

Film Review: Kong: Skull Island***

Kong: Skull Island

Direction: Jordan Vogt-Roberts

Screenplay: Dan Gilroy, Derek Connolly, Max Borenstein

Cast: Tom Hiddleston, Brie Larson, Samuel L Jackson, John Goodman

Length: 118 minutes

Rating: 12A



Opening in dramatic fashion, two fighter jets crash onto an undisclosed island located somewhere in the Pacific Ocean after an aerial battle during the Second World War. Emerging from parachutes, the American and Japanese pilots continue to fight to the death in single combat through desert and jungle before being interrupted by a monster.

With that, the stage is set for a title sequence embellished with striking graphics that dance across the screen. An extensive archive footage portfolio follows, rapidly documenting American foreign policy and armed forces operations over the years, featuring both the Vietnam War and nuclear testing, in a summarising documentation that adeptly positions the background story in anticipation of events to come.

Moving to Washington at the start of the 1970s, William Randa (Goodman) is one of the high ranking officials of a government expedition organisation requesting funds for a discovery team to explore the uncharted Skull Island in the Pacific Ocean. Financial backing is only guaranteed, however, when the point is made that rejecting support for an American discovery would mean Russian satellites acquiring superior photography of the

area. Once more, a symbolic proxy war starts a race between the United States and the then Soviet Union to claim Skull Island.

A task force is assembled comprising James Conrad (Hiddleston), a former captain of the British Special Air Service employed as a hunter tracker, Mason Weaver (Larson), an anti-war activist and photojournalist, who joins hoping to expose the truth about this top secret military mission, and Preston Packard (Jackson), a Lieutenant Colonel with the United States Army and helicopter squadron leader who provides soldiers and air transport for the operation.

Skull Island is completely enclosed in an extreme weather system of electrical storm cycles which protect it from the world, or rather, protect the world from it. On the inside of the hazardous barrier, all communication with the outside is impossible leaving the team in the isolation. Kong: Skull Island is reminiscent of Apocalypse Now, with its majestic sequences of the helicopter squadron progressing in formation across the hot sky to an unknown country, as well as Platoon, upon landfall when the group of characters must break through the endless green of the formidable forestry.

Skull Island appears to all to be a magical paradise untouched by man, saved by its quarantine allowing for its flourishing natural state. But appearances can be deceiving and the team discover more than they bargained for. Once machines are removed from the equation, man must fight to survive amongst the harsh environment in this thrashing action adventure.

Filmed in the natural landscapes of Australia, Hawaii and Vietnam, Kong: Skull Island benefits from the luscious scenery of muddy coast and opaque jungle where bolder mountains rise and fall from the dark waters and swirling mist and mystery. Both beautiful and dangerous.

Hiddleston and Larson produce assertive leading performances,

allowing Jackson and Goodman to deliver brilliantly bombastic supporting characters that walk away with all the best dialogue, while Henry Jackman's original score is also a stand out feature. Ultimately, the star of this film is King Kong and the computer-generated imagery of the MonsterVerse on Skull Island highlighted to full effect during the huge monster battles.

Kong: Skull Island marks the second part of the Legendary Entertainment MonsterVerse succeeding Godzilla in 2014 and preceding Godzilla: King of the Monsters and Godzilla vs. Kong due in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

With a three quarter century history, the King Kong franchise is rebooted with aplomb after a ten year absence by this eighth official edition. All hail the King.

Our rating *** Kong: Skull Island is in cinemas now.