"KING OF THE JUNGLE" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Bruce Humberstone and Max Marcin; screenplay by Max Marcin, Philip Wylie and Fred Niblo jr. from the novel "The Lion's Way" by Charles Thurley Stoneham; Camera: Ernest Haller; 6 reels

The huge success of "Trader Horn" and "Tarzan the Ape Man" launched a whole spate of wild animal adventures in the early 30's, taking in not only more Tarzans, but also the actual and pseudo-documentaries of the Marin Johnsons and Frank Buck, and the circus films such as Clyde Bruckman's "The Big Cage", "King of the Jungle" is a neat combination of Tarzan genre and circus film, and also parallels "King Kong" (released at exactly the same time) with its spectacular climax of jungle animals running amok in a big city. Because of its brief running time and its star, "King of the Jungle" has always somewhat unfairly been relegated to the "kiddie matinee" category, but its rousing sense of fun and its really well-staged action sequences certainly elevate it to a level where adults (though preferably unsophisticated ones) should certainly enjoy it thoroughly. It's a glossy and well-mounted production moves briskly, and is exceptionally well photographed, the occasional use of back projection and other trickeries - and the adroit editing - is only occasionally used. For Buster Crabbe - being very smoothly performed. There is also some interesting use of the zoom lens with which Paramount had been experimenting since the late 20's. The film should have made an immediate star of Crabbe, an Olympic swimming champion whose previous film work had been limited to a bit or two and some doubling; but Paramount has always had a somewhat sorry record in their handling (or mis-handling) of or rather special talents, and they totally muffed their chance to build him into a major property - although through the years he was to become exceptionally popular in other action serials and serials. Incidentally, much of the big climax of "King of the Jungle" was re-used by Paramount in a late-40's B, "Caged Fury" in which, ironically, Buster Crabbe was the villain!

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

"TARZAN AND HIS MATE" ( MGM, 1934) Directed by Cedric Gibbons and (uncredited) Jack Conway; scenario by Howard Emmett Rogers and Leon Gordon from a novel by J. Kevin McGuiness; based on the character created by Edgar Rice Burroughs; Camera, Clyde de Vinna, Charles Clarke; 9 reels
With Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan, Neil Hamilton, Paul Cavanagh, Forrester Harvey, Nathan Curry.

Perhaps only three of the many adventure films of the 30's really lived up to both their potential and their advertising promises: "King Kong", "Gunga Din" and most certainly "Tarzan and His Mate". It's a far and away the best, most elaborate and most action-packed of all the Tarzans, its single flaw being that the casting of Driscoll as the MGH Tarzan, the radical changing of the Tarzan character himself from the far more civilised and educated individual created by Burroughs. (Only Bruce Bennett was allowed to follow that concept in the independently-made "The New Adventures of Tarzan"). That shortcoming apart, "Tarzan and his Mate" is grand stuff. It ran into the usual MGH production hassles: filming was stopped at one point, the director removed (Cedric Gibbons, an art director and a brilliant one, was wanted to direct - but had absolutely no understanding of that craft) and an original player, Rod la Rocque, replaced by Paul Cavanagh and much footage re-shot. But none of these setbacks show up on screen. Too much exposure of Maureen O'Sullivan in a nude swimming scene sadly resulted in much of that sequence being deleted, and the extremely sparse costuming of both Jane and Tarzan raised some production code eyebrows, and their wardrobe was somewhat extended in later films in the series. Today the film is too rarely seen or shown at university campuses and elsewhere - because of the trouble it invariably causes with its cavalier treatment of the natives as being somewhat less than human beings. Natives were always used in the Tarzan as useful "props" in all the perils involved: it was always some hapless native porter who would fall of a ledge just before Jane got to that danger point, be mauled by a lion, or several of them would systematically be killed off in various tribal tortures (often quite ingenious) in order to lengthen the suspense leading to Tarzan's fortuitous rescue (which would have a white safari. [Throgly usually he was too late too, to give the white villain]) Here admittedly, the natives got a short shrift than usual, with Neil Hamilton blithely and somewhat irritatedly remarking how many of his native boys were wiped out on safari -- almost twice the number he had originally estimated; However, it is unfair to condemn the movies for such attitudes; the criticism should instead be aimed at the generally held attitudes of the time. which the movies merely reflected and unwittingly recorded.

-Jim K. Everson