"THE KENTUCKY DERBY" (A Universal Jewel, 1922) Directed by King Baggott
Based on "The Suburban" by Charles T. Dazey, scenario by George C. Hull. Five reels

Universal always gave the customers their money's worth back in the 20's under the Laemmle regime, and this rousing yet withal light-hearted melodrama is no exception. There are several sub-plots racing along together, action, sentiment, and two rival Southern colonels (Col. Rome Woolrich and Col. Moncrief Gordon) who perennially sip mint juleps as they worry about mortgages, family honor, and the great shame of having Reginald Denny, "the last of the Kentucky Gordons", married to the daughter of a stableman. (Emmett King, a perennial Southern Colonel of the silent screen, was one of the Old South's biggest obstacles in the path of true love -- perhaps you'll remember the trouble he caused in "Barbara Frietchie" which we ran some three years ago!) Denny is disgraced, shanghaied, and shipwrecked. Three years later he arrives home the day before the big race, and is able to bring things to a happy conclusion. "The Kentucky Derby" is fast, corny, typical fare from the company that still called itself the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. It's easy to see why such programmers were so popular in their day, and why, for that matter, they still provide solid entertainment. King Baggott's direction, with some very neat little touches, makes it all seem much more important than it really is, and, as always with Universal, there are good sets and some really lovely photography - nicely composed interiors, fine, sweeping exteriors. And the film is duo-tinted. Reginald Denny, not yet established as a comedian and still specializing in action roles like this one (and "The Abysmal Brute"), nevertheless has a lightness of touch that is most pleasing. There are good performances too from Lillian Rich (who died only last year), that fine old Griffith-Biograph trouper Wilfred Lucas, and Harry Carter, one of the best-known villains of Universal's early serials.

- INTERMISSION -

"THE LOST WORLD" (1925) A First National-Watterson R. Rothacker Attraction
Directed by Harry Hoyt; research and technical direction by Willis J. O'Brien; photography by Arthur Edeson; sets by Milton Menasco; edited by George McGuire; Chief Technician: Fred W. Jackson; script: Marion Fairfax, from the original story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; production supervisor - Earl Hudson.

The Cast: Paula White (Bessie Love); Professor Challenger (Wallace Beery); Sir John Roxton (Lewis Stone); Edward Malone (Lloyd Hughes); Professor Summerlee (Arthur Hoyt); Gladys Hulett (Alma Bennett); Marquette (Virginia Brown Faire); The Ape Man (Bull Montana); Austin (Finch Smiles); Zombo (Jules Cowles); Mrs Challenger (Margaret McWade); Major Hibbard (Charles Wellesley); Colin Mc Ardle (George Bunny)

Although the plot and pattern of "The Lost World" have now been absorbed in the stock-in-trade of the horror film, the picture was never made nor exploited as such. When it opened at the Astor in 1925 on a two-shows-a-day basis, it was advertised solely as a spectacular adventure story.
"A Story of the Past and not of the Hereafter" was one catchline in prominent use. Another was "They sought a virgin world, untroubled by man and his passion - and even there found LOVE!" Spectacles and novelty offerings were big boxoffice in the mid-20's, and "The Lost World" (which had "Quo Vadis" at the Apollo for competition) was one of the year's biggest stunt attractions. The reviews were unanimous raves - nothing quite like this had ever been seen before. In many ways, it still hasn't been equalled. Comparison with "King Kong" of the early 30's is of course inevitable - both films used the same technical creator, the same type of monsters and, basically, the same plot. Despite the fact that "Kong" is credited to Edgar Wallace, its similarity to the earlier film is remarkable. It utilises the same plot construction, down to the smallest item... the slow, deliberate build-up, the journey to the sinister land where the monsters are conveniently concentrated in a small area, the sudden hysterical change of pace when the huge beasts appear to wreak havoc, a pace that is sustained until the capture of the principal monster. Then a brief lull, followed by even greater mayhem when the savage beast breaks loose in a terrified city - London in "The Lost World", New York for "King Kong". Even in minor incidents was material from "The Lost World" repeated in the later film - as for example the episode of the ape man trying to recover the annoying humans dangling from a rope cast over a precipice - Lloyd Hughes here, Bruce Cabot and Fay Wray eight years later.

In only two aspects did "King Kong" differ essentially. For one thing, it introduced a strong sex angle and a beauty-and-the-beast motif. Deriving from ancient mythology, the idea of beauty (and purity) ultimately destroying evil was exploited at length in the German films of the 20's ("Nosferatu" etc.) and in many subsequent horror films. "King Kong" went so far as to stress it by an opening title (allegedly an "old Arabian proverb") which read "The beast looked upon the face of beauty, and lo! from that day the beast was as one dead". This angle is completely absent from "The Lost World", although admittedly that might well be due to the problems of cultivating a beauty-beast relationship between Bessie Love and a brontosaurus. "The Lost World" also differs pleasantly from most of its species in that the monster manages to outwit the stupid humans, and escapes quite unharmed at the end.

Harry Hoyt, who directed, was frankly a hack. His picturesque start in the movies (he sold a script to Biograph for $5, and it ultimately came to the screen under Griffith as a Pickford vehicle) wasn't matched by his later activity. "The Lost World" was undoubtedly his biggest silent success; too many others wore of the routine calibre of Clara Bow's "The Primrose Path". In the early 20's he was directing quickies like "Jungle Bride", a Charles Starrett-Anita Page opus. The fact that his directorial talents were negligible does not however affect "The Lost World", which is essentially the creation of technical wizard Willis O'Brien, with a great deal of help from that wonderful cameraman Arthur Edeson (who mentioned in Rochester recently that it was the time-consuming camera work on this film which prevented his accepting Niblo's offer to shoot "Ben Hur"). The story, the romance and the dramatics matter hardly one iota, and are interesting at all only because of the pleasant people involved, most specifically Lewis Stone and Bessie Love. Occupying the interest - and the footage - to a much greater degree are the superbly created tricks of O'Brien -- the savage fights between prehistoric monsters (it is a matter of considerable amazement that ANY wildlife has survived on the lost plateau, since the death rate among the aggressive and decidedly anti-social brontosaurus, pterodactyl, dinosaur society is quite startling!) and the brilliantly constructed episode of the monster running amok in the streets of London. (It's a matter of some regret that film makers seem to delight in showing London in a state of panic, a state it has never yet experienced. Menzies went way overboard in "Things to Come", and so does Hoyt here. Of course, a loose brontosaurus might ruffle a Londoner's...
serenity to a degree — but not to the undignified extents pictured here). Many of the effects have never been duplicated since — particularly a wild stampede of scores of monsters, and a delightful shot of a playful family of six brontosaurus (or brontosauri) feeding from the remains of another beast. The sneers and eye-rollings of O'Brien's camera-conscious monsters are well in evidence too. After "King Kong", O'Brien went on to make "Son of Kong", "The Last Days of Pompeii" and the unfinished "Gwangu" which, I suspect, provided most of the footage for the current "The Black Scorpion". "Mighty Joe Young" of course showed O'Brien's technical wizardry at its best, even though the film itself was hardly another "Kong".

The fairly recent "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" (made by a protege of O'Brien) proved the value of the old "Lost World" formula by repudiating it completely. It introduced its monster too casually and too soon, eliminating an effective build-up, and necessitating much repetition. Now of course the "monster picture" has become almost as staple an ingredient as the western, both through a dozen or more real cheapies like "Two Lost World" (all of which draw on "One Million B.C." for stock footage) and through more ambitious films like "20 Million Miles to Earth" which often waste truly marvellous effects on trite plotting and poor direction. It's a pity that the number of these pictures, each so alike, has spoiled the novelty of the genre and prevented the careful and large-scale "stunt" attraction like the original "King Kong" and "Lost World" from being really worthwhile. If such a film can be made cheaply — and still make money — there just seems no reason for doing the job properly. Of course, the fact that the job done properly would undoubtedly make proportionately MORE money doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone!

Complete prints of "The Lost World" do not appear to have survived through the years, but our print — a Kodascopy version — is a meticulously edited version which retains all of the highlights. Because Kodascopy catered to the home-movie trade, some of the more terrifying shots were excised on the theory that they might have scared the kiddies. The youngsters of the 20's have much to answer for to today's film historians and students — but perhaps after all, they weren't really to blame, even though they unwittingly dictated much of the Kodascopy editing. However, enough of the monster footage remains to have given Junior some delightful nightmares. Our print runs 75 minutes, as against the 10 reels of the original. It is however, easy to account for much of the missing footage when one recalls that the film's plot construction so paralleled that of "King Kong". Kong didn't make his appearance until some 44 minutes of build-up had taken place, and so it was here. The first two reels were spent in London, with a good deal of footage devoted to Lloyd Hughes and his fiancée — a young lady quite absent from our print. All of reel 3 was spent at "a trading post on the Amazon", likewise out of our version. Two more reels were devoted to exploratory adventures at the base of the plateau, hence the essential monster material didn't appear until reel five, or half-way through the film. By reel 3 in our print, we're already in the thick of it, and the pace is sustained until the final frame. We'd love nothing better than to run the full 10 reels — but until it is rediscovered, this is a pretty good substitute. And incidentally, it is a fully tinted print, with a red volcanic explosion, and all the tinted fireworks one could ask for!

By the way, despite the unanimous raves from the trade press, the film was quite severely criticised for including a shot of the London Pavilion, with a big sign advertising "The Sea Hawk", another First National presentation. Advertising plugs in movies were quite common at the time, and invariably aroused storms of protest from critics and especially exhibitors.

---------------------- Program Notes by Wm. K. Everson ----------------------