

King Solomon's Mines

(Compton Bennet and Andrew Marton, 1950)

Component 1: Key Developments in US Film Focus Areas: Genre, Narrative, Context

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Sequence 1 - Titles and introduction to Quatermain (00:00 -00: 09:24)

Sequence 2 - Camping at waterfall and Umbopa's arrival (00:50:26 -00: 53:49)

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting)

- At 00:18 in the trailer for the film, <https://goo.gl/RyMf0G> there is a MS group-shot of the three main characters with Umbopa's supporters in background. The tight framing and identical postures shows how the explorers have overcome their class and gender differences to bond together. Elizabeth carries a rifle in the same manner as the men, showing her equality and how her character has developed from prim Englishwoman to independent explorer. Though the white characters are in the foreground, they are not leading the African characters, and the eye-line match implies they have equal status. (In the scene itself, they are just bystanders watching the culmination of Umbopa's narrative).
- Sequence 1: Title sequence: silhouetted African trees and red sunset suggests the mystery and heat of the 'Dark Continent'. Panoramic ELS of wildlife are the first images - emphasises the 'wildness' of Africa, but also provide natural spectacle for an audience who hadn't seen footage like this before (see Context). LS of Quatermain and Kwali in 2-shot shows bond between these two characters despite their contrasting cultural dress; when we see the European hunters, they are hanging back, hesitant until Quatermain signals to them - this establishes his authority and expertise. When the hunters attempt to shoot a second

elephant, Quatermain stops them, showing his morality and respect for nature (that the hunters later refer to as 'sentimentality').

- Sequence 2: MS of Elizabeth trying to comb her long 'ladylike' hair, then getting frustrated and cutting it off. There's then a LS of her bathing by the waterfall. A later MS shows her reclining, content with new shorter hair framed by bright blue sky. All three shots show her liberating herself from her 'prim' and stifling (married) English background. The MS of her literally falling into Quatermain's arms shows the beginning of the spark between them.
- A group shot of the three white explorers and Umbopa establishes the contrast in height and costume, but also that they have a bond and similar goal. His stature also suggests his hidden power and status.

Mise-en-Scène

- Sequence 1: Location: Quatermain's hut is a mixture of European and African elements, reflecting his identity as a mixture of the two continents. The horns adorning the wall show his skill as a hunter, but the book on the table in the foreground shows he is also educated. Prop: Kwali's necklace is taken by Quatermain from his corpse to give to his wife, suggesting that he understands and respects their culture.
- Sequence 2: The spectacular waterfall location represents the intimidating power of the wilderness, but also the suppressed passion between Elizabeth and Quatermain that begins to spark in this scene. The pool in which Elizabeth bathes demonstrates how Africa is now beginning to liberate, rather than horrify her. Prop: the hatching baby crocodile also shows Elizabeth's growing ease with nature and could further symbolise her 'rebirth'.

Editing

- Sequence 1: Match-on-action cuts between hunters and elephants - creates the illusion that they are occupying the same space. Later there are deliberate LS featuring various animals and the actors in the same shot to avoid the 'stock footage and studio' look of

other, lower budget 'jungle pictures'. This is especially evident in the stampede sequence at 00:47:00 (press and marketing played up the danger to the actors in this sequence).

- Juxtaposition of the scene when Quatermain is visited by the Englishman and his visiting Kwali's widow, suggesting again that he is a man between two worlds (and perhaps uncomfortable with both).
- Sequence 2: Cuts between the huge waterfall and Elizabeth reclining suggests release; then between Quatermain and Elizabeth shows both the newfound respect - and attraction - between the characters. When Ombopa approaches, there is shot-reverse-shot to show that Quatermain is unafraid (with the other two explorers following his lead). They are more curious than defensive and this shows Quatermain's ease and establishes Ombopa as a non-threatening character.

Sound

- Sequence 1: The title music of African drums and chanting is both enticing and slightly threatening, reinforcing the image of the 'Dark Continent'. Dialogue: Quatermain's responses to the European hunters, and his use of the native language, show his discomfort with his heritage and his connection to Africa.
- Sequence 2: The roar of the waterfall almost drowns out the dialogue between Quatermain and Elizabeth - however without spoken language, using hand signals, they achieve a level of communication their words previously obstructed.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

- Representation of gender: though Quatermain fulfils every macho action hero stereotype (clearly an antecedent of Indiana Jones, even with his costume), and seems to have little character development, Elizabeth undergoes a complete transformation over the course of the film. At the start, she looks and behaves as if she has wandered in from a Victorian drama. But after only a few days on safari, she is stripped (literally by Quatermain) of her prim English petticoats and later (in Sequence 2) cuts her flowing hair to an almost boyish style. She is literally shedding the constraints of what others expect of her, becoming an adventurer. After the halfway point, she is able to admit her marriage

was unhappy and the search for her husband seems more a quest for closure than in any hope he may be alive. Though the clash between 'civilised' European women and primal Africa is a common theme in many 'jungle pictures', Elizabeth seems to embrace the liberation it offers her, rather than resist it. Her romance with Quatermain seems secondary to her love affair with the freedom the adventure has given her. Notably, there are no scenes of her returning neither to more 'civilized' settlements nor to England. As she shakes hands with Ombopa, it is suggested that this is her new home. (See Context for representations of Africa).

Historical

- The film is one of the best examples of a highly popular 'jungle picture' sub-genre of adventure films. In the early 1930s, following the success of Tarzan films and an American/European fascination with the 'Dark Continent', MGM sent a film crew to Africa to film footage that would eventually become *Trader Horn* (1931). The film crew's experiences were portrayed in the press and marketing as even more adventurous than the film's narrative, and the movie was a hit. The crew captured over 20,000 ft. of wild animal footage, so the studio used this in dozens of imitation 'jungle pictures' for the next 20 years, inter-cutting the stock (unconvincingly) with scenes with actors filmed in studios. By 1950, they decided the public's thirst for the genre was at an all-time high, so invested in sending a crew and actors to Africa to film *King Solomon's Mines*. Their willingness to put the actors in close contact with wild animals led to some spectacular, immersive scenes (like the stampede), a convincing story and some great publicity; and Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Editing (1951)

PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus - Genre, Narrative & Context

- The film, in some ways, follows a typical 'Hero's Journey'. Quatermain is a jaded explorer, bored of life and immune to the dangers of the wild. He is offered a quest, initially refuses, but then - for the sake of his son - accepts. He then uses his expertise to guide his more innocent charges through a landscape that seems to represent a number of elements: a 'fiery' desert, an 'airy' mountain pass, into the eponymous mines (earth) and finally an escape via a 'cleansing'

underground river (water). What is interesting is that in an earlier sequence Quatermain explains a 'pointless' game that sounds like the blueprint for every adventure narrative. True to this, he doesn't even bother with the diamonds when they actually find them; his real reward is rediscovering his sense of adventure (and perhaps loves with Elizabeth). This personal, inner adventure is mirrored by two other typical quest narratives: Elizabeth's journey to liberation from the constraints of her unhappy Victorian marriage, and Umbopa's quest to reclaim his stolen kingship. In some ways, they are just as much the heroes of the narrative as Quatermain.

- In 1950, Africa, though mapped and colonised, was still regarded as a place of mystery, danger and excitement to Europeans and Americans. The phrase 'Dark Continent' was coined by Henry Stanley, an explorer who went on his own 'missing person' quest to find Dr Livingstone - and who has since been accused of exaggerating

the dangers he faced. The film was released long before television wildlife or ethnographic documentaries had made the wildlife and peoples of Africa familiar. Therefore, the on-location footage of both animals and tribal rituals would have been genuinely exotic to the audiences.

For this reason, the filmmakers have crammed every frame with as many animals as possible (especially during the stampede), and spend long periods simply observing the villages and dances of the African peoples. The trailer for the film certainly exploits these sensationalistic elements.

- However, having established an exotic 'otherness' in the marketing, the film itself - like the character of Quatermain - actually treats the cultures encountered with a surprising degree of respect. The 'natives' are neither demonised nor patronised, nor treated as one homogenous mass: each tribe is differentiated and given accurate names. Plus: Umbopa's subplot eventually forms the climax for the