



The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters Discussion Guide

Director: Seth Gordon
Year: 2007
Time: 79 min

You might know this director from:

Identity Thief (2013)
Horrible Bosses (2011)
Freakonomics (2010)
Four Christmases (2008)

FILM SUMMARY

Video games. They're for passing the time, challenging friends and oneself, winning the prize, setting new goals, killing the bad guys, or maybe saving the princess from the villain. They were once a pastime for kids, a simple and fleeting activity, but **THE KING OF KONG** presents us with the flip side of the gaming universe where boys have grown into men who guard their precious reputations.

Billy Mitchell, Florida's hot-sauce mogul and proud mullet-wearer, hit the highest Donkey Kong score just one year after the game was released. A decade later, an even higher score was hit by Steve Wiebe, an unemployed father of two humbly passing the empty hours in front of his Donkey Kong machine. All gaming ears were on alert. How dare anyone challenge the perfection of Mitchell, a god amongst his minions in the gaming elite?

THE KING OF KONG follows Wiebe, Mitchell, and Walter Day - the founding father of competitive video gaming's monitoring board - as Mitchell's previously undisputed title as the Godfather of gaming is put to the test. It is a tale of stiff competition, rough rivalry, and the capriciousness of human nature. It is a tale of good and evil, luck versus strategy, and one man's ego threatening to snuff out another's. **THE KING OF KONG** places a peculiar corner of American society in the spotlight and considers whether games are just a pastime of overgrown boys, or whether there might deeper aspects worth exploring.

FILM THEMES

Video games: a passive hobby or an outlet for the obsessively compulsive egomaniac? Steve Wiebe and Billy Mitchell offer two vastly different approaches to the same end game.

RIVALRY

Competition resides in varying degrees within all of us. We compete against ourselves, other people, robots and machines. The need to win and improve our performance is an aspect of the human psyche. The rivalry between Wiebe and Mitchell was intensified due to their personalities, but the film proves that competition is a human motivation. In its healthy form, competition pushes us to beat our best, to reach for higher goals, and to prove that we have what it takes. On the other hand, competition can bring out the worst in human nature, pitting us against one another and consuming us to the point where we must win at the expense of everything else.

ONE AND OF THE SAME

Though they are rivals, Wiebe and Mitchell shared many of the same characteristics. They were both outcasts, die-hard gamers, nerds; quirky, compulsive, and anti-social. Those who gather at arcades live on the fringes of society. The world of retro video gaming brims with testosterone as overgrown boys seek recognition. A certain intensity pulsates within the arcade walls, and each competitor who shows up is focused solely on the game before them. Do the games attract certain characters, or are these characters formed over the many hours of time spent playing games? All we know is that the oddballs of gaming share very similar characteristics.

NEED FOR CONTROL

Like Donkey Kong, *THE KING OF KONG* introduces the notion of strategy, skill, learning the game and understanding the mathematical equations behind it. There is a certain pattern and rhythm, a need for hand-eye coordination, precision, and comprehensive intelligence. Games were perfect for Wiebe, who might have suffered from OCD, and for Mitchell, who impulsively groomed himself and demanded that his self-appointed disciples bow down to his glory. Both men came to Donkey Kong for the opportunity to be in absolute control of something.

A CREDIBLE FRAMEWORK

"The worst thing...would be to give someone the credibility of a score that doesn't deserve it," said Walter Day. When Day set out to create *Twin Galaxies*, he pushed gaming to a new level and gave it a framework. Even the Guinness Book of World Records cites Day when it comes to video game scores. Without a governing body, gamers across the world arguably view competition differently, never having a way to prove their individual scores or learn about the milestones of others. Through the invention of a centralized body, gamers were granted credibility.

"Well, maybe they'd like it if I lose. I gotta try losing sometime."

Billy Mitchell

"I wanted to be a hero. I wanted to be the center of attention. I wanted the glory, I wanted the fame."

Walter Day

FILM FACTS:

- THE KING OF KONG has been awarded many prestigious prizes, including Best Documentary from the Austin Film Critics Association, the Online Film Critics Society, the Satellite Awards, the St. Louis Film Critics Association, the Utah Film Critics Film Association, and the Central Ohio Film Critics Association.
- Playing pinball as a child, Billy Mitchell first started video gaming at the age of 16. He began managing the family business - Rickey's World Famous Restaurants - while still in high school, and assumed ownership of the restaurant chain in the mid-1980s. The building where the original restaurant is still located has been named a historical landmark by the state of Florida. Rickey's World Famous Hot Sauces, originally served at the restaurants, have been sold to the public for the past 20 years. Rickey's Restaurants serve more than 515,000 pounds of chicken wings each year.
- As a child, director Seth Gordon spent his summers at the Funspot arcade in New Hampshire playing video games all day long.
- Steve Wiebe released a Contemporary Christian album entitled "The King of Song" in 2009. Song titles include "Chapel in the Pines," "Pilot in My Soul," and "Following Dreams."
- Doris Self, the world's oldest video game competitor and champion of Q-Bert, died in a car accident in 2006.
- Video game development first began in the 1950s as an extension of computer research in fields such as artificial intelligence. Most early game developers were more interested in learning about computers rather than creating entertainment products. Early games include Nim (a mathematical game), OXO (earliest known game to display graphics on a screen), Hutspiel (a U.S. war game), Arthur Samuel's checkers game, and the NSS Chess Program. Tennis for Two, released in 1958, was the first interactive analog computer game.
- Nintendo was founded in 1889 in Kyoto, Japan, where it produced and marketed a handmade playing card game called Hanafuda. As the playing card industry was limited, Nintendo began looking for ways to expand. In 1975, they released EVR Race, their first arcade game. Product developer Shigeru Miyamoto joined Nintendo in 1977, and went on to develop Donkey Kong, lifting Nintendo to new levels.
- Mario, who now serves as Nintendo's mascot, was introduced in Donkey Kong, where he was referred to as Jumpman. He has served in over 200 video games since his creation in 1981.
- The original Mario could only run. Miyamoto soon enabled him to jump, stating "If you had a barrel rolling towards you, what would you do?"
- The American Classic Arcade Museum resides in Funspot Family Fun Center in New Hampshire.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Steve Wiebe's students said that he made learning fun by teaching them in engaging ways. Learn more about how to help the public education system through The National Public Education Support Fund.
2. Stimulate yourself and others through healthy competition. Encourage the achievement of greatness.
3. Video gaming can have many positive benefits, teaching individuals how to strategize and react quickly. It's even been shown to encourage empathy. Hone your human nature skills through gaming.
4. Billy Mitchell provided evidence of the detrimental effects of an overblown ego. Keep yours in check.

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

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