.

10.28.52.00

I had expected a village. But Nan turned out to be completely non-descript. With nothing going for it *except* its isolation.

I remembered that Coop had written somewhere that he knew some people there... missionaries.

It's thanks to the photos I had and the help of a rickshaw driver who knew a shopkeeper who might help us that we finally found what I had searched for.

From the very beginning my only thought was to find a place ... the house where they'd stayed or where they'd settled. But that was 70 years ago.... Almost 80!

Boonsri said I should show them my photographs. I did as I was told.

But they'd already seen the photographs – when they were students at the Presbyterian mission school run by Americans. They were surprised we hadn't been there.

Sure enough, just outside town, we found it. A red brick building plopped right in the middle of the Thai jungle.

They couldn't have been nicer, and let me look through the mission's carefully-kept diaries - where I discovered why Shorty and Coop stayed here over a year to make *Chang*.

Coop must have enjoyed the compound's creature comforts – a church, a hospital, a school, American missionaries who knew everything about the region. There was even a charming guest house, where Shorty met a jungle guide who spoke English. His name was Kru.

10.31.01.00 – Rose at home

I want to tell you a story which is entirely written down in the mission's diary. A story about Kru. One day the boy and his father were out in the jungle and a tiger jumped on the father's back. And the boy - he was only 11 - he attacked the tiger and killed it with his machete. Unfortunately, the father was very badly wounded and he was taken to the hospital of the mission. The boy stayed with him throughout his whole convalescence. But when he was healed, the boy converted, became a Protestant and went to the missionary school. He was

very gifted, learned English in no time flat, and then he became a missionary himself. That's when they gave him the name of Kru, which in Thai means 'teacher' or 'professor' or something like that.

Kru became their interpreter, their jungle guide, he captured the animals they needed and became production manager. He also accepted to play the lead – a peasant, like his father had been. His children also played roles in the movie. As did the surprising Bimbo, Kru's monkey. But his wife refused. A family friend ended up playing his wife in the film.

I stayed a week in Nan before going back to Bangkok. But before going home, I wanted to verify something I'd been told. It was when they came from Nan to Bangkok and then took a train south to film that scene when the village is attacked by an enormous herd of elephants....

10.33.10.00 - Thailand

My guide Mr Boonsri and I took the same train the boys had taken.

It had taken almost seven months to shoot the scenes near Nan. But to film the elephant scene, they decided to risk a five hundred mile trip and half the film's budget – a risk Cecil B. De Mille might have thought twice about.

The entire town wanted to come along! And many did!

They'd never taken a train; nobody wanted to miss out. So on top of everything else, Shorty and Coop became impromptu tour guides.

The villagers had never seen the ocean. Shorty and Coop forced the train to stop so their friends could climb down and discover it for themselves. Some probably even took their first dip in the ocean!

From there, they continued south to film the attack of the elephants.

Chang opened at the Rivoli in New York at the end of April 1927

10.35.41.00 – Rose at home

Listen. Listen to these rave reviews from the Paramount publicity department.

“CHANG. CHANG the ruthless, smashing and crashing. The avenger. Rampant and raging. The destroyer, trampling and ravaging.”

Paramount was a little heavy-handed, but efficient.

That's the way they drummed up interest all cross the country. I've been told it did very well in Europe, too. And then it just disappeared. For 50 years it disappeared. Remember Mr. Kevin Brownlow, room 327, the English historian, well he found a copy in 1980.

How come films disappear like that ? Oh my God, *King Kong* could have disappeared...

10.36.51.00 – Archives of Lindbergh

If there was one adventure Cooper regretted missing, it was being in the cockpit instead of Charles Lindbergh on the first trans-Atlantic solo flight from New York to Paris. It was only one month after *Chang* opened.

Shorty, on the other hand, probably regretted not being the cameraman who filmed Lindbergh's departure - the first footage ever made with live sound.

But I don't feel too bad for them, even if they missed out on all the hoop-la around Lindbergh's return. After all, they too had made history. *Chang* would receive an Academy Award nomination as best film. They were already off working on a new project in Africa, this time featuring lions and hippos. It would be Paramount's last silent film, *The Four Feathers*. Afterwards, Shorty set off for Indonesia with his young while Coop stayed behind in New York to produce.

Aviation was changing. The movies were changing. And so would they. Change.

10.38.43.00 – Rose at home

For years, fifteen years, they met and became friends with explorers of that time, pioneers in documentary film, scientists out doing field research for museums, and explorers who went to the ends of the earth and stayed there for years...

Everybody knew everybody, they swapped stories, lied and bragged together whenever they got together that is, mainly in New York.

There were two films that greatly impressed Schoedsack and Cooper. One was "The River of Doubt," well, it was ex-President Teddy Roosevelt's trip down the Amazon .

10.39.47.00 – Extract of "Komodo"

The other was *Komodo*, the film Cooper's friend William Burden made with his wife Catherine of their expedition to the famous "dragon island" of Indonesia. It was the home of the last surviving - and enormous - prehistoric reptiles. They're called "earless monitors," I think.....

Cooper was so impressed with his friend's film and the stories Burden told him about the other islands in the region that the jungle movie he and Schoedsack were already dreaming up started to take form in Coop's imagination. They'd already seen a possible protagonist at the Barnum and Bailey Circus.

10.40.54.00 – Rose at home

Here it is...

Gargantua was the circus' biggest attraction, its star. A scary critter, to say the least...

Maybe that's how they got this completely insane idea to bring Gargantua or another gorilla to the island of Komodo and film his combat with the huge prehistoric reptiles who lived there... They really were nutty as fruitcakes, those two.

But then they met O'Brien. Another bit of luck. Because O'Brien could make a gorilla with his own bare hands.

This is O'Brien. It was he who made all the models of King Kong and the prehistoric animals in the movie. Another odd one, this O'Brien. He'd been a trapper, he had been a cowboy, he had raised some chickens and been an illustrator for the sport pages – and then he got into the movies.

10.42.06.00 – Mark at home

Which brings me to Mark, the bearded, pipe-smoking gardener at the Harrington in whose incredible film collection I learned everything I know about Willis O'Brien and the making of *King Kong*. Mark keeps his collection in his cellar, and it's well worth the visit – believe me.

Sure, *King Kong* looks like the Army recruitment poster I showed you. He even looks a lot like Gargantua. But his real ancestor, according to Mark, is a little model

of an ape. And it was created by O'Brien by covering steel wire with thin pieces of sheet rubber. What Mark says is that King Kong first appeared on screen in O'Brien's "The Missing Link," that was in 1917.

Mark showed me another treasure. And there are only four copies of it in the world! A film O'Brien never finished, but showed to Cooper. It was called "Creation".

When he saw "Creation," Cooper knew he no longer had to figure out how to ship Gargantua to the other end of the world to film his live combats with prehistoric reptiles. Everything could be made in the studio! And that's exactly what happened.

When Coop saw the way O'Brien could integrate magnificent painted sets with animated clay models and real actors all in the same sequence, he must have hit the roof. The way to make *King Kong* was at their fingertips.

10.45.31.00 – Rose at home

By the way, do you know what King Kong means? I mean what "Kong" means? It's an Indonesian word for monkey. King Kong. Monkey King. They had a little trouble getting it accepted at RKO. They said it sounded odd. I think it's got a great ring to it. And on a poster, it's very intriguing, Look, KING KONG.
Oh, come here.

They say Cooper was the brains behind *King Kong*. I don't know about that. It certainly made him a big-time producer. Maybe that's why he could work planes into the story. In any case, he played the pilot and Shorty the co-pilot of the plane that shoots down King Kong from the top of the Empire State Building in New York.

10.46.37.00 – Archives of NYC

New York City, where it all had started. Where the success of *King Kong* began at the Roxy – where I was born. And in some ways, where it all ended – the city they abandoned soon afterwards to begin other careers.

They had been two gutsy adventurers holding up a camera to everything they discovered and wanted to share with the world. But after that, each went his own way.

Cooper went on to produce some of John Ford's greatest films – *Rio Grande*, *The Searchers*, *The Quiet Man*...

10.47. 23.00 – Rose at home

Schoedsack tried to remain true to himself – he was miles and miles away, he was in Syria, preparing a film about the Bedouins. It was going to be called "A Fugitive from Glory." And you know what? What irony. He couldn't get the money together to make the film. Would you believe that? He had to go back to America. And then he and Coop just went on and did their thing. I know, I know after *King Kong* they made films that were in every book of history of movies, every film anthology in the world. But they didn't move me.

As far as I'm concerned, the wonderful story of those two men ends with *King Kong*.

Watch your step ! Bye!
Could you slam the door, please ?

10.48.27.00 – End credit list :

Un film de

Serge Viallet

Assistant réalisateur
Cédric Lépée

Avec

Louise Vincent Rose Fay Hauske
Claude Bureaux Mark

Adaptation anglaise et coach d'acteur
Dana Westberg

Dialogues
Dana Westberg
Louise Vincent

Montage
Pierre Catalan

Image
Philippe Bottiglione
Serge Viallet

Son
Jean-François Chevalier

Electricité
Cafer Ilhan

Décors
Françoise Arnaud

Etalonnage
Benoît Farasse
Sylicone

Mixage
Christelle Louet
Christophe Henrotte
Studio Maia

Musiques
Création originale : Jean Chavot
“Alonzo the Armless”, “Stung Like a Whip”
Alloy Orchestra
“I surrender, dear”
Red Norvo and His Swing Seplet

Archives
American Museum of Natural History
British Film Institute
Kevin Brownlow
The Library of Congress
Milestone Film & Video
N.A.R.A.
Sabucat Productions

Une coproduction
La compagnie des Taxi-Brousse / Arte France

Producteur délégué
Arnaud Hantute

Directrice de production
Anne Le Grevès

Chargée de production
Audrey Ferrarese

Administrateur de production
Karim Samaï

ARTE France
Unité de programme soirées thématiques
Alain Wieder

Avec la participation du
Centre National de la Cinématographie

Avec le soutien du
Programme Media Plus de la Commission Européenne



Remerciements
Serge Bromberg
Kevin Brownlow
Boonsri Chaiyana
Igor Chatterton
Valérie Combard
Etat d'Urgence Production
Hervé Glabeck
Pierre-Yves Joseph
Médecins Sans Frontières - Thaïlande
François Nosten

Frédéric Pidancet
Presbyterian University of Chiang Mai
Joseph Quintard
Laurie Rault
Antoine Sannon
SPC Archives
Transparences production

© La Compagnie des Taxi-Brousse - ARTE France - 2003

10.49.30.00 - END