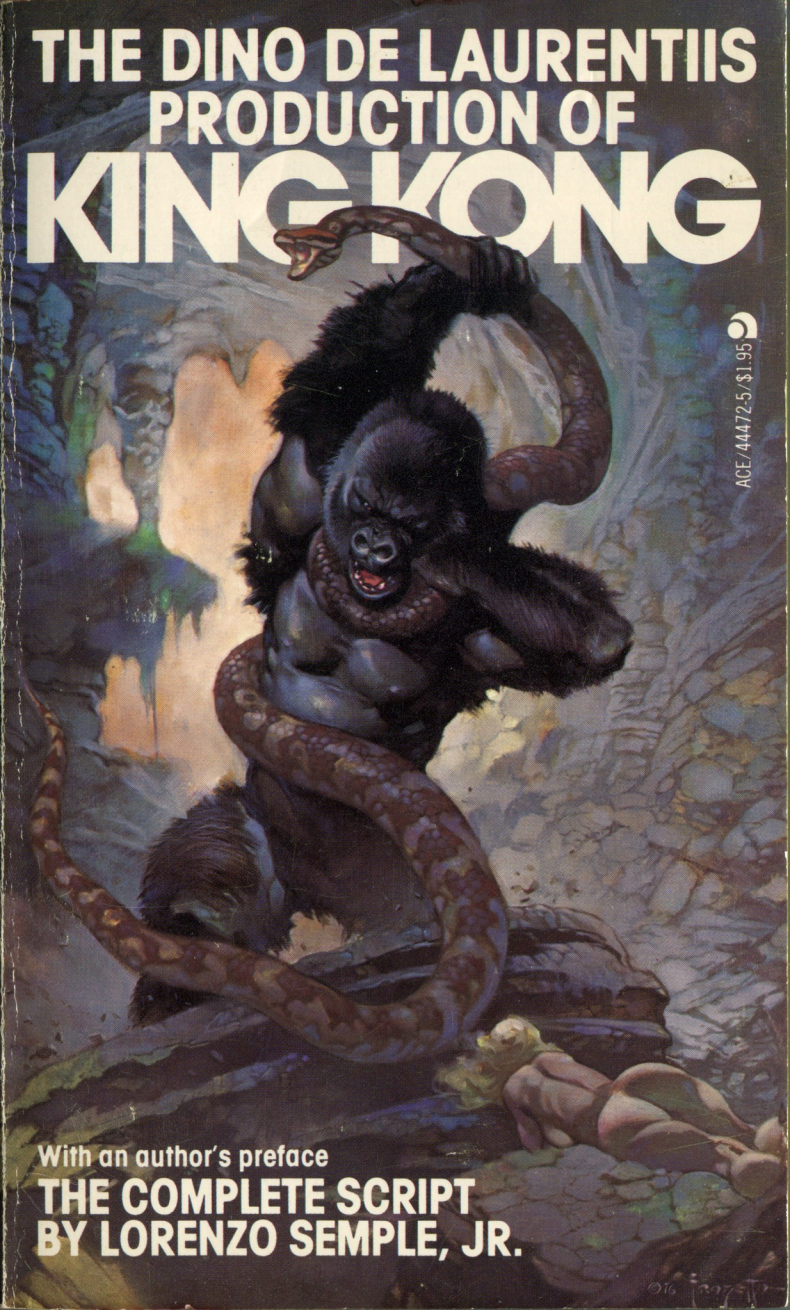


THE DINO DE LAURENTIIS PRODUCTION OF **KING KONG**

A detailed illustration of King Kong, a large black gorilla, standing on a rocky ledge. He is roaring with his mouth open, showing his teeth. A large, brown and yellow patterned snake is coiled around his body, with its head raised and tongue flicking out. The background shows a rocky, mountainous landscape with some greenery.

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With an author's preface

THE COMPLETE SCRIPT
BY LORENZO SEMPLE, JR.

The Complete Script Of
The Dino De Laurentiis Production Of

KING KONG

by
Lorenzo Semple, Jr.

With a special preface by the author



ace books

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THE COMPLETE SCR
THE
DINO DE LAURENTIIS PRODUCTION OF KING KONG

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PREFACE



I'm sitting one morning in my small office in Aspen, Colorado, where I live, when the phone rings and it is Dino. The movie producer Dino De Laurentiis, that is to say. His last name isn't used much even by total strangers, though some of his most immediate entourage tab him "Mr. D." Words aren't wasted. "Lorenzo, I give-a you jus' a title, two words, you tell-a me what you think." *Dramatic pause.* "King-a Kong!" "Sounds terrific," say I. "Okay, you come-a down tomorrow, we discuss it!"

So commenced my writing of the screenplay which is this book. Some very simple folk imagine actors make up their own lines. Some more sophisticated know that directors tell the actors

what to say. Both groups are seriously bananas.

Bit of background while I'm winging down to L.A. from Aspen. I'd worked for Dino before on *Three Days of the Condor*, which had recently come out with Robert Redford and Faye Dunaway, and was thought to have turned out okay. If it had turned out rotten you probably wouldn't be reading my words here, for in this business if a script of yours turns out rotten you usually don't work so quick for that producer again. That is as it should be: it stirs the adrenalin, makes every page a fresh challenge, etc., etc. Actually, I'd met Dino several years before, when he was still Rome-based but cooped up temporarily in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. We talked about a sequel to *Barbarella*, the comic strip sci-fi fantasy Dino had produced starring a bare and non-political Jane Fonda. All he really had for the follow-up was a setting and a terrific title. Much of the action was to be submarine, and the title *Going Down*. In those days before the full flush of the sexual revolution that title was stunningly daring—if not out of the question—and for many good reasons *Going Down* never went. The reason I was summoned for it was presumably because I'd originated the TV version of another comic strip, *Batman*. It was the first thing I'd ever written for film and was done while residing in Spain (1965) with wife and baby kids, the somewhat banal idea being to live cheap and write a Great American

Play. Anyway. The next year found us all in California, me a fledgling movie writer.

I had good luck. I worked steadily from the start. The features I worked on in the ten years twixt then and now ranged from *Pretty Poison* (which lost lots for 20th-Century-Fox but copped me a Best Screenplay of the Year plaque from the New York Film Critics) to a turkey called *Fathom* which starred Raquel Welch as a cryptic skydiver, and was so entirely without merit that even Ms. Welch's drumbeaters omit it from her film bio. Other of my credits were such as *The Parallax View* (Warren Beatty), *Papillon* (McQueen and Hoffman) and *The Drowning Pool* (Mr. & Mrs. P. Newman). So much for history.

Now my flight from Aspen is finished, and we rejoin *King Kong* as I enter Dino's office on North Canon Drive in Beverly Hills, an enclave so richly Italianate that one expects a Borgia Pope to be working the Xerox machine. We are about to have our first KK story conference.

A scriptwriter friend of mine always says he'll write such-and-such a job for free—but he'll want \$5000 an hour for the Meetings. Larry is dead right. The Meetings one must endure in this game are excruciating and soul-numbing—said torture increasing directly as the square of the budget. Nobody guessed at the time that our KK would weigh in at around \$25 million, but obviously he wasn't going to be a cheapie. A writer

might reasonably expect 100 hours or so of talk on such a heavyweight before being unleashed to bang key at ribbon.

Dino is different. Totally. Nobody experienced in flicks is apt to believe the following paragraph, but I swear to God it's true.

My homework for the confab consisted of having run the original *Kong* a couple of times in 16mm, projected on a sheet in an open living room heavily populated with kids. I assume Dino had done the same in his Canon Drive projection room. So my first question that day was should our remade KK be in the 1930s period of the original? Dino thought not. Modern. I agreed. It followed immediately that the story device of the original—a two-bit movie producer heading for the South Seas on a speculation scouting trip with a gorgeous blonde actress—had to go. Just too plain *silly* for today's audience. What to replace it with? "You think-a something, Lorenzo . . ." I said I'd try and had just one other basic query: Should end still have Kong blasted off New York skyscraper? Yes, said Dino. We planted a couple of other guidemarks. Start with as much *reality* as possible. Develop the love story between Kong and the girl much further than it went in the original. (People tend to forget, but Fay Wray's behavior with Kong in the old one is something less than emotionally rich. Every time she comes out of a faint, she *SHRIEKS!* Period.) Heaven

knows how, but try to *characterize* Kong. Dino capered around his office, pantomiming an enormous monkey plucking off a girl's vestments, delicately, as one would pluck the petals of a flower. (Dino began his career as an actor.) That was the entire content of our conference on how to remake *King Kong*. Fifteen minutes after it began, I was leaving Canon Drive HQ en route back to Aspen to write a story outline.

A producer friend, Jerry Bick, happened to phone me the next day about another project. In the course of chitchatting he mentioned how *he'd* always wanted to redo KK, but couldn't nail down the rights. He didn't know quite how he'd have approached it, Jerry said, except he had a mental picture of a terrific scene. Kong in a supertanker, one of those 1000-foot long behemoths of the sea. *Zap! Light bulbs glowing above the noggin!* I asked Jerry if I could use that elegant notion and he said of course.

The basic story device immediately fell into place: oil company expedition. In truth I'd been toying with that idea before my gift from Jerry, and had even mentioned it to Dino as an off-the-cuff possibility, but it was the supertanker image that locked it in.

I returned to Canon Drive a couple of weeks later with an outline—some forty double-spaced pages of narrative. That is to say, I returned to Canon Drive a few days after sending the outline

down, for it is a charming peculiarity of Dino's that he has all written material translated into Italian for his reading. *All written material.* Outlines, scripts, whole novels. Dino rises before six every morning and reads. Carefully. He is a disciple of the written word. People who don't know him well are oft misled by his flamboyant character, and confounded when he catches them out on some tiny detail of the script.

My outline was well received. Re-reading those forty pages today, I find them startling for two reasons: (1) How exactly they set the style and story of the finished picture; (2) How totally many of the details got changed. For example: Jack Prescott, the Princetonian played by Jeff Bridges, was originally an eccentric and semi-comical Italian attached to the Vatican library. Dino rejected that person out-of-hand as utterly preposterous, and the concept remains in only one line of the script. (*Hint*: Look for it in dialog on Page 30 of this book.) The reason I made our present romantic lead a comical foreigner was because the romantic lead in my outline was Joe Perko, the oil-drilling foreman who remains in the movie only as a bit. If I remember, I made Joe Perko the lead because I'd just read an interesting piece in *New York* magazine alleging that liaisons between classy semi-intellectual female persons and roughneck blue-collar males were all the rage. I didn't believe that then or now, but it sounded

like it would make for an amusing relationship. One might well ask by what lunatic fancy the girl of this script, Dwan, would qualify as a "classy semi-intellectual." The answer is, *she* was a different person in the outline too: Camera Operator of a movie unit along on the expedition to film TV commercials for the oil company. Candy Bergen, that is to say.

With the exception of the change in the girl, the character shifts described above were decided on instantly, almost by unspoken assent. There's a potent domino-effect in script construction. The humorous Italian bit becomes a young Princeton anthropologist, therefore latter is now your leading man, therefore roughneck Joe Perko moves down the line, therefore the girl no longer has to be Candy Bergen. It is not that I've got anything against Candy Bergen: I've never met her, but I think she's terrific. The point is, there is something shamefully *predictable* and *TV-ish* about a beautiful girl Camera Operator, which no amount of fancy footwork is going to get around. The basic concept is unworthy of a gigantic ape. When I grumbled about this, however, and suddenly had a flash that the girl should be a nothing would-be actress found adrift in a raft, Dino looked totally blank. Obviously he found it totally unbelievable, with which it was hard to argue. It is unbelievable. But so, I argue, is a 40-foot ape—and having established "reality" of a sort with the

oil-exploration vessel setting sail, we needed a bridge to the fantasy which will follow, and what more agreeable fantasy than finding the most gorgeous girl in the world floating unconscious in the South Pacific?

This whole question of "believability" and "reality" was the heart of the matter—greatly exacerbated, I must admit, by the phenomenon which was occurring while we were hammering out our outline. Phenomenon named *Jaws*. Here was a picture filled with ludicrous absurdities, both ichthyological and otherwise, which was being accepted as *totally real* and because of that *coining zillions*. Dino passionately demanded at the start that we make our ape as believable as their shark. I tirelessly rejoined that despite the nonsense in *Jaws*, it was so skillfully done that people were willing to accept it as fact—whereas nobody would ever "really believe" in a 40-foot ape who flipped out over a 5'4" blonde bride.

Back and forth we went—this abstract discussion concretized in whether The Girl should be my Dwan or Dino's hypothetical Candy Bergen—and God only knows how it would have been decided except that the Director entered at that time.

Enter John Guillermin.

It is customary for writers to blame directors for butchering their great scripts, and indeed that often happens, but certainly not in this case. John

is a little loony, as anybody would have to be to carry off *Towering Inferno* and *King Kong*—I boast of a certain attractive looniness myself—but from the moment he read the outline to the moment I am writing these words (just days before publication), he totally dug the style of Romantic Adventure we were after and busted his tail to keep that style coming through. I won't dwell on the nightmare problems of logistics and time-pressure which hounded us throughout—that's for another book—but somehow John survived them. There were plenty of hot arguments with Dino along the way, too, but in the end they were all resolved the same way: at the bottom line, if the picture *needed* it, Dino ordered it *done*. (Maybe one exception to that, but that will remain our secret.)

I remember some smart-ass type around M-G-M, where we were shooting most of the time, once telling me we were in horrible trouble because he'd heard it rumored we were on our *third costume designer*. My own feeling was that that was exactly why we were *not* in trouble—unlike most producers, Dino would keep doing things over until they were right. The picture was all that mattered. *Res ipse loquitur*.

However. Back to The Girl. Candy Bergen, Girl Cameraperson, or the Actress-Adrift? John liked the idea of the latter as much as I did, and in the face of the combined opposition, Dino threw

up his hands. Try it. If he didn't like it, he'd let us know. As it turned out, he liked it.

I guess I did my first draft in about four weeks. It was easy to write, which is always a good sign. It followed the outline closely, incorporating the various character changes just described, and again it was well received. Obviously, however, it was too long. It ran about 140 pages when mimeographed, which would be long for any movie—and for a movie with so much non-dialog action, *much* too long. Make it ninety pages, Dino says. John Guillermin looks concerned. No problem whatever! I say. I'll take it down to ninety, lose nothing, and indeed improve it in every way. John looks *extremely* concerned, suggests that he and I go over possible cuts in detail before I do them. I'll have none of that. Just wait and see—I'll be back in a flash with a terrific tightened script that will make everyone jump for joy. So saying, I retreat to Aspen to execute these boasts.

All writers are insecure in one way or another, and surely I'm no exception. Unlike many, however, my insecurity doesn't take the form of violently defending what I've written and denouncing people who criticize. On the contrary. When someone implies something of mine isn't *one hundred percent PERFECT*, I immediately feel guilty of having committed an awful crime, having betrayed those who trusted me, etc., etc. I ruthlessly throw out everything.

I was really delighted with the rewritten Second Draft, which finally came out around ninety-two pages. I shipped it down to Canon Drive for translation, following in person a couple of days later to receive the expected pats on the head and congratulations.

Instead, I found utter shock and gloom. The Second Draft was hated. John said everything that distinguished the outline and First Draft had vanished. Dino opined it was impossible I could have written such trash and actually accused me of having sub-contracted the rewrite to someone else. All I could do was mumble that I had, after all, only done as I was directed—hacked it to around ninety pages on Dino's order. "So why-a you listen to me?" Dino demanded contemptuously—and unanswerably.

Enough about what became known as "The Infamous Second Draft." It was discreetly chained in the attic like the batty aunt, never to be mentioned again. John and I sat down quietly with the First Draft, and easily processed it into something very closely resembling the final script printed here.

Of course there were endless changes from January to October, 1976, as the actual shooting progressed and the budget rose. Trim this. Work out a substitute for that. By pure happenstance, our KK was shot almost totally in sequence—that is to say, the first night's shooting was Page 1 of

the script, and the schedule followed almost scene after scene to the end. There are some advantages in that. When it became apparent, for example, that Jeff Bridges and Jesse Lange played well together, John had me extend some of their romantic scenes a bit. To compensate, we cut back on peripheral stuff like chitchat of the search party in the jungle.

The one area that drove us all nuts from beginning to end was what we called the "Presentation Scene"—where Kong is unveiled in New York and makes his escape. You may remember, in the original movie it was quite simple: the beast was unveiled on the stage of a theatre and broke loose from there. We aimed at something more spectacular. My outline and all drafts of the script had Kong making his break from a huge spectacular in Shea Stadium. This was easy to write, but would be much tougher to execute. Maybe *millions of dollars* tougher to execute. There was also the point that two other big movies in production that summer featured stadium panics—*Two Minute Warning* and *Black Sunday*. Therein lies this writer's sole complaint against the producer in the entire affair: Dino clearly indicated from the start that he considered the stadium presentation infeasible, while John was insisting just as strongly that it was indispensable, but never until much later did Dino announce *absolutely for sure* that we must find a substitute. Lest this complaint be

weighed too heavily, let me quickly add that no producer except Dino could have made the movie at all—that is beyond controversy. Anyway, as a result of the diplomatic indecisions, midsummer found me writing tentative variation after variation as the cameras ground closer to the day. . . .

Kong escapes from Madison Square Garden, which was only superficially appealing.

Kong is landed by helicopter at a reception at the Bronx Zoo, from which he escapes after also releasing all manner of beasts from their cages.

Kong escapes from a Brooklyn pier, where he is being landed from a huge barge.

Kong escapes from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, much as in the original, where he is being presented for the TV cameras.

And others.

The unfortunate part of the procedure was that we all became so jaded and (yes!) bored with these variants that it became increasingly difficult to sift the good idea from the bad. The chief determinate of the way we finally did it was that it enabled us to reuse the Great Wall of Skull Island, which still stood on M-G-M's desolate Lot 2 at a cost of nearly a million bucks. There John worked out a sequence that was essentially a trimmed version of the Shea Stadium of our First Draft, but still we were to be bedeviled. Would you believe that residents of this Culver City neighborhood complained about the noise and so the cops made us

shut down at midnight? This despite the fact that it was a night sequence, and in midsummer, it did not grow dark until nine o'clock.

However. So 1976's *King Kong* was scripted. It was fantastic fun. I've seen the picture in rough cut, and the faithfulness of film to what I had in head strikes me as amazing. I also realize the picture is emotionally rather trickier than I'd thought—forcing the viewer to love a monster he first feared, rewarding that affection by killing its object in the most brutal way, and not even sugar-coating this bitter pill with a Boy/Girl clinch. I hope the concept doesn't lay too much on the audience. If it works, I will take bows alongside Dino and John, who made it happen. If it doesn't, I'm not being falsely modest when I say the blame is mine. Luckily, only those who read this will ever realize that.

—LORENZO SEMPLE, JR.

The Complete Script of
the Dino De Laurentiis Production of
KING KONG

by
Lorenzo Semple, Jr.

KING KONG

IT IS night in the exotic port of Surabaya, Indonesia. A feeling of urgency and mystery rises from a ship being readied for sailing at the end of a guarded quay. Armed port cops patrol the chain-link fence. Dusky Indonesian dockworkers sweat under floodlights as their women prepare weirdo repasts in the shadows, sending smoke from charcoal braziers drifting up around the space-age radars and suchlike of the *SS Petrox Explorer*. She is a super-modern oil search vessel out of Houston, Texas. Her house ensign dangles from a mast . . . a stylized letter "P", done in red-white-and-blue as if hacked from an American flag. You recognize it right away as the rather arrogant symbol of the Petrox Corporation, that great conglomerate whose gas stations plaster the U.S. from coast to coast.

On the ship's foredeck, Joe Perko holds a clipboard and looks with near disbelief at a load of steel pipes. Joe is foreman of drillers, a roughneck type with a huge jaw and a voice filtered through gravel. Near him stands Boan, one of his crew, big and black with a shaven noggin. They see Roy Bagley emerge on a high deck, carrying some little lab gizmo. Bagley is the ship's petroleum geologist, a pleasant fellow with an occasionally wry sense of humor.

Joe: Hey, Bagley! Something's haywire—they only loaded me enough pipe to push one test-pole less'n two thousand feet!

Bagley: It'll be enough.

Boan: You gotta be kiddin'! On Bongatong we didn't come in till past twenty-six thousand feet!

Bagley: Take my word, fellas—this hole proves out within two thousand or it's a write-off!

Bagley vanishes through another doorway, baffling Joe and Boan with a look that plainly says he knows something he ain't telling. In the ship's radio room, Fred Wilson stands beside Captain Ross, watching a teleprinter bang out bad news about a storm moving NNE through the Banda Sea. Fred Wilson looks exactly like what he is

. . . a slick, smooth, youngish, self-satisfied, upward-mobile oil exec from Petrox headquarters in New York. The skipper, who's cut from more down-to-earth cloth, shakes his head at the crummy weather report.

Capt. Ross: My advice is, we stay here in Surabaya another forty-eight hours . . .

Wilson: The hell with the weather. Every hour we hang around gives Shell or Exxon a chance of beating us to the island.

Capt. Ross: How could they? I thought we're the only ones who——

Wilson: Captain, we'll sail. Soonest.

Without awaiting for an answer, Wilson exits.

Capt. Ross: You'll be sorry.

An old taxi rattles up to the dock area. It is night. A young man lurches out. He is Jack Prescott. Bearded, attractive and intelligent-looking. He also looks remarkably drunk. A seaman's bag is tossed over his shoulder and he wears a jersey with a Petrox emblem. Wobbling up to the policeman at the gates, he fumbles for his wallet. As he gets it out, a wad of currency "accidentally"

comes out of it, and falls to the ground. Though it is obviously deliberate, Prescott seems unaware of it; the cop's foot instantly covers the dough. Faster than you can imagine, the young man is passed through the gate.

The ship's first mate, whose name is Carnahan, is hailing the crew from the bridge through a bullhorn.

Carnahan: Roll the gangplank ashore! Dock hands ready on the bow!

As Prescott crouches behind some crates on the quay, you realize the drunk bit was only an act. He is totally sober. He watches as Indonesian dockworkers scurry to obey the orders. Suddenly he sprints through light and shadow toward the stern of the ship, jumps from the dock and catches a line dangling down there. He swings there with his sea bag, and then starts inching precariously up.

Bilingual commands are now relayed from the Harbor Pilot up on the bridge with Captain Ross. Lines are cast off. The engine telegraph rings. The screws thrash up dirty harbor water.

Slowly, the ship warps out against the last spring-line, and then that too is free. More water boils up

astern as the *SS Petrox Explorer* starts ahead. Wilson is at the rail beside Bagley, watching as the dock slides away. The exec's eyes are bright with contained excitement as he lifts a cool gin and tonic.

Wilson: Here's to the Big One.

A couple of days have passed as the upper deck of the *Explorer* is lashed with warm tropic rain which flies almost horizontally as the ship pitches in the weird yellowish gloom of a typhoon's fringe. A tarpaulin over a lifeboat in the foreground is raised slightly from inside. This is Jack Prescott's hiding place. He is about as seasick as any fellow you ever saw. He upchucks. Behind him is the window of the radio room. Through water beating on the glass, the chief and second operators can be seen at powerful radio panels. The former is trying tensely to tune in something from a mess of whistling static. Suddenly a voice comes through remarkably clear.

Radio Voice: . . . Mayday! . . . Mayday! . . .
This is the——

But with that it fades away again into static. The Chief looks across to the Second who is standing at the direction-finder panel. The fellow shakes his head.

Captain Ross and Wilson are in the pitching dining salon. Ross eats heartily. The same cannot be said of Wilson. Ross watches the exec pausing over a forkful, his eyes fixed with sick fascination on a swinging light fixture.

Capt. Ross: I'm reminded of Amsterdam, for some reason. Ever eat a raw herring chased with beer and a scoop of ice cream?

Wilson gulps and rises and bolts out into the tempest. As Ross resumes eating, faintly pleased, the phone on the bulkhead buzzes. Ross gets up and takes the handset.

Capt. Ross: Skipper.

Chief Op's Voice: We picked up an SOS. Low power signal, it faded before we could get vessel or its bearing.

Capt. Ross: Check with Singapore Center, keep listening, let me know if you get anything.

Wilson comes back in as Ross hangs up the phone. He looks awful. Though he was out but a few seconds, he is drenched. Watching him sit again, Captain Ross feels some slight compassion.

Capt. Ross: We could get out of this stuff by

backtracking around Timor Island. The hitch is, it'd cost us a couple of days.

Wilson: Keep on course, Captain. I'm fine.

Wilson stiffly forces a forkful of food into his mouth.

Capt. Ross: I got to say, for a New York desk guy, you have some guts.

Wilson: Guts, hell—I have my neck on the block. I peddled this one to the board. If that island doesn't produce *huge*, I'll be wiping off windshields.

By the next day the storm has ended. Now the *Petrox Explorer* is a toy ship on the blue, leaving behind it an arrow-straight wake. Joe Perko, Boan and seamen Timmons and Garcia sit on a forward hatch playing pinochle. The well-worn deck of cards is one of those with shapely calendar-type girlies on the back. Joe pauses. He considers his next play.

Joe: I kinda hate to let this beauty go—

Joe shakes his head and tosses her into the center where she is instantly pounced on by Boan. Suddenly the guys become aware of something.

Shuddering below as the rudder is put over, the ship begins steady and turns to starboard.

Boan: What are we swinging south for?

Timmons: I dunno. That island we're headed for is due east.

There is a soft alerting bong from the ship's P.A. speakers as Captain Ross's voice is heard.

Capt. Ross: All hands—this is Captain Ross. All drillers and ship's crew not on watch, assemble in the mess room for an announcement of interest. Thank you!

Boan makes a face.

Boan: Oh, man. I bet we've been sold to Howard Hughes and we're in the CIA.

Inside the crowded mess room, the air is very informal. Many of the men are just in shorts. The room is partly darkened as Wilson stands by a slide projector.

Wilson: We'd have told you before, but I couldn't risk anyone talking until we were on high seas. Men, we may be sailing into the history books. I believe we're headed for the biggest oil strike ever—right here in the magic circle—

He clicks the slide projector. On screen appears the image of an ocean chart, almost totally blank except for depth-shadings and submarine contours. A course line is drawn along a heading of 174 degrees, nearly due south, terminating near the bottom of the chart in a drawn circle.

There are murmurs from all around. The general mood is put into words by Sunfish, a part-Cherokee driller from Oklahoma.

Sunfish: That's magic, all right! We gonna find oil under two thousand fathoms of deep blue sea?

Wilson: That's what the charts put there, yes—just deep blue sea. Now look at a low-level photo of the area—

The image on the screen changes. Now it is an old black and white, showing nothing but a long, low fog bank hanging over the sea, with a pattern of distinctive wisps rising over one end.

Wilson: This one was taken in 1943. We dug it out of Navy files. As the charts say, no sign of land—just a fog bank you wouldn't look at twice. Here's another picture from precisely the same camera angle. We took it from a company plane two weeks ago. Same area of ocean, over a quarter century later—

A new slide appears. This new photo is amazingly like the first, except for being in color. Even those towery wisps rise in a near-identical pattern. There are more murmurs from the room and a couple of low whistles.

Wilson: Amazing, huh? A bank of fog that doesn't change a hair in thirty-five years. Fan-tas-tic. But still nothing for *us* to explore except for one reason—an NSA spy satellite went way off course and photographed it by mistake. Correction—for *two* reasons. The second is that I personally got hold of these super-classified pictures via a donation I made to someone in Washington, D.C. No names, but I think he lives on Pennsylvania Avenue.

There is some good-natured laughing and clapping. Wilson turns to his geologist.

Wilson: Roy Bagley? Would you take over with the science?

As Bagley moves to the projector, the door from the deck opens and someone slips inside. It is Jack Prescott. The door shuts again, and he is lost in the shadows at the rear.

Bagley: That satellite was supposed to be analyzing exhaust gases of a Chicom missile test, so it was loaded with two special kinds of film. First, the infrared . . .

The projection on the screen now shows a varicolored but sharply defined mass shaped roughly like a human skull.

Bagley: The different colors represent different surface temperatures—

Joe: You mean there's *land* behind that fog?

Bagley: Correct, Joe. An island hidden by a perpetual fog-bank—never seen by human eye nor walked by human foot. Those infrared patterns aren't like any I ever saw. Even more surprising, though, is what the spectrograph picked up.

There's another click and the screen now shows brilliant color bands, overlapping and melting into each other.

Bagley: Chemical composition of our mysterious low fog-bank—free hydrocarbon radicals . . . excess nitrogen . . . carbon dioxide far above normal—not poisonous, but very damned curious. This must result from vapors seeping up through the ground. I'll add my guess to that—seeping up from petroleum deposits.

The scientist's statement is not strong enough for Fred Wilson, who steps out with an expression of near-fanatical intensity.

Wilson: Guess, hell—that island is the tip of a huge underground tank, just waiting for us to twist the cap off. I'm betting everything I got on it.

A new voice is heard from the shadows at the back of the room.

Prescott: I'll take fifty cents of that.

Prescott is somewhat backlighted by the window in the darkened room; therefore he is heard, but not clearly seen.

Prescott: There's all kinds of things that might account for the excess CO₂, for example. One would be animal respiration.

Bagley: What?

Prescott: Animal breathing. I also got to question that human feet have never walked that island. In 1605, Pero Fernando de Quieros was blown south from the Tuamotu Archipelago. He wrote in his log of "piercing the White Veil"—that's the cloud, obviously—and landing on "the Beach of the Skull" where he heard the "roar of the Greatest Beast." The rest of that log entry, unfortunately, was suppressed by the Holy Office in Rome.

Wilson: What are you talking about? Who are you?

Prescott walks forward as he keeps talking in a quiet but spellbinding manner.

Prescott: In 1749 a waterlogged lifeboat was picked up in this same area. It was empty. But drawn in blood on a thwart was a likeness of some huge, slouchy humanoid *thing*, and this strange warning: "from thy full-moon wedding with the creature who touches heaven, Lady, God preserve thee." I also heard of a note in a bottle written by a dying Japanese submariner in 1944, but I haven't been able to track that one down.

In utter consternation, Wilson turns to Carnahan.

Wilson: Who in hell is this joker?

Carnahan: Don't ask me.

Wilson: What—He's wearing one of your crew jerseys!

Prescott: Take it easy—I'll pay any fair amount for my passage.

Wilson has whirled, almost speechless.

Wilson: You're a—*stowaway*?

Prescott does not deny it. In fact, he nods.

Prescott: Jack Prescott. I'm from Princeton. Department of Primate Paleontology.

Wilson: Department of—you lying phony, you're from some other oil company! *How did you get wind of this?*

Startled by the vehemence, Prescott takes a step backward as Wilson moves after him. He suddenly becomes aware of all the crew watching him. If there's anything Wilson doesn't like, it's looking like a fool.

Wilson: Okay, men. The meeting's over. That's all.

IN THE officers' mess a little later, Captain Ross is unpacking Prescott's sea bag on the table. Clothes, books, camera equipment . . . nifty Nikon with motor drive, long lenses, all the goodies. Wilson stands over Prescott looking at his U.S. passport. Garcia and Sunfish wait in the doorway like cops. Wilson throws down the passport scornfully.

Wilson: Hell, it doesn't mean a thing. Gulf or Exxon could fix you a phony passport so neat even Kissinger couldn't spot it. For the last time—who in hell are you?

Prescott: I'm Jack Prescott. I admit I'm interested in your island—but not to do with oil.

Wilson: Jack, you're not even a fair country liar. There is NO WAY you could've found out in Surabaya where we were headed.

Prescott: You bought charts.

Wilson: Come on. Don't make me get rough. Who did you pay off in Washington?

Prescott: They hadn't sold charts for this area in years. When a friend of mine tipped me, I figured I'd take a chance.

Capt. Ross: You know, he's right—I did pick up charts in Surabaya.

Wilson: So what? He'd guess that. Take this lousy spy below and lock him up till he's hungry enough to quit spouting lies.

Garcia and Sunfish move forward and escort Prescott out of there like a prisoner. As they reach the ship's deck, Prescott suddenly halts. His eye is caught by something out over the sea. He stares and points.

Prescott: Look out there—

Garcia: What's the point of games, amigo? You can't swim a thousand miles.

Prescott: Honest to God—please look out there—

The sailors touch his elbows to hustle him along, but Prescott suddenly breaks and dashes up a companionway to the bridge level above. Pursued, he runs out to the end of the bridge wing, where Timmons is lounging around on watch. Again he points.

Prescott: Use your glasses—about ten o'clock and wait for a swell!

Timmons looks at him oddly, lifts his binoculars and peers off just as Garcia and Sunfish arrive to grab their prisoner.

Timmons: What am I looking for?

Prescott: I don't know exactly, I just thought I—

Sunfish: Nothin' is what you're looking for. Now come on!

Suddenly Timmons' face changes.

Timmons: I'll be damned! It's a raft.

As the ship stops, the rails are lined with most every soul on board. Prescott is not among them. The men are all gazing off and downward in a

near-religious way. What they are gawking at is a rubber lifeboat drifting about fifty feet off. In the wet bottom is sprawled an unconscious girl. An arm trails over the rubber into the warm sea. She wears a very clinging and alluring evening gown. Naturally her clothing and coiffure are a mess. Despite that, or perhaps because of it, she looks absolutely terrific.

The ship is almost dead in the water nearby. Stairs have been lowered along the side, with Carnahan and Joe and Boan and some others poised on the platform at bottom, holding boathooks. Captain Ross is watching from the bridge wing and calls to the wheelhouse.

Capt. Ross: Steady as she goes! Dead slow astern on the starboard screw!

The engine room telegraph rings. The ship bears down sidewise on the raft, slow and easy. A boat hook snags the raft. Everybody on platform is willing, to say the least, but Joe Perko gets there first. The girl is lifted. Sort of gingerly, Carnahan checks her heartbeat and then calls up to the ship.

Carnahan: She's alive!

Joe Perko has the honor of carrying the girl into Captain Ross's cabin. They are followed by Boan

and Carnahan . . . and would be followed by another ten guys pursuing in the corridor if the skipper didn't stand in their way. The girl is placed down on the berth.

Capt. Ross: Get outta here.

The skipper's thumb indicates the door. The guys exit quick. Ross shuts the door as Carnahan gently rolls the girl on her side, turns out the seams of her nearly backless gown. He has just found a label when Wilson enters.

Carnahan: I. Magnin, Beverly Hills. No gross injuries that I can see.

Carnahan is rolling her back and starting to take her pulse when Captain Ross notices something in the gown's pocket. He takes it out. It is a book of waterlogged paper matches—on the cover are a string of colored marine alphabet flags. He reads them aloud.

Capt. Ross: C-y-n-a-r-a. Cynara. Yacht, sounds like.

Wilson: Boy. You'd sure have to be a careless yachtsman to lose *this* one overboard.

Capt. Ross: We heard an SOS, remember?

NIGHT falls. A brightly lighted ship rushes ahead through a phosphorescent sea. Jack Prescott is not enjoying this. He is locked in a cabin, vainly pounding on the locked door. In the radio room, a teleprinter is knocking out a long printed sheet. It is biographical information about Jack Prescott. It is from New York or somewhere, in response to Wilson's urgent inquiries. Wilson reads it. Nearby, Bagley watches.

Bagley: I guess you can stop sweating, Fred—here comes a copy of his U.S. Navy records, with a set of fingerprints. The guy's kosher.

Wilson: Yeah. And I know just how to use him, too.

Wilson strides out and walks down to Prescott's cabin. Prescott, who has been lying on his bunk, hears the sound of a key in the lock outside. He turns his head. The door opens. It is Wilson. Prescott stares at him in understandable confusion.

Wilson: The skipper thinks she's about to wake up. She could be hysterical, so follow me. You had one year of med school before you switched to zoology, right?

Prescott: What've you got? A crystal ball?

Wilson: Jack, there is nothing I haven't checked about you. Come on.

Prescott rises and follows Wilson out.

Wilson: What we gotta figure now is some way for you to work off your room and board.

Though he has this all worked out already, Wilson pretends to be struck by an idea.

Wilson: Say . . . you're pretty good with that camera junk of yours, eh?

Prescott: I've snapped a few monkeys.

Wilson: That's it. Congratulations, you are now this expedition's official photographer.

Prescott: "Fred Wilson Brings In The Big One." Cover of the next Annual Report, right?

Prescott has scored a bullseye. Wilson says as much with a slow grin, then suddenly wipes it off.

Wilson: I'm just thinking of the history books.

The girl lies on her back in the same gown on Ross's berth. Wilson and Ross watch from the background as Prescott breaks an ammonia ampule and waves it in the general region of her gorgeous nose. The girl stirs, makes some unclear sounds, then her eyes flutter open.

Prescott: Hello. There's nothing to worry about. You're safe and well on an American merchant vessel.

There is no response. The girl's eyes flick around as she is making a tremendous effort at thought.

The Girl: Where's Harry and everyone?

Nobody says a word. Silence. A significant silence.

The Girl: You mean they're—gone?

Prescott: Do you remember anything?

The Girl: No. Yes. I was up on deck by myself and then—I was swimming to a star.

Capt. Ross: To a light.

Prescott: Why not let her call it a star?

Capt. Ross: By a miracle, a life raft was blown overboard near you. It was self-inflating, with an automatic flare.

Wilson: I'm afraid the yacht didn't last long after getting off her SOS. Radio Singapore reports someone has already found a charred piece of her hull.

The girl's eyes suddenly flood with moisture.

Capt. Ross: We're terribly sorry.

The Girl: Me, too. Harry had discovered me. He promised to put me in a movie he was making in Hong Kong.

Prescott: Bum luck.

The Girl: I guess I won't complain. When you're adrift alone in the South Pacific and someone——
Who spotted me, by the way?

Capt. Ross: He's standing right over you.

Dwan looks directly up at Prescott. Their eyes meet. Even a blind man could see that something is going to develop here.

The Girl: How can I ever thank you?

Prescott looks at her, then down at his feet. The girl understands.

The Girl: I'm Dwan. D-W-A-N, Dwan, that's my name. Like "Dawn" except I switched two letters—to make it more memorable.

Prescott: I'm a mere Jack.

Dwan: You're kidding, Jack. How could someone who saved my life ever be "mere" to me?

Prescott turns to the others.

Prescott: Come on—let's clear out of here and let her have a rest.

Dwan: Boy, I haven't had a good one of those in years. Are we headed back to Singapore?

Capt. Ross: Not directly, ma'am.

Dwan: That's okay, I'm not in a rush. Probably Harry wouldn't have put me in a picture anyway, he—(stops, struck by an amazing thought) My God. What a *meaningful miracle*—I owe my life to a movie!

Wilson: Is that so.

Dwan: I swear to God. Harry was showing a movie I refused to watch—that's why I was up on deck when the yacht blew up.

Dwan smiles. What with her still moist eyes, it is as radiant as a rainbow.

Dwan: Hey. Maybe my luck's changed!

DAY after day, the *Petrox Explorer* steams south towards its rendezvous with destiny. Dwan becomes one of the gang. She outfits herself in shirts and jeans belonging to the smallest member of the crew, the Chinese cook, which she alters with needle and thread. One morning a cloud appears ahead. It is the fog bank, recognizable from those photos Wilson projected in the mess. The towery wisps of fog, the shape—everything unchanged. The first rays of the dawn sun strike the top and pour down over it and across the ocean like molten metal, as the ship, against the rising sun, moves very slowly in its direction. Wilson, Ross and Prescott are all on the wing of the bridge gazing fixedly ahead through binoculars. There is

an air of extraordinary anticipation and excitement.

Wilson: I always wondered how Cortes felt when he first saw the Inca treasure. El Dorado.

Capt. Ross: Me too.

Prescott: Actually, it wasn't Cortes—it was Pizarro, and he died busted.

Now the cloud is barely one-half mile ahead. There is activity on deck. Anchors are cleared, shore boats unleashed for launching, radar antennas spin. The engine room telegraph rings. Water boils up behind. The ship's forward motion is rapidly checked as bow anchors rattle out and hit the water with huge splashes.

In the wheelhouse a radar operator is adjusting the fine tune on his machine as Wilson and Bagley watch. A green blip starts tracing a repeated irregular line which rises to a high point toward the right before zagging down and leveling off. He tunes that in.

Radar Operator: Here we go. Solid land, all right—you're looking at its profile, east to west.

Bagley: Typical Pacific formation, it looks

like. . . . This'd be the slope up from the beach . . . mountainous sector here at the west.

Suddenly something extremely weird happens on the radar screen. Near that mountainous rise, the blip is outlining some rearing shape; it rises a tiny bit above the regular line, and moves for an instant and vanishes. It has been so quick that no one is sure they even saw it. The operator fiddles with the knob.

Wilson: What the hell was that?

Radio Operator: Just a glitch. A false echo. Off a flock of seagulls, maybe.

Prescott walks in the door, loaded with camera things.

Prescott: Spot anything unusual?

Wilson: Not a thing, Jack.

Prescott: Look at the screen.

Wilson does and sees nothing. Then he understands. Prescott has the Nikon ready. Keen-eyed, Wilson does a radar-watching act as Prescott clicks pictures.

Dwan pauses on a companionway, looks at her reflection in a window and arranges her hair just a tiny bit. Satisfied, she runs on up. She has cut off a pair of jeans to make shorts and frayed the edges, which with legs like hers is only sensational. Emerging on the deck above, she hurries past busy sailors who pause and whistle at her. She is pleased by that and cheerfully whistles back at bare-chested Boan. Near the top of the gangway stairs, which are slung outboard to a motor launch in the water below, Dwan finds Fred Wilson and the others getting ready to go down. She gives the boss a big smile.

Dwan: Bonjour! How's this for beach wear?

Wilson: Fantastic. But I'm afraid you can't go ashore.

Dwan: Hey, wait a minute—I'm going ashore on the first boat.

Capt. Ross: You really should wait until we get a recon done, ma'am.

Dwan: The hell I will!

Dwan turns to Wilson and gives him her charm with both barrels.

Dwan: You want full coverage of this landing, baby, you want me in it. You know, the all-American girl? Sole survivor of yacht.

Dwan throws an arm around Wilson's neck, presses her cheek to his and smiles big toward Prescott as he clicks off a bunch of shots with the motor-driven Nikon.

Wilson: Hey, don't print those—I'm a married man!

Prescott: Smasheroo. Guaranteed cover of *People* magazine.

Wilson: Well, print just one.

Dwan: Come on, Mr. Wilson, I need the break and you owe it to me—I am the holder of a Petrox credit card!—Dammit, I *am*. Radio your computer and ask. Okay, so my payments are a few months overdue. You're biting me eighteen percent interest *plus* the late charges.

Wilson: Ms. Dwan, you have fought and clawed your way into my hard heart. Climb aboard.

Dwan kisses Wilson warmly on the cheek and turns to Prescott.

Dwan: Maybe it's him.

Prescott: What's him?

Dwan: I had my horoscope done before I flew out to Hong Kong—it said I'd take a trip over water and meet the biggest person in my life.

The motor launch approaches the mysterious swirling white which is at the seaward edges of the low cloud bank. Prescott is snapping pictures. Timmons and Garcia are up in the bow. Carnahan and Wilson are at mid-ship control post, with Bagley, Joe and Boan toward the stern. The launch reduces speed and disappears into the white fog. Ghostly and unearthly, the launch moves slowly now through the fog. Bagley watches the gauges of a weather instrument with sensors in the air and over the side in the water.

Bagley: Interesting. We're in a lateral surface-current eighteen degrees cooler than the air.

Wilson: Interesting why?

Bagley: The fog began exactly at the edge of it. It might lift when we get through.

Carnahan checks the indicator.

Carnahan: Crossing twenty fathoms—shallowing rapidly!

Garcia: This soup's thinning out ahead! I think I hear breakers!

There is an instant hush. Carnahan knocks the prop to neutral and cuts the engine to idle. Very faint waves are heard ahead as the boat's momentum carries it on. The fog lightens. Then, as if by magic, an island shore appears at some distance. It is dark and mysterious. Black cliffs loom. Waves beat around a crescent of white sand. Carnahan picks up the radio mike and calls the ship.

Carnahan: Shore boat to *Explorer*.

His words boom out of the P.A. speaker on the ship's foredeck. Everyone has stopped and is listening to his voice.

Carnahan: . . . It's not so much a cloud as a curtain around the island. We just broke through into the clear and there's a landing beach dead ahead. In two words—*no problem*. Out for now.

The group left behind claps and whistles. They dream of a big bonus. Up on the bridge, Captain Ross grins and continues on into the wheelhouse.

The launch hits the breakers off the beach, yawing through them as Timmons and Garcia jump down with lines, followed by Joe and Boan in the stern. The guys lean on lines against the backwash. Prescott swings over the side and holds out his arms. Dwan leaps into them. Prescott catches her and carries her as he wades ashore. Dwan kicks her legs in the air.

Dwan: Hey, put me down—it's been three weeks since my tootsies touched dry land!

Prescott: You're gonna be surprised.

Dwan does not know what he means. He puts her down and she discovers quick. Dwan staggers and reels with sea legs unaccustomed to steady ground.

Dwan: Wow! Far out. Man, I'm like to get busted for drunk walking!

She does a big staggering turn and falls hilariously flat on the dry beach. She kisses it as Prescott takes her picture. Wilson yells from the launch.

Wilson: I'm coming ashore, Jack!

Prescott turns. He looks out, makes a wry face,

lifts his Nikon and aims it out at Wilson. The cornball exec is clear of the launch and in water up to his thighs. He pulls his cap down and marches toward the beach. In his khaki pants and shirt, visored cap, even low-slung pistol belt with a .45 automatic in it, he is the spitting image of General MacArthur doing his famed I-have-returned wade ashore on Leyte. The motor-drive rips off a few dozen frames. Wilson stops and turns. He yells to Carnahan still in the stern of the boat.

Wilson: Let's not get eaten alive on this island—bring the mosquito spray.

Bagley has already walked to the top of the beach where he is studying the gigantic cliffs which loom above the beach. He carries a clipboard with a map made of those infrared photos. He halts beside Joe Perko, who is eyeing a natural archway in the rocks at the end of the sand. Through the arch is the only way off this beach.

Joe: At least we don't have to wonder which way to go . . .

Bagley: Yeah, and we'll hit a stream about a half mile west. We'll push up it.

Joe: You wanta start setting seismic charges this morning, huh?

Bagley: Absolutely. Can't do anything until we've mapped the underground geological structure.

Wilson calls cheerfully from the background to the others and waves them on.

Wilson: Come on, everybody—get yourself in gear! Through the magic archway.

The tiny figures stalk through the huge arch. Dwan spots something.

Dwan: Hey, there's a waterfall ahead! Last one to get a drink from it is a rotten egg!

She runs ahead. She reaches the waterfall and takes a drink from it as Prescott catches up with her.

Prescott: Don't go running off on any more solos. Just do me a favor—stick with me, huh?

Dwan looks at him with a look of surprise, not understanding the anxiety in his tone. He is not about to explain it at this moment. Above them is a V-shaped gorge, a pathway into the mysterious interior with its clouded rocky crags.

They have gone a mile or so when they come

around a low barrier of rocks. They stop dead. They are all tremendously amazed by something that has come into their view. What it is is an enormous wall, almost mythic in scale. It looks like it is a hundred feet high, made of earth and stone and timber. It is obviously man-made, but as rugged as the terrain from which it springs. Wilson and the others gaze at it in utter awe.

Wilson: Holy Mother. That looks as old as the Great Pyramids of Egypt!

Prescott: Yeah, it could be. Difference is, the pyramids weren't repaired six months ago.

Their eyes all jump to him. Prescott is putting a wider-angle lens on the Nikon.

Prescott: You'll notice there's earth chinking those timbers. That would have to be replaced after each monsoon season.

Carnahan: You saying there are people on this island?

Prescott: Yes, I am. What's more, I'll characterize them. Scared people.

Wilson: Scared of what?

Prescott: I don't know exactly. But it apparently requires a wall of this scale to keep it shut out.

Wilson eyeballs him.

Wilson: Jack, let me straighten you out about a couple of things. One: This wall is an ancient ruin. Two: The island is not inhabited.

Immediately there is a sound from the interior of the island. It echoes along this side of the wall . . . the BOOM BOOM BOOM of drums. Everyone reacts in their own way. Fred Wilson whips out his .45, Carnahan quickly slips the carbine off his shoulder.

Prescott: Three: There's an uninhabited German beer hall in there with a mechanical band.

At the wall there are about fifty native drummers beating away. They are in front of a pair of enormous gates which run the full height of the wall. The gates are held shut by a wooden bolt about five times bigger than a telephone pole.

The shore party makes its way cautiously forward through the foliage along the wall. The drums keep beating.

Atop a slight rise, Prescott and Wilson drop to the

ground. They signal to those behind to do the same. Bagley creeps up with two pair of binoculars. He gives one to Wilson as Prescott is looking through his camera which now has a telephoto lens on.

A procession is emerging from the jungle. Native women are chanting as they carry a bamboo platform on their shoulders. On that kneels a girl, sixteen or so, dressed in a fantastical gown of bird feathers and dyed skins. Her head is crowned with flowers. The men's chanting joins the women's. There is a male procession coming from the jungle converging with the women toward side steps which lead up to a raised area before the gates. In front are painted dancing Ju-Ju men. They wear a hooded costume of knitted fiber covering most of their bodies except for holes cut for eyes and nose.

Wilson, Bagley and Prescott are gawking at the spectacle below. Prescott is taking it all in through his Nikon.

Bagley: Fred, swing your binocs a bit to the left—you'll see kind of a funny pool.

Wilson does so and sees a smallish dark pool in a slight depression.

Wilson: You think it *could* be?

Bagley: Surface seems viscous. It sure as hell could be oil.

Wilson's face is sort of transfigured.

Wilson: Sweet Holy D. Rockefeller.

The native women converge with their men, chanting their ritual chant. All you can pick out is one syllable which is repeated very often: "Kong! . . . Kong! . . . Kong! . . ."

Dwan crawls up beside Prescott with binoculars and focuses them down.

Dwan: Hey—it looks like a wedding.

Prescott: Good guess. You can bet it's scheduled for tomorrow night, when the moon is full.

Dwan: Where's the groom?

Prescott touches her binocs and aims them slightly. Through the binocs she sees another Ju-Ju man as he dances into view wearing a crazy ape-mask. He also wears high platform foot gear to increase his height, and wears paw-like skin gloves.

Prescott: See the one in the ape-mask? You might say that's the groom's stand-in. The actual groom is on the other side of the wall.

Dwan sharpens the focus of her binoculars. It looks like she really digs it.

Dwan: Far out! Like you mean it's bad luck if they see each other before the wedding march—

Prescott: Ghastly luck—for the whole congregation.

As Dwan looks at Prescott questioningly, there is a yell from one of the natives. The chanting and the drums stop. They've been spotted. Every single native is looking straight at them. The white folk freeze. Three Ju-Ju men, with the towering ape-mask in the middle, start to walk up the slight rise. One of them shouts an order and a number of men with spears fall in behind them. The Americans are as scared as you would be as they watch this horrible number approach them. Wilson's voice comes out like a croak.

Wilson: You want to talk for us, Jack?

Prescott: I'll try.

Wilson: What if they aren't buying?

Prescott: We shoot—in the air only.

The Ju-Ju men stop about fifteen feet away as the guys and Dwan rise to their feet. The spearmen halt, too. Prescott steps forward a little, half raising his open-palmed hands to show he is weaponless. Ape Mask points to the area below and makes a gesture like everything down there has been messed up. Then he shouts at Prescott in his weird language. Obviously, he is mad.

Wilson: Can you figure the beef?

Prescott: Only the tone. He's probably saying we've contaminated their magic . . .

Ape Mask suddenly sees Dwan standing slightly defensively behind the front fellows. He stares at her. He exchanges a few quick words with his mates. They seem to like what he says. Majestically he points at Dwan with fully extended arm. She makes a big smile.

Dwan: Hi!

Ape Mask gestures for her to follow them. Dwan keeps smiling, but shakes her head. Firmly.

Dwan: I like you, too, but not that way.

After thinking it over Ape Mask turns and shouts to the mob below. Slowly six native maidens walk forward from the group. They stop in a line, their eyes demurely downcast. Ape Mask throws a bit of pantomime at Prescott.

Prescott: He wants to deal. Six of them for Dwan.

Dwan: Tell him I'm awfully flattered, but as a charter subscriber to *Ms. magazine* I could never be a party to such an arrangement.

After a moment of silence, the spearmen behind Ape Mask take a step forward. You get the feeling they are not going to invite these trespassers to join the tribe.

Prescott: In the air—*now*.

Wilson's .45, Carnahan's .30 caliber carbine. BOOM BANG BANG BOOM BOOM BANG. The effect is dynamite. They never have seen this kind of magic before. They scatter . . . scared out of their wits! Our side backs cautiously away, their guns ready to go off. They take off, too, when they are sure the natives will not chase them.

AS THE *Petrox Explorer* lies at anchor that night, very clearly over the water comes the sound of Archie and Edith Bunker's voices, followed by male laughter. In the crew's mess the guys are watching "All in the Family," projected from color tape onto a big screen. In the ship's radio room an operator is working a keyboard, translating gibberish five-letter code groups onto a punched tape for transmission.

Dwan is alone on the upper deck. She is religiously reading some horoscope magazine from the crew library. She gets out a cigarette, but has no match. She walks into the chart room. A golden glow touches her face. It is from the spectacu-

lar moon which is just rising. She doesn't notice the radar screen below the window. As if woken by that same rush of golden moon-arrows, a shape is rising. The green blips show it rearing, starting to move. She notices it now, but only with no more than idle curiosity as she lights her cigarette. It has no meaning for her. She wanders out, restless-looking.

A mile or so away a pair of outrigger canoes are moving over the moonlit water. In each are eight painted natives, their paddles slicing the sea with barely a sound. Beautiful, scary, they vanish into the dense, low cloudbank.

Back on the ship there is a meeting going on. Smoky air, drinks, sandwiches, hum of air-conditioning. Prescott, perhaps a little tipsy, glares angrily at Wilson.

Prescott: The nineteenth century is over, man. You can't just waltz in and grab their island!

Wilson: Thanks, Jack—I'll check that with the United Nations. In the meantime, Phase One—we scare 'em into the boondocks with a Fourth of July number.

He looks to Bagley.

Wilson: You guys ready to march in and set charges for the seismograph?

Bagley: No problem.

That draws a short, harsh laugh from Prescott. He bangs his glass three times on the formica table top.

Prescott: Kong. Kong. Kong. You heard them chanting it. *He exists*. You saw the wall. Who do you think they're planning to give the girl to?

Wilson: It's some nutty religion. Some priest dressed up like an ape gets the girl. However, Roy, we'll humor Jack here. When you go inland, take plenty of TNT. Any sign of a monkey bigger than four feet, send it bang bang.

Prescott jumps to his feet, almost trembling with his loathing of this repulsive executive.

Prescott: You wouldn't.

Wilson: Bet me.

Prescott: Even an environmental rapist like you—even you wouldn't be idiot enough to murder a unique new species of animal. Why, kids

would burn every Petrox gas station from Maine to California.

He gives Wilson a look of unspeakable contempt and storms out. He leaves an uneasy silence behind him. Captain Ross gazes thoughtfully at his cigar smoke.

Capt. Ross: He's probably right.

At the bottom of the gangway ladder the moon shines on Dwan. She is sitting on a small launch, fishing and sipping a can of her favorite brew, the incomparable Mexican Dos Sequis. She looks up, hearing some small sound above. Prescott is hurrying down the steps with a stuffed duffel bag in his arms. It blocks his view, so he has put it down in the bottom of the Zodiac dinghy before he sees Dwan looking at him.

Dwan: What are you doing?

Prescott: Getting ready to steal a boat.

Dwan: Seriously?

Prescott: Look at my face.

She looks. His face is serious indeed.

Dwan: You're going ashore?

Prescott: Soon as I've swiped some more supplies. I'm going on a camera hunt in the interior.

Dwan: That sounds horribly dangerous.

Prescott: It's a chance that comes once in a lifetime, baby. You grab it or you're dead meat.

He starts up the stairs again.

Dwan: Jack, wait a minute!

There is something new in her voice which makes him stop and turn.

Dwan: You really shouldn't go ashore tonight. It's not a good night for an Aries like you.

Prescott: How did you know I was an Aries?

Dwan: From the shape of your ears.

Jack looks at her curiously.

Dwan: No, seriously, I asked Fred Wilson.

Dwan sticks the fishing pole between her knees

and pulls out the horoscope book from her jeans. She tilts it to catch the light from the deck above and solemnly reads aloud.

Dwan: "Aries. In evening, steer clear of unconventional activities. A surprise with unpleasant aspects may be in store for you."

Staring at her anxious face, Prescott realizes she honestly believes this. It zonks him.

Prescott: I guess I could delay the trip for a couple of hours. What did you have in mind?

Dwan looks at him temptingly.

Prescott: Fifty times around the deck's a mile—we could jog.

Dwan keeps looking at him. He starts up the gangplank.

Prescott: Let me finish my stealing in the galley.

He turns halfway up the gangplank and looks at Dwan.

Prescott: You'll disappoint me if you're still fishing when I get back.

Dwan: Why, Jack?

Prescott: I'd hope you'd be planning a more interesting evening with me.

With that he's gone. A warm smile illuminates Dwan's face. Plainly looking forward to getting together with Jack, she hastily starts to pack her fishing gear. It is not to be. Suddenly out of nowhere . . . out of the night . . . there is a painted native face gliding up alongside her in the prow of a canoe. It is simply shocking in its suddenness. A dark forearm with a ringlet of feathers clamps around her throat, a hand claps over her mouth. The black man's mitt stifles her shriek.

Up in the dining salon the radio operator waits as Wilson reads a message sheet and Bagley watches. Wilson scribbles an initial at the bottom.

Wilson: Okay, send it out. Leave me the clear-text copy—

Radio Operator: Roger.

He leaves the copy and goes. Bagley looks at it.

Bagley: Listen, I said that pool *could* be oil. We won't know until I get a sample and test it.

Wilson: Think positive. Guys who think negative don't get very high up the Petrox Tower.

Bagley reads the outgoing announcement and skeptically echoes Wilson's cocky words.

Bagley: "No problem at all." Well, I guess you know what you're doing.

Prescott hurries down the outboard steps with another bag of gear for his expedition tomorrow. He smiles. Dwan is not there. He starts to hurry back up the plank when something catches his eyes. It is a native bracelet, crudely made out of teeth, feathers and shells. It wasn't there a minute ago—the terrible realization of what has happened dawns on him.

A MIND-blowing scene is being acted in front of the great wall. Crazy torches cast creepy shadows across Dwan's face. She wears a garland of flowers on her brow. Women's hands force her mouth open and tilt her head back. She offers no resistance as a drugged potion is poured down her throat from a shell. She is kneeling on the same bamboo platform the native maiden was seen on this afternoon. Everything is decorated with flowers. The platform is being lifted by the women.

Dwan wears that same fantastical gown of feathers and brightly dyed thin leathers. The feeling is joyous—a happy bride escorted by her maids.

The chanting women carry Dwan toward the area in front of those giant closed gates. Ahead of her the drums are beating. Torches and fires flicker on the wonderfully painted torsos of dancing warriors and Ju-Ju men.

The moon rises over the jungle. Ethereal light filters through the leaves that are just a little bit different from any you have ever seen.

There is activity on the great wall. Men are up on a ledge from which the gates are operated. They pour bamboo buckets of hot oil onto the bolt, lubricating it, tugging and straining to pull it back from the huge wooden rings fixed to the gate sections. It is sliding now.

Dwan is being borne up as the gates swing open inward. A flood of moonlight shines down on her. The chanting and dancing increase in fervor as Dwan is carried through the gates. Now for the first time we see what is on the other side of the great wall: Jungle. But in front of the foliage a stone pedestal rises perhaps fifty feet high. The women put down the bamboo carrier at its base. At the merest urging of bridesmaids' hands, Dwan rises to her feet. Whatever that drug was they gave her, the beautiful California girl is really out of it—dreamy, vacant-eyed, compliant. The women escort her up the steps. Glimpses of primitive carvings are on the stone.

Dozens of natives, eager as owls, climb ropes and ladders to the top of the wall on the inner side. Dwan is escorted to the top of the pedestal. Her arms are outstretched and tied, but not with cruelty. It is purely symbolic. Her bonds are merely garlands of flowers. The handmaidens race down the steps, having left the bride on the altar.

An enormous horn has been put on top of the wall and aimed out over the jungle. It is made of skin stretched over a bamboo frame. Ten natives hurry into place at the horn's ten mouthpieces. They glow. A hellish, apelike roar blows out over the jungle. Below the gates are already swinging shut as the last of the bridesmaids hurries back through. They bear the empty bamboo platform Dwan was borne out on. The huge bolt is being pushed back into place.

On the beach, just about the whole crew of the ship is landing this side of the looming wall in a small flotilla of launches and barges and lifeboats. Moonlight glints off all kinds of equipment as powerful battery lights cut toward the jungle and fog. The terrible chant and echoing blasts of the great horn are heard from inland.

The Chant: Kong! Kong! Kong!

Everybody freezes for an instant. Prescott and

Boan, the latter with a radio set slung over his shoulder, jump from the bow of the first boat and sprint ahead into the jungle along the wall.

Just about the whole tribe is arranged on top of the wall. A universal voice echoes . . . "Kong! Kong! Kong!"

Dwan atop the pedestal barely hears it. Whatever the drug was they gave her, it has really sent her on some kind of trip.

The jungle is moving. Something is coming. A pair of enormous eyes are rushing through the foliage. These eyes purely are not human. They see things with a different color perception. There is distortion around the edges. The ears are hearing with some kind of sound distortion, too. We can hear the creature's great breathing, the distorted approaching chant from the wall. The ground trembles. Trees crash to the ground. They are being pushed aside like blades of grass.

The natives atop the wall see and hear this amazing stuff . . . Their frenzy becomes indescribable. The "Kong . . . Kong . . . Kong!!!" thing is coming so fast and overlapping from their throats it is one continuous cry.

Of course, the approaching thing is Kong himself. He crashes on through the moonlit jungle faster and faster. Trees are smashed left and right. He reaches the pedestal. He stops. He looks down. Dead ahead is the wall. The natives are on top, shimmery and distorted at the edges. There is another long, tremendous cry . . . "Kongggggggg!" Kong looks down at Dwan, as at the bullseye of the target. She is in a prismatic halo. The whiteness of her face and limbs is effulgent. It seems to shine. Kong's breathing pauses. Dwan can discern little more than a great shape above her occluding the moon.

Kong exhales his held breath. The hurricane of his breath ruffles Dwan's hair. Kong's paw descends. *The scale of it!* The paw and arm move to Dwan. The huge but mobile fingers wrap around her, lift her up. Dwan's eyes finally focus and see. What they see is just a flash of the most fearful ape face in the whole world. Dwan shuts her eyes hard in disbelief and opens them again. It is not a bad dream. It is real. She just shrieks. Kong holds her about ten feet away from his face in the giant paw. She is still shrieking. Curiously the shrieking doesn't seem to displease Kong. Perhaps his ears are not sensitive to the piercing higher frequencies being emitted by this terrified Californian. He brings her closer to him. Mercifully, Dwan faints.

The ecstatic natives are streaming down the side of the wall to celebrate the placation of their Scourging Beast with the usual ritual.

The advance guard of the rescue party has reached the scene. Prescott and Boan are on their knees by the wall in the same area from which the expedition viewed the natives earlier today. Prescott is gazing through night glasses as Boan is poised with radio. Prescott lowers his glasses with a cold, haggard expression. He speaks into the radio microphone.

Prescott: We're too late. She's outside the gates. Set off the show!

Wilson and the others are some distance behind, getting Prescott's message over his radio. Wilson shouts back to those behind.

Wilson: Fourth of July!

Wilson aims a flare pistol up and fires.

The area in front of the gates is bathed in a flickery red glare. Stillness and silence falls over the cavorting celebrants, every head swivels up.

A red magnesium flare hangs on its little parachute. There are pops and half a dozen more

flares blossom overhead, green and red and purest dazzling white.

The natives gape, and then from the jungle along the wall there is a fusillade of gunfire in the air, and Americans yelling like it was the last round-up, and the natives come to life and you never saw a wild party bust up so fast.

As natives flee into the bush, wailing and howling in fear, Prescott and Boan are already sprinting down into the area and climbing up to that ledge from which the bolt is operated.

They are just up there, trying in vain to get the bolt moving, when the vanguard of the crew and riggers comes streaming down with guns and equipment and super-bright battery lights.

Prescott: Help us, someone!!

Wilson shouts at a couple of guys nearest him.

Wilson: Get up there, help them on the bolt! . . . Carnahan, cover the gates!

Carnahan: Aye, aye—Weapons into position! Lay your dynamite, Perko! Timmons, you ready on the lights?

Joe and Timmons and people move into position, following the drill which must have been laid down on the trip ashore. Smooth and efficient. Lights trained on gate. Joe Perko sets prepared blasting charges, runs back with fuses wired to detonators. About fifteen other crewmen and riggers range themselves in a semicircle back of Joe and his detonators, assorted rifles and pistols and shotguns all trained on the gate. Prescott yells down as the bolt comes back.

Prescott: If he's still out there, the lights will hold him back! *Don't shoot!*

The great gates swing inward. Lights blaze through. The stone pedestal and the jungle beyond. No sign of Dwan. Prescott has already slid down from the ledge. He is running out ahead of the others. His flashlight stabs up at the top of the stepped pedestal as Wilson appears behind him.

Prescott: He's taken her.

Wilson: Someone's taken her.

Prescott: Who in hell do you think went through there? Some guy in an ape suit?

Prescott swings his light on the great swath

through the rain forest. Trees are flattened left and right. Wilson stares at the evidence. He walks slowly ahead. Then he stumbles. With a little yell he falls forward out of the glaring lights. There are quick reactions as lights and weapons swing all whichways. Prescott runs up. Then his light finds Wilson. The exec is picking himself up, brushing off mud in a depression he tripped into.

Wilson: It's okay, I just fell into this damn hole.

Prescott: No, you didn't.

Wilson: Whattaya mean I didn't? Look at me!

Prescott: You're not in a hole—that's a footprint.

Nobody says a word. The men's faces say everything.

IT IS late that night in the moonlit jungle. A party of six slogs up the hillside, following another swath of knocked-down trees. Prescott and Carnahan, Boan, Joe, Timmons and Garcia. They are armed, carry heavy backpacks and lights. Prescott and Carnahan are at the front of the file. Carnahan is talking into the microphone of the radio strapped on back of Boan, who is tramping alongside him.

Carnahan: I reckon we've done a little over two miles—still no sign of her at all. Of course that's better than spotting blood or—uh—remains.

The message is received by Wilson who has set up

his command post on the beach. His comfort is in marked contrast to the guys in the jungle. Canopy tent, cots and camp furniture. Big distant generator providing juice for lights. Small refrigerator, etc. Floodlights watch the edge of the jungle where a couple of armed sailors patrol the perimeter of this tiny foothold of civilization. Captain Ross lounges with a drink, listening to Wilson and answering voices from a radio speaker. A Chinese cook from the ship takes a wok of small egg roll tidbits off a brazier and passes them to Captain Ross as Wilson is talking into the microphone.

Wilson: Yeh—unless it means he's gobbled her down completely.

Wilson pops an egg roll into his mouth as Prescott in the jungle has heard that remark from the speaker. He grabs the microphone to answer sharply.

Prescott: I told you—most jungle apes eat only fruit.

Wilson: Most jungle apes don't leave a size ninety footprint, either.

Behind them Garcia trips and slides downhill with a yell.

Garcia: Madre mia! How in hell far we goin' to-night??

Carnahan takes back the mike.

Carnahan: The guys have had it. I'm gonna pitch camp at the first level ground.

Prescott: You damn old ladies! We're just getting our second wind!

Wilson: Say again, Jack? You mean you're still not past the area where he might have dropped her out of panic?

Prescott hesitates, then takes the microphone.

Prescott: I guess you're right. It makes sense to stop until dawn.

Wilson: Okay, Carnahan, pitch camp. You know the drill?

Carnahan: Yessir. We plant seismic charges for mapping purposes and fire a rocket so the ship can plot our position.

Wilson: Correct.

Carnahan: Say, there'll be someone on the radar all night, won't there?

Wilson: It's a promise. Any large furry blips spotted moving in your direction, you will know. Sweet dreams and out.

Wilson hangs up the microphone and turns the radio off. Thoughtfully he dips another egg roll tidbit into mustard and sweet sauce and pops it into his mouth.

Wilson: That footprint I fell into measures out at six feet, four inches. If it's for real, how *high* would that make him?

Captain Ross makes a footprint of his own in the sand and eyes it. He calculates.

Capt. Ross: Multiply by around eight, I'd guess.

Wilson ponders and looks up in the air as if at a fifty-foot-high creature. He whistles softly. Captain Ross grins.

Capt. Ross: He'd make a helluva commercial, wouldn't he?

Wilson: Commercial?

Capt. Ross: You know: The battles we at Petrox fight to fill your gas tank, blah, blah, blah.

Ross sips his gin and laughs. There is no laugh from Fred Wilson. The seed of a thought has been planted in the executive's brain. He looks like Cortes on the peak in Darien.

Miles away the jungle party is pitching camp for the night. They are setting up a perimeter with watch-fires and booby traps and such. Prescott and Carnahan are erecting a lightweight screened shelter-tent which they will share. Obviously something is gnawing at Carnahan's mind. He voices it in a sudden blow.

Carnahan: If he's not gonna eat her, why did he take her?

Prescott: Apes are highly territorial. He's carrying her to his turf.

Carnahan: What for?

Prescott: I'm as ignorant as you are! Stop bugging me with so many dumb questions!

The men's eyes meet for an instant. Prescott quickly averts his, but the look in them and the

tone of that outburst have answered Carnahan's questions. Prescott's face is suddenly bathed in sweat as he bends over, slams down the tent pegs—just slams them into the earth.

MORNING comes. The sun has just risen. There are flowers all around as splendid as the Garden of Eden. In a far part of the jungle Dwan sleeps fitfully on the ground. She lies supine, an arm tossed over her eyes. She stirs. Her expression suggests some not unpleasant dream. She flops her arm off her face and opens her eyes. They almost pop out of her head with utter disbelief, as she sees Kong's face over her, looking down. There was just that subliminal moonlit flash of it before. This is the first time it is really seen. It is terrifying! Now Kong parts his lips slightly, revealing awesome teeth! Dwan is too terrified to make a sound.

She shuts her eyes and rolls over as if still asleep.

She starts to crawl away very slowly and unobtrusively on her elbows and knees. Whammo! Suddenly from nowhere a cage comes down over her. What seems a cage is actually Kong's fingers. The beast is on his haunches. Dwan screams. Slowly, experimentally, he lifts the cage of arched, cupped fingers from over his captive. Dwan darts away. She must have covered all of five feet before Kong's cage fingers pounce on her again. On her knees she shrinks and trembles. With a tremendous effort, she puts her head out through the hairy bars and looks up. Kong is looking down at her in a terribly serious way. God knows he is still frightening, but you would almost swear that this animal was thinking. He plainly realizes in some mysterious way this girl is different from the others who had been offered him before. The strangeness of it perplexes the animal enormously. He moves his free arm up into the air and suddenly beats his chest, letting out a stupendous roar.

Dwan pulls her head back in and, understandably, screams. The tumult stops. Again the cage-paw is lifted. He straightens out a forefinger and touches her. Dwan takes a step backward. It touches her again. She turns to run and immediately falls into the palm of Kong's other paw, which he has placed flat, right behind her. Dwan, before she knows it, is being lifted up into the air

on that hairy living platform. She sways, puts her head out and looks down over the edge of the receding ground. She desperately holds on to the soft black hairs of the paw and turns and yells toward Kong.

Dwan: I can't stand heights!

Kong ceases his motion abruptly. Dwan is flabbergasted. While it seems impossible for Kong to respond to her plea, she keeps on trying.

Dwan: Honest to God, I can't! When I was ten years old and taken up the Empire State Building, I threw up in the elevator.

It is highly unlikely that any of his previous brides spoke to him in this fashion. Kong studies this curious noisy blonde briefly at arm's length. Then he starts to bring her in closer for a better look. His eyes feast on her; the wonderful gleaming whiteness of the girl in the middle of his field of vision, those concentric halos of astigmatism around her. Her little mouth opens in another scream, but again, to Kong's ears it seems strangely melodious. By now he is holding her about two feet away from his face. Dwan is certain that her final moment is at hand. Understandably, Dwan cannot take the tension. She snaps. She springs up to the front of the paw, yelling inco-

herently and flailing wildly at Kong's face, punching around the nose region with both fists, and yelling hysterically.

Dwan: You chauvinist pig ape. What are you waiting for? If you're gonna eat me, EAT ME!

The animal fails to respond.

Dwan: EAT ME!!

She slams him again. The negligible blows seem to fascinate Kong rather than anger him. Dwan winds up for another wallop, and then suddenly freezes in utter horror at what she has been doing. She shrinks backward and drops to her knees and gasps.

Dwan: I didn't mean that. I swear I didn't. Sometimes I get too physical. It's a sign of insecurity, you know? Like when you knock over trees?

Her tones become even softer. She almost purrs at him.

Dawn: Nice ape—nice monkey—nice monkey—oh, such a nice, sweet, nice sweeeeet monkey—We're going to be friends—I'm a Libra—what sign are you? Don't tell me—you're an

Aries! Of course you are—I knew it! Oh, how wonderful. How neat.

She starts to laugh, rippling about 110 percent hysterical. Kong gazes at her. His features twitch slightly, again exposing great fanglike teeth. The sight unhinges her again. Her laughter changes without a break into screaming. Then, suddenly she is holding on tight as the paw is being lowered fast, her stomach rising like she was on a roller coaster. The paw she is resting on is on the ground now. Kong is gazing down at her in that befuddled way. Motionless. Dwan crawls backward to the edge of the hairy platform, to the motionless fingers . . . always looking up at the downgazing eyes of the beast . . . barely able to believe that he is making no move to stop her. She reaches the edge. A pause. Then quickly, sort of faking it to appear she is slipping, she rolls down off Kong's paw to the jungle floor. She lies there, free, breathing heavily as again she looks upward. Kong is simply watching her as a child might watch a new wind-up toy he has been given. He is uncertain what its action will be when it is released on the carpet. He watches Dwan rise to her knees, then to her feet. She now starts to move. Very slowly and deliberately she backs away . . . away from the extended fingers of the grounded paw which do not move at all.

She takes one more creeping step backward and then ZOWIE!! She is whirling and off her blocks like an Olympic sprinter . . . running at top speed, zig-zagging . . . when suddenly there is a roar and a great dark shadow covers her. Zagging out of it, Dwan trips over a vine and goes sprawling headlong down a short embankment into a pool of stagnant rainwater. Dwan sits up, all muddy and gasping. It appears the attempted escape has piqued the ape greatly. Indicating vividly what will happen to her if she makes up a dumb move again, Kong roars and slams his fist into the ground next to her. It is like an earthquake.

Dwan: HELLLLLLLL!

The sound of her cry doesn't carry to the spectacular terrain where the exhausted search party is taking a break. Carnahan is carefully viewing his wrist chronometer. He fires a flare. It shoots up through the perpetual cloud cover. Aboard the *Petrox Explorer*, a waiting sailor gets a beat on it as it bursts into a brilliant green flare.

At the same moment, the radar operator in the wheelhouse has his eyes glued on the screen. He is watching the same phenomenon seen before, the blip of some moving shape which looms on

Skull Island. He reaches for his radio telephone to report to Wilson.

Below deck Bagley is in a small cabin laboratory jammed with fascinating gadgets. He is looking through the eyepiece of some analyzer at sticky droplets of an oil-like liquid filtering down through a tube. He watches for a moment. Then he straightens up and turns the gizmo off. He opens a drawer and gets out a bottle of bourbon and takes a gulp. He flicks on an intercom and orders a shore boat.

On the beach, Fred Wilson continues to enjoy the good life. The Chinese cook is giving him a massage as Wilson reads the radio report from the ship to the guys in the jungle.

Wilson: Radar reports they had him on the screen for about thirty seconds, 3.6 kilometers west of your flare . . . he was reported moving in a random manner.

Prescott and Carnahan squat by the radio set listening to Wilson continue from the speaker. Carnahan looks a trifle nervous.

Carnahan: You sure of that, huh? He wasn't moving in our direction?

Wilson: Affirmative. Random. Like in a circle.

As ever, optimistic Jack takes a more favorable view.

Prescott: Maybe he's lost her. She got away—he's searching for her. Let's get going.

Wilson picks that up over his radio and is displeased.

Wilson: Wait a minute. Carnahan, have you set seismic charges at this stop?

Carnahan: They're setting 'em now, sir.

Wilson: Don't move until it's finished. That's an order.

Prescott: Are you nuts? There's a girl out there who might be running for her life from a gigantic crazy ape!

Wilson: I know how you feel, Jack. I feel the same. But there's a national energy crisis which demands that we all rise above our selfish private emotions.

With his usual grin, Wilson flicks his radio off.

Prescott: You hypocrite! All you're thinking about is your stock options and your—

Carnahan reaches out and slaps a hand over the microphone.

Carnahan: Save your wind, Professor—he signed off.

Wilson is the boss and Prescott knows it. All he can do is whirl and shout across to where Joe and Boan are boring a hole in the ground with a post-hole digger.

Prescott: Hurry it up!

Boan laughs and shouts back.

Boan: Ain't bustin' mah black back fo' no white comp'ny, white massah!

Prescott: Okay, take your time! Who gives a damn that radar has the ape headed our way!

It takes about one second for that to sink in. The guys all hurry like there's no tomorrow. As the guys start working with super haste, Dwan is whimpering as Kong carries her somewhere fast. The hurrying ape's natural arm motion swings her so that the earth and heaven become a revolv-

ing blur. A rushing sound rises and Dwan suddenly feels water pouring over her. Kong is holding Dwan under a terrific crystal waterfall. She does not realize it at first, but he is not attempting to drown her. He turns her this way and that, washing off the mud. When this is done, he lifts her and drops her into the jungle stream just above the lip of the falls. Whoooooopsie! Over she glides, maybe twenty feet or thereabouts down the face of the silvery falls. With a splash she hits the lagoon below and goes under in a firmament of bright bubbles. Sudden dark paws descend around her. She cannot see Kong's serious face reflected on the surface above her. Then she feels herself being lifted from the water, fished out in Kong's cupped paws. He parts his fingers slightly, letting the liquid run out. Dwan gasps and sputters. Kong sees her, cupped there, the whiteness in the center of shimmery rainbow rings of color and wetness. Suddenly his cheeks expand like a giant bellows. Whoosh! He is blowing on Dwan. Dwan is stunned by the thoughtfulness of this outsized creature as she realizes she is kneeling under the ultimate hair and dress dryer. She is on her knees, eyes shut, head bent forward. Her hair streams behind. Her attitude is drowsy, stupefied. Suddenly Kong stops the blowing number. He has turned his head. He sniffs the air. He scents something.

BAGLEY disembarks from his shore launch and walks up to Wilson's command post on the beach. His gait is unsteady. The fact is, Roy Bagley is a little drunk. He reaches Wilson and gives the exec a lopsided smile.

Bagley: Well, I finished testing the samples from that pool. It'll be real great oil.

The grin that appears on Wilson's face is a gorgeous thing to see.

Wilson: Fred Wilson is crazy, is he? Oh, boy! Wait till those fancy pants in New York get the word on this one—wait till I turn the screws on them . . .

Wilson stops suddenly, eyeing Bagley. The geologist has hauled out his flat pint of bourbon and is taking a slug.

Bagley: Like I said, it will be great oil—when Ma Nature is done cooking it a little longer. Bit more aging.

Wilson: Like how much?

Bagley: Hell, hardly a tick of the clock as geological time goes. Say, ten thousand years. Till then, you'd get better mileage filling up your Cadillac from a horse trough.

Wilson: Oh, my God.

He sits down. His movement is very slow. In fact, you would think he had just been dropped on his head from an airplane. He closes his eyes, and has a vision. He sees himself working as a boxboy at the nearest Safeway.

Bagley: I hate to kick a fella when he's dead, but I did tell you—you should not have radioed New York you were bringing in the big one.

Wilson's eyes open.

Wilson: The Big One. Hey! Who said I ain't gonna?

Wilson wheels to his radio and picks up the mike. He barks into it.

Wilson: Get me a clear channel to the company at Surabaya—I got to arrange an air drop right away.

In the interior of the island, the party plods along. Joe jogs up alongside Carnahan, who is with Prescott in the lead.

Joe: Who gets the skin?

Carnahan: Gets what?

Joe: The monkey skin—it oughta be worth a fortune for stuffing. We been talkin' it over and we think it oughta be equal shares for all us hunters.

Prescott: We're not hunters, Joe—we're trying to rescue a girl. I'll give you two seconds to get out of range before I punch you in the nose.

Prescott means it. Joe goes on back as Prescott shakes his head. They come around a shoulder of rocks. Ahead of them is a ravine. It is very deep, but not wide. A chasm of no more than seventy-five feet across, bridged by a huge log, the trunk of a fallen tree. Everyone stops. Prescott walks up and tries the log with his foot. It seems secure.

Joe: You go first, Jack.

Prescott poises himself and then heads across the log. He does it swiftly and surely. He jumps off the far end where the tree bridge is wedged into an earth embankment. He holds on to protruding roots there and turns and calls back.

Prescott: Solid as a rock!

Carnahan: Okay, single file—after me!

Carnahan and the men start across. They are all out there on the log when suddenly they freeze with such expressions as are difficult to put into words. Prescott looks back at them from the far side.

Prescott: Come on! What's the matter??

There is a terrific roar—as Kong looms up on the far side. Dwan is in his hand. He comes closer, but Prescott, against the bank, doesn't see him. Kong surveys the frozen men on the log curiously.

Garcia: Holy Joseph and Mary!

In a reflex of terror, Garcia swings his carbine wildly up and fires. Kong is not hurt. He bares his teeth and roars. Dwan screams as she is swished through the air and deposited in a tree top. Prescott scrambles up for a look over the edge of the embankment. He catches one flash of Kong

wheeling back and down, and then dives headlong for those roots. Kong emits another roar and bends to the edge of the ravine with his dangling arms. The men on the log are paralyzed with terror as Kong's great paws close around the end of it. He rubs his black mitts back and forth, making the thing rotate. They dance and scream and fight for balance. Boan manages to jump backwards and catches a root on the safe side of the ravine as Carnahan and Joe and Timmons are dislodged one by one and plummet, screaming, hundreds of feet down to their green deaths in the chasm. Kong lets out another roar. Prescott slides and swings backward into an overhung cave just as Kong stomps his foot on the ground above. Again. Earthquake. The whole lip of the embankment crumbles, taking Garcia down under thousands of tons of earth and rock. Kong is triumphant. He drums his chest. He roars. He whirls and retrieves Dwan from the tree top and lumbers fast away. In the cave, Prescott is ashen. He hears the sounds of Kong's retreat. He pushes away debris and emerges from the cave mouth. The bridging tree has gone down with everything else. He sees Boan across the ravine, his huge trembling body pressed into the earth like he wants to become a part of it.

Prescott: Try to make it home. Tell Wilson I went on.

There is no response from Boan. But he must have heard. As Prescott starts climbing up, the cargo plane Wilson radioed for has just arrived. It flies over the *Petrox Explorer* at low altitude. Suddenly a bunch of steel drums come out of the plane. They are painted bright yellow, each with a flotation collar. Vivid parachutes blossom, the big containers float down. On the beach command post Bagley is getting an announcement.

Bagley: Air drop done. On target.

Wilson: Terrific.

The two big bulldozers from the foredeck of the *Explorer* are being unloaded. They are throwing up sand and water as they thrash up onto solid sand. Wilson lets go at them with a bull horn, full volume.

Wilson: Move it! Get that equipment up the wall and working.

Bagley is looking at him.

Wilson: You think I'm loco.

Bagley: You said it, Fred. Not me.

Wilson: So what the hell if we had found oil—we

just end up pooling it with the Texaco mob anyway. But not this one, chum. Kong is all Petrox—a Fred S. Wilson exclusive.

Bagley: You sure that's gonna ring the bell? You promise oil and bring back a monkey?

Wilson: Remember the old Exxon ad campaign—"Put a tiger in your tank"? It was a smash success, sold zillions—with just a damn paper tiger going for it.

Wilson chuckles with satisfaction and picks up the radio mike. He speaks into it.

Wilson: Beach Green to Carnahan—return to base immediately for regrouping. Do nothing that might endanger Kong—repeat, nothing. Acknowledge.

There is just a staticky hum from the speaker.

Wilson: Carnahan. Do you read me?

Under a weird low sun seen reddish through the mist, Prescott slips, dirty with sweat and dust. He is pushing on through the exotic highland foliage. He slows down, panting, as he spots part of a great ape footprint. It sends him pushing on with even greater determination.

Not far away, Kong stares down at Dwan as she sits in a high glade. Around her are spires of boulders in many colors. They are great looking. The girl and beast stare at each other.

Dwan: Come on, man, forget about me—this thing is just not going to be, don't you see? We're mismatched—

Hopefully she pantomimes her meaning, contrasting the hugeness of him and the tininess of her. It has little effect.

BEHIND the gates at the Great Wall, there is much noise and activity. The bulldozers are digging an enormous pit below the closed gates. Crewmen are dragging up nets, while nearby welders are making some kind of steel frame. Screeching chain saws hack branches off trees in the background. Over this feverish activity Wilson is on top of the wall with a coil of wire. He throws one end down.

Wilson: Stretch it out. Hook it up.

Captain Ross climbs up a ladder near Wilson. His face is tight.

Capt. Ross: There is still no contact with Carnahan.

Wilson: So their radio's on the blink. Don't sweat it.

Capt. Ross: I want to take a search party.

Wilson: Sorry, Captain, there's not a man I can spare.

Capt. Ross: There are six guys cut off in the jungle and you're building monkey traps. Hell, Wilson, you're playing with their lives!

Wilson: Whatcha think I'm betting of my own?

Their eyes meet. It is Ross who blinks and starts down the ladder. Suddenly Wilson sees something out beyond the wall. It is Boan. He is exhausted and stumbling from the jungle.

Wilson: Where's the others?

Boan stops and draws a hand across his throat. Wilson is almost shocked out of his shoes. He hauls a flask out of his hip pocket and takes a drink. Meanwhile, Kong and Dwan make their way through dark sylvan shadows in a high craggy area. It is night now. Dwan is limp in the great

paw, not kicking or making noise, just looking up into the huge, moist eyes. Prescott struggles upward over very similar terrain. He stumbles in near darkness, curses, but keeps going. Kong and Dwan come up over a rise and Kong sees the full moon. It has just risen into his view over the curtain of mist that surrounds this Skull Island. Kong stops. He gazes at it. Then he slowly looks down at Dwan and starts emitting a sound quite unlike any we have heard from him before. It is a low, vibrant, rumbling crooning from deep down inside him. His eyes seem to glow with lambent interior fire. Dwan looks into them and hears that crooning. On the deepest level it both terrifies and fascinates her. Kong's eyes sweep up to a summit of crags. Silhouetted against the moon are a cluster of rocky spires. They are grouped together like a cardboard cut-out of Manhattan skyscrapers. The silver-blue moon. The velvet sky. Seeing this place, Kong's crooning becomes more intense. He moves into a high glade amidst those crags. The floor is of moss, strewn with orchids and even rarer blossoms. Wisps of mist hang sensuously. Holding Dwan in one paw, with the other he starts stroking the back of her head with astonishing delicacy, back and forth. Dwan begins to tremble uncontrollably. The indomitable Jack Prescott is getting close to this as he rests a moment. Then he hears something. It is that crooning of Kong's, but so low and distant that it is

barely perceptible, perhaps an auditory illusion. Prescott lifts his head and catches a glimpse of that same unforgettable cluster of spires. He presses forward.

Dwan cannot pull her eyes from Kong's hypnotic gaze. She continues trembling. She is not in control of her muscles. The paw holding her gently turns and opens. Now she is kneeling on a platform in the air. Kong's face is ferocious, but the light of his enormous eyes is soft. Dwan is kneeling there, as ape fingers pluck away a piece of her robe. Another piece of her robe. Her mouth opens in a "nooo!", but she cannot make any sound. The gentleness and precision of the ape's actions are extraordinary.

Kong's lips part. Another croon. Dwan is rolled off the ape's palm and into the moss. With a soft moan, she flops her face to the side and away from the thing over her. Her eyes change. She is seeing something unbelievable. In the middle distance, there is a snake in the moss. Its head is barely visible. Dwan's face is paralyzed as the snake comes closer. Now, for the first time, you see her and the snake together. You comprehend its scale. Enormous! The head is just striking down at her when the reptilian blur is intercepted by a swinging ape paw, and the other paw sweeps Dwan to safety. The snake hurls and hisses. It

curls up around Kong's arm in an effort to reach Dwan at the end of it. Kong roars and whirls, but keeps chopping at the snake head to keep it just barely back from getting his beloved. He finally manages to deposit Dwan in a crevice of rock. As he leaves her there and whirls again, the snake anchors its tail around a spire of rocks and with the energy of an express train, snaps a coil around Kong's neck. At that moment, Prescott comes over the rim of this high amphitheater and sees the primeval battle going on below. There is such roaring and hissing you think the sky must fall and the snake and Kong, locked in their struggle, rise and fall and roll together like one creature. The snake is not losing and keeps throwing coil after coil over the ape. Dwan, in the crevice, is agonized with the ape's agony. She cannot help it. Her eyes are wet with tears. The very earth shudders from the battle. Some rocks come falling around her. She shrinks back and looks up. Prescott is above her, looking down at the same instant. They see each other.

The serpent is now around Kong's legs and torso and arms all at once. It is almost a duplicate of that classic piece of statuary of Laocoön and the serpents. Prescott rips loose a mass of vines and drops them to Dwan some twenty feet below. She twines them around her lovely wrists and starts climbing up against the steep rock face as Prescott

pulls. The snake has Kong in really bad shape now. Suddenly the ape sees something through the tightening coils of death: Dwan now at the top of the glade and throwing herself into Prescott's arms.

Dwan: Oh, my God—Jack! Mere Jack!

There is such a roar from below that their heads spin. Kong has been given an enormous shot of adrenalin by the sight of Dwan in the arms of this Princeton fellow. Kong gets his paws together, manages to seize the repulsive reptile-head by both its jaws and literally rips it in half. Dwan and Prescott race down from the outer slope of the amphitheater and get into the edge of the rain forest.

Kong comes up over the rim, that pale semi-daylight moon in the mist above him. He lets out a roar. Dwan and Prescott make tracks through the rain forest. Kong is smashing aside trees. He is really moving. Dwan and Prescott break out of the trees and into the open. Almost immediately they are on the edge of a precipice. They jam on the brakes and cling together and look down. Dwan gives a somewhat crazy little laugh.

Prescott: You game to try it?

Dwan: Hell, yes—I took a silver in the high dive at the “Y”!

Dwan laughs again and faints dead away. Prescott catches her, holds her and looks back over his shoulder. Just one look at that great monster moving sends him, holding Dwan tightly, over the edge. The clinging figures recede down and down toward a turgid river, heaven knows how far below. At last there is a splash, but before the sound can reach up here it is lost in a roar. Kong looks down over the edge. His expression is one of absolute fury and frustration. After an instant of hesitation, he starts running.

A PUBLIC address speaker tied up in a tree by the wall is sounding off. The voice of the radio operator from the *Petrox Explorer* echoes through the night.

Radio Operator: Radar update—monkey plotted eighteen hundred yards west by northwest—heading zero eight niner—velocity two-two miles per hour, estimated monkey time to your position, five minutes or less.

The men at the wall are working in great haste. They are putting the finishing covering over a huge pit seen being excavated earlier. The covering is of cargo netting and tarpaulins, which are

being scattered with tree branches and dirt. One corner is open with the end of a ladder sticking up. Captain Ross comes running up and shouts.

Capt. Ross: Okay, everybody—clear out! Get down to the beach—CLEAR OUT!!!

No second invitation is needed.

The men are already running like hell, jumping aboard moving bulldozers which are clanking up along the wall toward the beach. Ross dashes onto that ladder sticking up from the pit and calls down through the open corner.

Capt. Ross: How you doing, Logan?

Down in the pit, those big yellow drums dropped from the airplane are ranged in a row in a gallery cut into the earth wall. They are in a jerry-built steel frame, pivoted at both ends so the whole bunch can be tipped forward simultaneously to dump the contents. Logan, a driller, is working at one end of the long frame with a welding torch. Instead of a regular welder's hood, he is wearing a gas mask. He yells back up.

Logan: Almost finished—one minute more!

Meanwhile, Wilson and Bagley are on top of the

wall, maybe a hundred feet along from the gates. They squat on their heels, watching Boan fiddling with a detonator box. The big black man is all scratched and battered from his jungle ordeal, but he is working hard. A wire from the box droops in a curve toward the covered pit. A little ruby ready-light glows "on" in the box.

Boan: Okay. It's hot now.

Wilson: You sure he'll be able to bust the gate-bolt out of that ring?

Boan, whose deep dark eyes have seen Kong, stares at Wilson. He just makes a sound that could be a laugh. Dwan and Prescott are stumbling and running through the jungle. They are following that swath in the trees made by Kong previously. They are wet, scratched, disheveled, out of breath utterly. Dwan trips over a vine, and falls heavily forward. She just lies there, her face in the earth.

Prescott: Get up.

Dwan: No way—I've had it—go on, Jack—Have a drink for me at the Brown Derby—

A bizarre sound reaches their ears. It is the radio operator's voice from the P.A. speaker.

Radio Operator's Voice: Radar update—monkey at nine hundred yards—niner zero zero and he is *moving!*

As the echo of that dies, from behind comes a distant but familiar roar. Prescott yanks Dwan to her knees. She starts to topple again. He picks her up and throws her over his shoulder and goes staggering forward. Meanwhile, Logan is just finishing in the underground pit. He chucks away his welding gear. He runs along a row of drums in that frame and knocks off loose lids, sending them banging to the earthen floor. Each is filled with some clear liquid. He scrambles up the ladder. He emerges from the pit, barely pausing to flip the netting over the corner aperture before he is racing off toward the beach. Captain Ross is rapidly climbing the ladder toward where Wilson is perched over the detonator. Kong's roar reaches them. Prescott with Dwan in his arm lurch up and stop. He looks up and calls a single near-breathless syllable.

Prescott: Help!

Wilson and Bagley on top of the wall see them.

Wilson: It's them! Open the gate!

Bagley and Boan come sliding down vine ropes

from the top of the wall to the bolt ledge and are joined by Captain Ross climbing from the ladder below. They hurl their weight at the bolt. They get it sliding. Prescott on the outside is dwarfed by the gates. He holds Dwan and throws his own weight at the enormous portals. One starts to swing inward. Prescott lurches through. He stops and pushes back with might and main to stop its swinging, to get it going closed again. Captain Ross comes sliding down to help him. It moves the other way and shuts. Boan and Bagley, on the ledge, force the bolt in again. They stop with it only halfway home, in the first great wooden ring. Prescott sees that and screams up at them.

Prescott: He'll smash that! Get it all the way!

Prescott takes a few staggering steps to the left and drops Dwan. Captain Ross grabs them both and hauls them away from the area in front of the gates into comparative darkness. Wilson is atop the wall, ready at the detonator box.

He hears the approaching crashing and roaring. We see Wilson's face, smitten with sudden disbelief as he at last sees his company mascot. Kong is looking at the frozen executive right in the bullseye center of his distorted shimmery vision. There is a terrific roar. Wilson seems to be moving very rapidly as Kong lurches toward him and

then at the very last instant Wilson vanishes. Wilson snatches the detonator with one hand, and with the other grabs hold of a rope which extends down. He jumps over and slides down an agonizing, skin-burning ten feet or so and manages to stop his fall. He swings there and looks up. Kong's enormous paw sweeps along the top of the wall and swipes the empty air Wilson just vacated. Kong starts hurling himself against the outside wall. Everything shudders. Pieces fly off. The shock sends Wilson swinging out like a pendulum. Now Kong has moved along slightly and is hurling himself at the gates. More debris. Splintering sounds. The loops that hold the bolt start to come apart. Captain Ross screams up at Wilson who is frozen on the rope.

Capt. Ross: Blow it, damn you! *Dump the chloroform!*

AS in a dream, Wilson pushes down the handle of the detonator box he still clutches.

There is a low thud in the pit as the entire frame of drums tops forward. About a thousand gallons of pure chloroform pour out, the volatile fumes swirling up instantly.

Kong hits the gates again with all his weight. The single ring holding the bolt gives way and he hurtles through amidst flying debris—Kong is just about to regain his balance when he reaches the covered pit. He crashes through into it.

We see the gaping faces—watching. Wilson, Bag-

ley, Ross, Prescott. There is more roaring and thrashing.

Kong's head and shoulders rise from the pit amidst those swirling fumes of anesthetic. His bellow sounds choked. His arms rise and drop again. Kong falls back out of sight. Then the only sound is a muddy splashing, as he beats feebly around in the chloroform puddles under him. Just a splashing.

A surprising thing takes place. The natives are coming out of the bush on all sides, from where you had no idea they were hidden.

As if at a signal, they all fall to their knees and touch their foreheads to the ground, and let out a long, dreadful wail.

A supertanker cuts through the ocean. It is fantastic. It looks about a mile long. In actual fact, its displacement is 476,292 gross tons. Its length, 1,243 feet.

There are a few little figures seen on deck. They look like toys. We see the familiar Petrox house flag fluttering in the wind.

Inside an enormous dark cavern of steel—with a mix of sounds. There is water rushing along hull

plates, throb of ship's engines, roaring air blowers. This is one of the supertanker's oil storage tanks, big enough to hold Notre Dame Cathedral. It is empty and scoured out.

Way up high is an open grillwork through which we can see blue sky. Down and down, we follow a slanted beam of sunlight. Kong is a great dark shape lying on his back on the vibrating floorplates, his eyes fixed on that patch of blue sky way up there.

Four sailors walk forward along the deck, dwarfed by the size of it. Probably they are Pakistani or Panamanian, as are most of the crewmen of these ships. They carry a huge basket of bananas and other fruits. They reach the edge of open grillwork which has been welded into place over an opening cut in the deck, and put down their baskets. They kneel and peer down.

The men's shadow falls over Kong's eyes. It appears to aggravate him. Then a movement. His clenched paw rises about ten feet and slams down on the floorplates. Again! It booms and rings and echoes like the hammers of hell! Those sailors hastily dump their fruit through the grill and run.

Up above, on the terrace of a mid-level deck where the officers' and owners' posh suites are

located, Dwan and Prescott are staring down this way as Kong's fist resounds with another muffled boom.

Dwan and Prescott turn their attention back to a backgammon board between them.

Dwan finishes a can of beer and pops open another one. Prescott shakes his dice. Their faces are somber, guarded—you get the feeling there is a secret compact between them not to speak or even think of what is below deck. Fred Wilson walks up, his mood as good as can be. He hands Dwan a telex sheet.

Wilson: Congratulations.

A little blank, she takes the sheet and starts to read it. She rises. Her whole bearing and demeanor undergoes a subtle change. Reading the sheet, she walks a little way along the deck in a regal manner, then turns and eyes Prescott.

Dwan: Do I look different?

Prescott: Yes. You shine.

Dwan: That's right. I'm a star.

Prescott looks questioningly at Wilson.

Wilson: It's all set, Jack. We open in Shea Stadium, backed by The Beach Boys for sure and *probably* Nureyev and Fonteyn.

There is a short derisive laugh from Prescott.

Wilson: I'm not kidding—a Beauty and the Beast bit, they flipped over the idea. If we can land Balanchine to choreograph, it's a deal.

Prescott: Monstrous.

Wilson: Kong-wise, that's a good word for it. Any chance of you two getting married?

Dwan smiles at Jack.

Dwan: This is so sudden.

Wilson: I mean at Shea, opening night. You do it out there around second base, we figure some way of Kong giving away the bride. (*He sees Prescott's face.*) Okay, just asking. Marriage is probably an old-fashioned image anyway.

Dwan: I don't necessarily agree. Do you, Jack?

There is a sudden echoing clang from down there. Dwan's expression changes. She crumples the telex violently.

Dwan: After all these years of rising above personal catastrophes, I'm gonna wind up at last with a shrink. How can I ascend to stardom on the back of someone stolen off a gorgeous island and shut up in a lousy *oil* tank?

Wilson: He's not "someone." It's an animal. A beast.

Dwan: Fred! He risked his life to save me from a huge serpent!

Wilson: Before you cry a lot, you oughta ask the natives on that island what *they* thought of losing Kong.

Prescott: Actually, they'll miss Kong a lot.

Wilson: Yeah—like leprosy.

Prescott: You're dead wrong. He was the mystery and terror of their lives—and the magic. In a year that will be an island of burnt-out drunks. When we took Kong, we kidnapped their God.

That was impressive. Dwan shudders. Her tone is hushed.

Dwan: What a scary thought. It's like there's a *curse* on us—

Wilson turns on Prescott.

Wilson: Damn it, I've had *enough* of you trying to confuse this girl's mind. It's her big chance, and yours, too. There are stars at Princeton just like in Hollywood, Jack. You want out? You want me to cable Harvard and Yale and get Kong another keeper?

Prescott: Shea Stadium. Rock bands. It's a grotesque farce!

Wilson: Your move, Professor—just say the word and your contract is torn up. *Now!*

Dwan's eyes look at Prescott in silence. They appeal to him. Prescott picks up his Bloody Mary or whatever from beside the backgammon board and drinks. Prescott drinks—but he does not say the word.

Wilson: See ya in Shea Stadium.

Wilson is gone. He knows when he has won. As the supertanker plows along that night, Dwan and Prescott walk on a high outside deck. He is puffing on a cigarette and frowning intensely. Suddenly he stops, throws down the butt and looks at Dwan. In the moonlight she is terrific.

Prescott: God, I'm so tired of thinking.

He seizes Dwan and kisses her. It goes on a little longer than either of them had expected. As they come up for air, Dwan makes a crooning sound at him. They go under again in another kiss. Prescott's hand comes up on the back of Dwan's head. A kerchief she is wearing around her neck is inadvertently detached and falls off into the breeze.

It blows away and conveniently lands on the edge of the grille over Kong's prison. It flutters there for a moment and then vanishes from sight. Below Kong is sleeping. His eyes are closed. In the ambient moonlight a wisp of silk flutters down and lands near the nostrils. Kong breathes, inhaling the perfume of Dwan's kerchief. There is a tremor through the great hulk. Suddenly an eye opens wide and seems to glow with interior blue fire. Kong's hand plucks the kerchief off his face and holds it where he can see it. He sniffs it. He lets out a sort of tormented groan, lifts a fist and slams it down on the floor plates and roars. Prescott is holding Dwan and kissing her as that echoing slam and roar is heard from the bowels of the ship. There is another pounding. Dwan stiffens and breaks from Prescott.

Dwan: He's hurting himself.

Another echoing slam makes Dwan wince as if she had taken the blow in her own heart. Prescott reaches for her but the girl steps back and touches him on the cheek.

Dwan: Wait for me. I'll be right back.

DWAN is gone before Prescott can say a word. Kong is trying to climb the interior wall of his prison. The metal is smooth. The task, of course, is impossible. Kong moves back through the beam of moonlight from the grill above. He pulls his fist back and swings it ferociously at a transverse bulkhead. Kong's blow crashes the bulkhead of a small crew cabin like a pile-driver. The metal wall bulges in and partly detaches an upper bunk. A sleeping Pakistani sailor is hurled onto the deck. Kong roars. In the enclosed metal place it is like the sound of hell. He moves quickly along and aims another terrific wallop at another section of bulkhead. Kong's thrashing is really playing hell with this enormous vessel. Sheaths buckle. Conduits spark and smoke. Yellow emergency

lights come on. Another blow. Gushing sea water. Then the accelerating whine and suck of automatic pumps.

Up on deck Dwan is racing toward the grille. She grips a stanchion to brace herself for the deck-shaking crash which follows from below. A bell starts ringing somewhere and there is a voice heard over a speaker system, sounding inhuman and mechanical, like some prerecorded message.

Speaker Voice: Alert. Ecological alert! Oil escaping from tanks one and three! Oil leaking into marine environment, rate ten cubic meters per second!

Dwan continues forward to the edge of grillwork over Kong's prison. As she reaches it there is another crash and now a honker starts up over the continuing Environmental Alert bell, and a second voice is heard over the speakers.

Second Voice: This is the Captain! Sea water pumps to full pressure! Prepare to flood tank four—I am ordering the ape DROWNED!

Dwan: Nooooooooooooo . . .

She scampers out onto the grillwork, bends and calls down.

Dwan: Hey, Big Boy—you dumb ugly ape. Kong!

Kong has his arm drawn back for another mighty blow. He halts. There is a low whistle from above and then:

Dwan's Voice: Remember me?

The terrible face swivels upward. Nostrils sniff. His eyes glint. They are made into a pair of flickering sapphires by the blue moonlight. Kong sees Dwan shining on the grillwork in a fantastic shimmering halo of moonlight.

Up on deck Prescott appears in a lighted doorway. He stops short, reacts and yells.

Prescott: You damn fool, COME BACK HERE!
He's gone berserk!

Dwan: Stop! Come any closer and I'll jump!

Prescott stops. Kong reaches up and extends his arms. But the tank is very deep—in actual fact, when this ship is fully laden she draws ninety-one feet of water—and Kong's pawtips fall some fifteen short of Dwan above them. Her voice comes down to him, *soothing*, echoing slightly in the cavern.

Dwan: Take it easy—easy—stop waking up sleepy people—no one is gonna hurt you—you're just going to America to be a star—

Kong reaches, letting out a sort of tortured growl. He suddenly crouches slightly and then leaps upward. The leap still leaves him short of the enticing vision above, but oh brother!—*fifteen tons* going up and then crashing down on the hull plates.

It certainly has an effect on Dwan as she slips. Suddenly she is through one of the three-foot squares and hanging by her hands and her grip is giving way.

Dwan: Oh, my God—*Big Boy, I'm slipping!*

So saying she drops. A swiftly darting paw catches her in a nick of time.

Prescott on deck is screaming up at the bridge and running forward:

Prescott: She's in the tank! Don't flood!

On deck Prescott, Wilson, the Captain and various crewmen all dash up and look down at the edge of the grille. Some of the men have powerful

flashlights. They are hushed, fascinated, and terrified for the beautiful girl in the grip of the ugly beast.

Dwan, who is pretty scared herself but trying not to show it, reaches out and touches Kong's face. He makes a strange low sound. He moves backward in the bluish gloom and reaches a corner of the storage tank. He slides down along it till he is squatting on his haunches. He looks upward.

Kong's viewpoint: the strange lens jumping around the periphery of the grillwork. Weird light and shadow from the lights on faces of men gazing down at him. They are almost like something from a German expressionist painting, harsh and grotesque—as terrifying to him as Kong's face is to you. Distorted sounds of their voices, grating, filled with obscure menace. Kong looks down at Dwan, as soft and shiny in his eyes as the men are dreadful. The contrast is total.

He releases Dwan on the battered floor plates. We hear those sounds which are eternal down here: throb of engines, the propellor shafts, air blowers, and rushing water beyond the hull.

Dwan stands there. Kong gazes down at her. Dwan retreats a bit, halts. The ape just gazes and

breathes. The sound of the latter grows quieter, as if it pacifies him merely to know that she is here and near to him in his incomprehensible captivity.

Dwan moves again. She backs away, but always meets Kong's gaze. There are climbing irons on the inside surface of the tank. Slowly, watching him, Dwan climbs.

Kong's eyes watch her. Dwan nears the top rung as hands reach down to help her. She pushes them away. She looks directly down at Kong and makes a gesture—perhaps a thumbs-up, maybe blows a kiss. Kong's eyes close.

Dwan pulls herself up onto deck. She finally suffers a delayed reaction. She staggers a few feet, grasps a stanchion and clings to it. Her whole body heaves. There is an enormous feeling of isolation about her this instant—aloneness—she has returned from some place where nobody but her has ever been. Her experience cannot be shared. Prescott comes up and holds her. She is far away.

Kong is seen through the grille. There is moonlight on the great dark hulk. His eyes are extinguished and closed. He is breathing like a child.

The hugeness of him crouched down in a corner, so quiet, is mystical. Darkness and magic. Sounds of the ship's engines. Throbbing. Kong's heart-beat. Quiet rushing water. Magic and mystery.

THE scene switches to New York City. It is late afternoon in a little park near the Long Island side of the East River, across from the soaring towers of midtown Manhattan. A girls' high school band marches down the street tooting "The Stars and Stripes Forever," leading hordes of New Yorkers of all ages.

There is an air of carnival expectation . . . and with good reason, for in the little riverside park has been built just about the damndest thing you ever saw. It is a full-scale reproduction of that great anti-Kong wall which the natives built across Skull Island, only here it is surfaced with shiny silvery mylar-type material, and the great

shut gates now are emblazoned with the Petrox emblem. Bleachers have been set up for the thousand or so lucky folk who will see the ensuing spectacle live, while the rest of the nation (if not the whole world) will be riveted to their boob-tubes. The ubiquitous Goodyear blimp cruises overhead, its lights blinking out a cheery greeting: "WELCOME KONG! THE BIG APPLE LOVES THE BIG GUY."

As evening falls and the hoopla keeps building, inside a corridor in a New York hotel, Jack Prescott strides grim-faced down the thick carpet. He is wearing jeans and a shirt. At the end are closed double doors. He throws them open and walks in.

Inside the hotel suite Dwan is being zipped into her show dress, being worked on under bright lights by makeup men and stylists. In the mirrors she sees Prescott entering. Reacting with surprise and confusion, her head spins around.

Dwan: You're not dressed!

Prescott: That's right . . . because I'm not going through with it. I'm quitting the circus.

Wilson is dressed in a beat-up safari outfit. He is having the brim-roll of his Anzac bush hat adjusted by a stylist. He whirls on Prescott.

Wilson: The hell you are! We've spent a million bucks building that wall out there—you're gonna be *up* on it when the gates open!

Prescott: No way, Wilson. I was wrong when I called this thing a farce . . . it's a tragedy.

Wilson: You little nobody, you've got a contract! You took an advance!

Prescott: I just donated that in your name to the Albert Schweitzer Memorial Fund For Returning Kong To His Home. Sue me.

As Prescott wheels away from the outraged executive, Dwan leaps up and throws her arms around him.

Dwan: Don't leave me tonight . . . please! . . . my horoscope says I'll . . .

Gently he has stopped her mouth.

Prescott: Dwan, shut up. I love you. Come with me right away. Now.

Her eyes hold his a moment. For a beat it looks as if Wilson will fly at her and hold her, then he smiles suavely.

Wilson: Go ahead. Except I promise you, you'll never get a booking in your life. You won't even tap dance at a Weight Watchers' reunion party.

He means it. Dwan looks back at Prescott with terrible appeal. Anguish.

Dwan: Jack! Don't you understand??

Prescott: Yes. I'm sorry. Stay well.

He smiles and is gently out of her arms and walking away before she knows it.

Dwan: Jack!!!

She would run after him, but Wilson catches her. Prescott is out.

Wilson: It's the old story. When you go up, baby, there's always some guy that can't cut it who you have to leave at the bottom of the stairs. There'll be lots of them.

Dwan understands this reasoning. Bravely, she stands straight and composes herself.

THE gaudiest helicopter you have ever seen is flying over Manhattan. PETROX is on the side in huge reflectorized letters. The body and struts are all tarted up with metallic glitter paint and sequins. It skims over the lighted United Nations Building and angles east across the river.

Prescott appears from the darkness and walks into the same park entrance taken by the girls' band and its followers a little earlier. He is revolted and yet drawn magnetically by the music and cheering from the unrevealed park area ahead. The searchlight beam probes the sky. He stops and gazes up ahead. The gaudy helicopter, caught in the crisscross of searchlights, is just landing. It

lands between the bleachers, right in front of a box raised several steps on a scaffolding. The box is draped with bunting and a big banner: "PETROX CORPORATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS". Enjoying themselves in that place of prominence are fifteen or so directors and their women. They are consuming champagne and hot dogs. The helicopter door opens and Wilson hops out. He turns and gives his hand to Dwan. There is terrific cheering when she steps gracefully down. She is now wearing a sash across her bosom: a pair of glittering hearts transfixed by a Cupid's arrow, one heart labeled Kong and the other Dwan. As Dwan is acknowledging the cheers, suddenly the lights all around go down and there is a new sound over the playing of the band. Beating tom-toms are heard over the enormous P.A. speakers in the trees. They blast out into the night. Dwan reacts with sudden fear. Two Ju-Ju men race up to her, take her by the arms and lead her up the glittery pedestal, to be once again tied to the sacrificial pedestal. During all of this, the members of the press and networks are snapping pictures and flashbulbs constantly. Prescott, hanging on the scaffolding at the end of a bleacher section, watches with love and misery as Dwan plays the starring role in this ridiculous pageant. Wilson's voice booms out over the P.A. speakers.

Wilson: And thus Beauty set her foot on the Forbidden Island . . . and was seized . . .

Wilson stands at his microphone . . . his moment of glory has arrived.

Wilson: . . . and great was the fear and trembling when Beauty was lashed to the dreadful bridal altar of THE BEAST. . . .

Dwan, atop the pedestal, puts on a delicious exhibition of fear and trembling as she negligently drapes herself in a fetching pose on the foam-padded sacrifice spot.

Wilson: The earth moves! Now the Beast approaches! Oh the power of him . . . the super power.

Fireworks shoot up and explode magnificently in the sky, painting everything with ever-changing shimmering colors. The girls' band breaks into "Hail to the Chief." The gates of that grotesque wall are now opening. The mighty silver portals swing to reveal . . . nothing! Darkness on the far side.

Wilson: Hail to the Power!

Lights. Good gosh! There in the open portal you

now see a perfect replica of a Petrox gas pump, at least fifty feet high. It begins to move forward on subsurface rails—the whole enormous thing coming this way through the gates. Wilson is pleased and excited. Again, fiercely:

Wilson: Hail to the Petrox power!

A helicopter way above moves sharply up, taking up the slack of a barely visible cable attached to the top of the pump, and in a flash the outer covering of the thing is lifted and gone into the night. There is Kong inside the remaining frame. Its steel members are disguised with festooned fake flowers and vines, the massive links chaining his ankles are concealed with plastic jungle foliage. On his head is an illuminated crown, flashing zircon letters around his brow; they spell out P-E-T-R-O-X. The crowd goes mad with awe and delight. They stamp their feet, yelling and cheering. Young mothers hold their tots up to get a better view. Kong's face twists around, trying to see what is going on. His rather sensitive eyes are assailed by the lights. His eardrums are assaulted by the pandemonium. Suddenly he sees something ahead of him and below. It is his beautiful Dwan, down there on the altar. She is gazing up at him. It is all so confusing, the poor animal could go bananas. And now there are other human forms swarming in at the edges of his field of

vision. Around the pedestal cameramen rush up in a wave, both TV and newspaper folk with their lights and cameras. They all converge up around Dwan. They crouch down for low-angle shots from the various step levels and all jabber at Dwan over the general din.

Photographers: Lean out over the side, sweetie! Lean out so we get you against his face! Hold her, someone! Swing her out for an angle!

A couple of the lensmen climb up to the pedestal and grab Dwan before she knows what's happening and swing her out for a better angle. Prescott stiffens and shouts futilely over the racket.

Prescott: Watch it, you damn fools! He'll think you're trying to hurt her.

His apprehension is all too justified. Kong sees his beloved Dwan being swung out backwards into a sudden agonizing sea of flashing bulbs and zapping spotlights. Kong is certain they are killing her. It sends him completely around the bend. His enormous paw twists and snaps a portion of the restraints. He snaps another. The bleachers are very still, uncertain. A couple of people stand up at widely separated places and try to start down. They are not sure that this is part of the act.

Wilson grabs a mike and speaks into it with great authority.

Wilson: Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing to fear. Hidden by the flowers is an escape-proof cage certified by the New York City Department of . . .

The rest of that is drowned by a mighty roar. There is more crunching steel as a flower-decked piece of cage comes crashing down about a foot from Wilson's head. Kong is writhing and throwing off the last of the cage structure and lifts his feet one by one, bursting the concealed ankle-fetters. Kong kicks away his ankle chains, and steps out of them. He stops and looks around. A woman in the audience suddenly screams. Panic! Everybody is screaming and starting to flee. Wilson dashes across and yells at the girls' band.

Wilson: Play something!

Courageously, the girls make with "Let The Sunshine In." Kong starts slowly moving. He is searching. He catches a flash of Dwan piling down the pedestal steps, but just at that instant there is a flash of light and over the screaming, an erratic popping is heard, sounding like tiny firecrackers. Clustered around a giant searchlight are bunches of cops and Pinkertons firing at Kong with their

.38's. Kong is furious. He is roaring and brushing off what seem to be tiny gnats. He moves. One Pinkerton atop the searchlight is enfolded in a great paw. He is lifted, wiggling and shrieking. Kong's jaws open and crunch shut on the hapless Pinkerton man, biting him in half. Prescott fights his way through the people who are running every whichway and screaming. They bump into each other. He finds Dwan, who has collided with a fleeing cop and is down on her knees half-stunned. He yanks her to her feet. Wilson is being swept along with the mob when suddenly he hears a man's voice.

Man's Voice: Wilson!!!

Just above him is the Petrox directors' box. It is just about empty of its fleeing occupants. One top-hatted man, the chairman of the board, is waving his gold-headed stick and screaming down. His aged, wizened face is a mask of venom.

Chairman: This will cost our corporation billions! You can run, Wilson, but you can't hide! No matter where in the world you go, Petrox will find you. I don't care if you go to the moon, we will FIND YOU AND . . .

Wilson has already turned and is fleeing in the opposite direction. He is running away from that

terrible figure and voice of vengeance. Wilson stumbles, pushes wildly against traffic and ducks under a corner of the bleachers and charges out. He runs headlong into something. It is an enormous foot and ankle. Wilson bounces back from it, his beautiful bush hat falling off as he trips to his knees. He looks up. Kong is looming above him. He is looking right down with the most terrible look. He bares his fangs and roars. Wilson is paralyzed. He sees death above him as the great ape foot is lifted and WHAM! It slams down like a pile driver. Kong's foot is lifting up again and lumbering on, and revealed from under where it was is nothing but Wilson's terrific bush hat, crushed flat as a pancake. There is Wilson, his head pressed against the earth, barely able to understand that the foot just missed him. Dumbly, he reaches for his hat and sees in the ruined thing his whole future . . . a crushed piece of wreckage. Wilson shivers and shakes and begins to weep. All in all, death would have been his preference. Wilson realizes that some days, even an oil executive can't win.

YOU can imagine the situation in the parking lot. There is a total bottleneck. Prescott and Dwan realize they are never going to get away on wheels. As they jump out of their car and run, Kong catches a glimpse of them. He roars.

Dwan and Jack make their way to a Queens street where they jog along looking into parked cars in the hope of finding one with doors unlocked and key in the ignition. Radio voices can be heard crackling from dimly seen passing police vehicles.

Radio Voices: What's the latest on the tanks? Last I had, they were moving up the Jersey Turnpike

past Trenton. Also a unit moving south from Connecticut . . .

Dwan stops. She is out of breath. She leans on the car where Prescott is vainly looking for an ignition key.

Dwan: They'll kill them, won't they?

Prescott: Well, I don't think they'll run him for mayor of New York. Though, come to think of it . . .

He emits a little laugh, a bit crazy.

Prescott: Hell, doesn't anybody leave keys?

Dwan: Can't you do a hot wire?

Prescott: Sorry.

Dwan: Man, you are really uneducated.

An amplified voice zaps them from a passing cop car.

Speaker Voice: Keep moving, this is a closed sector—keep moving. This means YOU. MOVE IT ON.

They do so. There is a distant roar in the background and some screaming. They stop and look back. The orange glow of fires here and there is behind them. Smoke. Sirens. Prescott and Dwan vanish around the corner. As Kong approaches, Prescott and Dwan reach an elevated subway station. As it happens, there is a train stopped in the station. They run up the steps and get in through the doors of the train just before they close and it moves out. The train rounds a curve, headlight shining. The motorman is gaping out the front glass with the most staggered disbelief. Kong is looming up ahead in the headlights. The motorman faints. As he does, he lets go of the throttle, which immediately activates the brakes. At the same moment Kong's paw comes across the front of the train, and stops it like a bumper at the end of a track. Passengers are being thrown around. They pick themselves up with typical good-natured New York curses. A woman is yelling that someone has swiped her purse. Prescott and Dwan are picking themselves up with the rest. Suddenly Dwan's eyes almost pop out of her head. She pokes Prescott without a sound. Kong's face is moving in to look into this car. Just a flash glimpse of that sends Prescott leaping into action. He seizes up some heavy package and throws it as hard as he can into the glass where Kong's eyes are pressed and screams.

Prescott: Run, everybody—run for your lives.

The glass in front of Kong is mysteriously turning white and opaque as the object strikes it. He roars. The end of the car tilts and Dwan and Prescott come out in a tumble. Kong sniffs at the car, and then rips off the whole roof to look in. A girl is sprawled on her face so you just see her back. It is that familiar old deception of someone seen from behind: the figure, the hair, just like someone you think you recognize. Kong picks her up, turns her around, inspects her. Not Dwan. Disappointed, he throws her away through the air.

Meanwhile Dwan and Prescott are shinnying down the structure that supports the tracks. Kong is infuriated. Dwan has eluded him again. He takes it out on the train and pushes it violently off its tracks. It falls down on a corner Petrox gas station which blows up in flames. Prescott and Dwan sprint away into darkness. Some kid comes this way on a Honda mini-bike. He sees the lurid explosion ahead, hears the roar, jumps off his bike and runs. He leaves the Honda on its side. It is still running.

ACROSS the river in Manhattan roadways are blocked with fire trucks topped by cops and machine guns. A searchlight unit plays its beams along the bridge toward Queens. Nearby is the command area where there are low-squawking radios and lots of police and fire department brass. A member of the group is talking to a handset.

Chief Inspector: We've got Queensboro Bridge buttoned up tight—how's the situation at the Brooklyn?

Radio Voice: I'll make ya a bet—I sell that monkey this bridge before he crosses it.

Prescott and Dwan toodle along on their Honda on the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge, Manhattan bound. Suddenly a blinding searchlight beam hits Prescott in the eyes, dazzling him and making him skid to a screeching stop. An amplified voice booms at him.

Voice: This bridge is closed to all traffic! The vehicular roadways are mined!

Prescott and Dwan abandon their wheels and start jogging along the footway at the side. Another booming voice bombards them from overhead. It is disembodied and awesome.

Second Voice: Clear all streets! Proceed to the nearest underground shelter and remain there!

A police helicopter with lights bathing its insignia is over them. That voice continues from the powerful speakers in its belly.

Second Voice: . . . Repeating, clear all streets! Any person found looting may be shot without warning! Without a warning!

The searchlight beams splash light all over the Queens end of that bridge. The riverfront is a dark jumble of warehouses and the occasional apartment building. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Kong

stands on the waterfront and looks up at the bridge. His instinct tells him that the dazzling lights are danger. Kong moves with quick, elegant grace and flattens himself against the wall of a warehouse. He stands still as a statue, barely breathing as there is a quick pass of lights overhead. Then darkness again. As Kong starts moving again under the bridge toward the river, Prescott and Dwan are wearily jogging through creepily deserted Sutton Place. The exhausted young lady quits, leaning back on a building.

Dwan: How about buying me a drink?

Prescott: Come on—only ten blocks more and we've got the key to a great apartment.

Dwan: What's the hurry? We've put a river between us. Bridges are mined and apes don't swim—your own book said so. Buy me a drink. There—

Dwan points to a nice-looking bar across the street. The lights are on and there is music coming from it.

Prescott: Okay.

They move across the street. In the middle, Pres-

cott stops suddenly. He is looking downtown and up in the air at a slight angle.

Dwan: What's the matter?

Prescott: Déjà vu. I don't know when, but I have a feeling I've seen this view before.

He shakes his head as they enter the bar. It is deserted. Drinks are still on the bar, even patrons' hats and coats. The jukebox is playing, but not a soul in view. Outside along the Queens bank of the East River it is not so quiet. Fire engines and ambulances are sirening north. Searchlight beams stab across rooftops. Lights flicker. A shadow moves through the dark. Actually it is not a shadow at all. It is Kong. Apes do not swim, but if they are big enough they can wade. Kong is big enough. Suddenly he pauses.

He looks upward toward Manhattan. See his eyes. He is looking at the tops of a group of midtown skyscrapers in silhouette against the full moon. Beyond them and highest of all: the stark twin towers of the World Trade Center. It is déjà vu, all right—just exactly the profile of those craggy spires around the Pacific Island aerie

where he carried Dwan. He just looks at it. He makes a curious sound, sort of a combined whimper of yearning and rumble of that crooning. He begins to move faster through the river.

DWAN and Prescott are sitting in the Sutton Place bar. There is a terrific moody feeling. The two of them in this place like the ruins of Pompeii, amidst the leavings some ironically New Yorky lyrics play on the juke. It is counterpointed by the symphony of faint sirens from the distance. Prescott pours the most expensive cognac for Dwan, who is perched on a stool on the other side of the bar. There is the sound of breaking glass in the distance. Dwan tenses.

Prescott: Sounds like Bloomingdale's—

Dwan doesn't get it. He explains.

Prescott: Looting has begun. The upper middle class rises, loots Bloomingdale's windows.

Now gunfire is heard from the same range as the busting glass.

Prescott: They pay the price. Tough.

Dwan quickly reaches for her cognac.

Prescott: Wait a minute—we don't want to get shot for looters.

He finds his American Express card, props it up on the cash register.

Prescott: Okay, go ahead—get smashed.

Dwan: How about that nice offer you made me when you quit the act? Does it still stand?

Prescott stares at her longingly and then comes around the bar. Some jet-set beauty fled these premises so fast she abandoned a chinchilla jacket on the bar. Prescott tosses the terrific fur over Dwan's shoulders.

Prescott: Chinchilla looks great on you.

Dwan: Wow—does it ever feel great too!

Dwan runs her fingers through the rich stuff, almost visibly glows as she admires herself in the bar mirror.

Prescott: That's one of our problems. Shut your eyes and guess what an associate professor earns.

Dwan: You think I need *furs*?

Prescott lifts her hand and looks at the palm.

Prescott: I read faster music, stronger wine. My God, Dwan, think what you've been through since you sailed on the yacht with Harry. . . . It's in your blood like dope—you're going to need new fixes I can't give you.

Dwan: You're a dumbbell, Jack. Kiss me—

Dwan turns her face up. Prescott moves his mouth toward hers and then halts just an inch away.

Dwan: Kiss me —

Prescott's lips move closer yet. Suddenly he turns away and grabs up his own drink.

Prescott: I'm a working man. I can't afford to get hung up on a rising star and a doomed ape—

Along Manhattan's West Side army tanks and personnel carriers go rattling north. The soldiers do not notice what is emerging from the river. It is Kong. He moves to the embankment and reaches up for a handhold, which happens to be on a riverfront Con Edison switching station. He grabs a wire. A sudden blue flash and he yanks his paw back. Slight smoke is rising from the burned hair on his mitt.

Kong is really aggravated. He grabs a highway light stanchion, snaps it off and hurls it into the maze of wires in the station house yard. As big transformers explode, the lights in the bar flicker out. The jukebox eerily slows and stops. Darkness but for the glow of a cigarette. Then emergency battery lights come on here and there and cast a weird orange-yellow luminescence.

Prescott: Flash. National Guard fires bazooka at looter on OneHundred and Twenty-fifth Street, blows every fuse from Maine to Florida.

Dwan laughs, then scornfully tosses the chinchilla wrap onto the floor.

Dwan: To hell with furs—does that nice offer you made me still stand?

Prescott: It depends on Kong. He's bigger than both of us.

Dwan: Don't tease me—I'm serious.

Prescott: So am I. If that monkey doesn't make it, we'll have him on our backs the rest of our lives. We'd never be able to look each other in the eye.

Dwan: I don't believe that.

Prescott: It's the absolute truth. You know it as well as I do.

Dwan: Why does everything have to get so mixed up? I almost wish we were back on that damned island!

Prescott is about to reply when a thought hits him. He bolts from his chair.

Prescott: Of course! I know where I saw that view before—Wait a minute! Don't move!

Like a flash, Prescott is dashing out to the street. He turns and looks downtown and upward as he did before. The skyscraper profile looks exactly like that place in the jungle. He looks at the World Trade Center towers the same way Kong saw

them a couple of minutes ago. The déjà vu he had before . . . but now he places it.

Dwan is sitting at the bar, perplexed, as Prescott comes rocketing back into the bar.

Prescott: I think we've got a chance, luv—sit tight while I make a phone call.

Prescott is gone already, back toward where the sign says rest rooms and phone are that way downstairs.

SOME blocks uptown the men who run New York are gathered in a big room. The establishment: politicians, bankers, commissioners, labor bosses—the whole gang, augmented on this occasion by a couple of army generals. They are all very still, listening intently to a smooth-looking man in evening dress, with a fine cigar and a carnation in his buttonhole. He is talking toward a speakerphone. Jack Prescott is on the other end.

Man with Carnation: You say you know where Kong is headed . . .

Prescott: Yes.

Man with Carnation: Where?

Prescott: It's a place where you can trap him without danger. Can you get a couple of big helicopters? Some steel blasting nets to drop on top of him?

The chief honcho looks around. The army general nods.

Man with Carnation: Sure—no problem. Where is he headed, Professor Prescott?

Prescott: We deal for that. You promise to trap him without injury, then I tell you where.

There is silence in the conference room. Cold stone faces in a smoke-filled room.

Dwan is on her feet in the bar with the chinchilla again. The fur is draped over her shoulders as she turns and sort of studies herself in a full-length mirror near the front doors. She does not notice something that flickers behind her in the plate-glass street window. There is a sudden apparition of a huge ape face, turned sideways, as it is bent down from its normal height so Kong's eyes can peek inside.

Downstairs, Prescott is hanging on the phone as the men in the conference room look from man to man for a consensus.

Prescott: Damn it—do we have a deal?

Man with Carnation: Yes. Where is Kong headed?

Prescott: There's one place in Manhattan that looks exactly like a certain part of his native habitat. Let him through to it and you can trap him there. Let him climb up to the top of the World Trade Center.

Meanwhile Dwan, upstairs in the bar, still has her back turned to the front door. Slowly, stealthily Kong's great paw comes in behind her. She senses something and whirls. Shock! Kong's paw right there. The huge, hairy fingers poised to seize her.

There is a clear moment during which Dwan might run and perhaps be saved, but for some reason she does not move. Then it is too late. The paw enfolds her. Dwan does not make a sound. Slowly she is lifted just a foot or two clear of the floor. She is withdrawn to the front door. Taking her through the door, Kong's knuckles negligently whack the door off its hinges.

Prescott returns upstairs from the phone booth when he hears the crash of the falling door. He freezes an instant then races ahead. He dashes in from the rear. No Dwan. With growing horror he

sees the unhinged door. He hears a drumming sound from the street outside and races to the door. Comprehension. He races out the door and sees Dwan being carried down the street by Kong, his free paw drumming triumphantly on his chest. There is a flash of moonlight on her tattered sequins as the ape carries her around a corner. As he croons in that loving way, three jet fighters shriek down the runway and take off. Air-to-air type missiles and rockets are loaded on the underside of their wings. Inside the control tower, a tough USAF general clamps a cigar in his teeth. He snarls into a microphone.

General: You idiots, they got no power and water pressure—you wanna burn up New York City? Get those fighters down! Send up the whirlybird gook-killers!

Prescott runs down a New York street. From the dark streets around echo the unseen but heard motors and metallic clanking of treads. Prescott spots an abandoned bicycle in a doorway. He grabs it and jumps aboard. The bronze doors of St. Patrick's Cathedral shine in the moonlight. Organ music and chanting can be heard from inside, a Dies Irae. It is medieval, like a service in some great city in the grip of the Black Death. One lone priest stands on the steps. Charging down Fifth Avenue in terror come a couple of hansom cabs

from in front of the Plaza. They are driverless and riderless. A great looming shadow approaches. It is Kong and Dwan. The priest starts chanting in Latin as he shakes Holy Water from a censer. It has no visible effect on the crooning beast. Behind the lion on the steps of the Forty-second Street library, a military officer crouches in the shadows. He looks north up Fifth Avenue and speaks quietly into a microphone.

Military Officer: He's crossing Forty-second Street, on plotted schedule.

Suddenly the lights of the library behind him come on. The officer looks around and speaks again into the mike.

Military Officer: The power's back on. Keep it quiet . . . get in the shadows.

NOW we jump to a street near the World Trade Center. It is jammed with idling tanks and personnel carriers and police and soldiers. Every vehicle light goes out, every idling engine stops. Men move back into the shadows. You never saw so many people and vehicles so quiet. Jack Prescott is getting closer as he bicycles like mad down a deserted block. Dwan seems hypnotized as Kong carries her along toward her destiny. Her mouth is slightly open, her pulse is accelerated. She is in some mental space beyond terror, beyond horror, beyond everything. Above them the World Trade Center towers soar against the night sky, twin monoliths like some present-day Stonehenge. Kong stares up at the moon, which

appears a silver disc balanced precisely on the south tower. He looks down again to street level and sees empty streets, dark buildings and parked cars. Despite this, Kong bares his fangs and roars. His instinct tells him there is menace there. He waves his free fist threateningly at the empty streets. Nothing. He roars again. Dwan comes out of her trance and screams. As it echoes, Prescott is skidding to a stop in front of the World Trade Center. He sees Kong bash in a window as high as he can reach to use as a handhold. He starts to climb as Dwan lets out another scream. Prescott cups his hands and yells to her.

Prescott: Hold on! Shut your eyes! They're coming with helicopters to net him!

She complies and shuts her eyes. Kong climbs. Below, Prescott drops his bike and dashes into the south tower of the Trade Center. He reaches an express elevator, plunges in and leans on the highest "up" button. The doors shut. Kong and Dwan are nearing the top. There are sounds below now, but the ape pays no heed. Police are coming from every direction . . . tanks, soldiers, from everywhere, crowding into the plaza around the base of the towers. Mobile searchlights send beams shooting up. Prescott jumps out of his elevator as the doors open on the topmost floor. His eye is instantly caught by something visible in

the window. It is Kong's foot going up past it. He dashes to find some way to the roof level.

Kong reaches the top of the Trade Center. The moon. It is so bright this night! Kong holds his beloved and starts to stroke her head the way he did under the other full moon halfway across the world. Dwan opens her eyes. Kong croons. Prescott is racing around the deserted area, trying in vain to find some way up. Suddenly he stops short as he sees something in a window. It is one of those mechanical window-washing scaffolds going past outside the window. It moves up the side of the tower. Searchlight beams from below garishly light up three or four uniformed U.S. Marines crouching on it with some biggish piece of equipment. An army general, seen earlier in the conference room, is looking up through binoculars and cursing softly and vehemently to the aide at his side.

Army General: Oh, those U.S. Marines. Didn't they get the plan?

Aide: Sure they got it. You know the U.S. Marines.

Prescott is at that window, disquieted. He is trying to get a view up, but can see nothing above the fixed glass. Suddenly he hears a peculiar whoosh-

ing sound from above. It's the U.S. Marines coming over the edge of the roof and igniting their flame throwers. Roaring jets of fire shoot out like the flames of hell. Kong roars and bellows with the primeval terror that all animals have of fire. But even in this terror he always remembers to shield Dwan as best he can. The courageous marines advance. Kong moves backward toward the edge of the tower. He crouches as the fire shoots over him, singeing his rich pelt and then—suddenly—he has jumped. Kong arches through the air, Dwan clinging to the fur of his neck, toward the north tower of the Trade Center complex. Upturned faces watch this fantastic spectacle from a thousand feet below, almost as they might see Lucifer leaping across the heavens.

Kong lands, just making it over the abyss. He has barely gotten his feet under him before he rips some air conditioning equipment off the roof and smashes it up. Dwan is still clinging to his furry shoulder. He whirls and roars and starts pitching the metal chunks across the gap he has just leaped. The marines cower behind their flame thrower fuel tank as Kong's missiles rain across. This is not a very smart idea. WHOOSH! KER-BLOOM! The tank is struck and blows up, incinerating the men in a spectacular fire bomb. Kong beats on his chest triumphantly. Prescott's

face is pressed against the glass as he has heard the explosion above him and sees the reflected glare of the fireball and Kong's chest drumming. He understands what has happened.

A military helicopter is taking off. Following it through the night are its two mates. They cross the moon like bad witches. Kong is crooning and stroking Dwan. She is near faint with emotion and the relief of the fantastic leap through space. Then Kong hears a clatter. He turns his head and sees the three choppers angling in and taking up a circular path around the top of the building.

One of the chopper pilots, a full air force bird colonel with many combat ribbons on his tunic, speaks into his microphone.

The Colonel: He's still got the girl. Follow me into a real tight waiting pattern . . . about fifty feet above 'em . . .

The helicopter comes closer, its waist door is open. Moonlight glints on something. It looks much more like a machine gun than a steel net. There is a gunner standing behind it. He is also a decorated veteran.

Dwan sees that glint as Kong turns his back to the

helicopters. They hardly interest him at all. He starts to lower her toward the deck. Dwan comes out of her far remote place and screams at him.

Dwan: Don't put me down!

Kong continues to lower her.

Dwan: Hold me or they'll kill you! DON'T PUT ME DOWN!!!

Of course, the words mean little to Kong. He puts her down. Dwan clings to his wrist and tries to climb back up him. She clutches the hair, but he gently manages to roll her free of him. The Colonel sees his moment.

The Colonel: Now!

The machine gun spits fire right at Kong. He is struck. He roars with surprise and pain as he tries to brush off these painful sharp stings. Dwan covers her face, moaning. Prescott, at the window in the other tower, sees the circling helicopter letting go a burst of gun fire. He reacts in angry frustration.

Prescott: Traitors! Cowards!

Kong swipes vainly at the helicopters as they

blaze at him in short bursts. He roars. Dwan is desperately trying to climb up his furry body. Kong sees her and plucks her up in his paw. The machine gunner gets a crazy glimpse through his gunsight of the girl in the ape's paw and swings out over the void. He yells into his mike.

Machine Gunner: Wait—he's got her again.

Dwan in the paw pleads with the ape over the dreadful circling noise.

Dwan: Hold me! Hold me! Oh, Big Boy—Hold me forever.

But the paw is moving her and putting her down in a corner of the parapet where she will be protected. Dwan tries to hold on but that hammering gunfire is resumed and he is slammed away from her grasp.

Kong is hit. Again and again. He staggers. His wonderful rich pelt is darkening redly now in many patches. He wipes some blood off and looks at it in wonder. He has never seen his own life-blood before. Turning, he roars and swipes out far—way, way out from the deck. He has hit one of the helicopters. It is tipped. It slides away and seems to gently touch the side of the building. At once it explodes. Kong is triumphant. His lips

curl back and he roars and beats his chest. The last hurrah. Hammering guns. Kong shudders all over and reels and crashes backward on the parapet. Dwan leaps up and rushes to him. His huge eyes are right on Dwan as without a sound he rolls over the edge of the parapet and crashes to the plaza below. Earthquake.

Kong is lying on his back, in the middle of the World Trade Center Plaza. He is not quite dead yet. Everything is more distorted than usual, barely perceptible and the only sounds are from within his own body: leaky whistling rushes of blood and the uneven breathing of that great heart. Faces appear and then vanish excitedly. TV cameramen are actually climbing on him. Flashbulbs. All the attentions given to an overnight celebrity. The beating of the heart grows slower. His vision is now losing definition, turning into mere shapes and patterns. Suddenly there is one moment of focus as Dwan's face is over him. She looks right down and sobs. Crystal tears drop onto him and everything goes soft. At the same instant the heart stops and the image flickers to black.

The whole city seems to be converging around Kong. Endless sirens and lights and police and soldiers and all kinds of well-dressed people are wanting to get in on this historic scene. A lady in

mink is bending down and dipping a corner of her handkerchief into Kong's red blood.

Dwan sees Prescott through the chaos. The smooth man with the carnation, the one from the city conference room, is whisked through by the police beside Dwan to be photographed with her. He puts an arm around her and smiles toward the TV cameras. Dwan's eyes go back to Jack Prescott. He nods at her, approving her treatment of the smoothie, but then he nevertheless turns away and is lost in the crowd. Dwan pulls away from the man with the carnation and takes off after Prescott.

Dwan: Jack!

She is overcome with grief and weak from her ordeal. She cannot catch up to him. She cries out again.

Dwan: Jack! Jack!

She stands there, sobbing. The man with the carnation reaches out for her and grabs her back with him for the press. Dwan is in the TV lights, weeping. A weeping, sequined star.

THE END

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SCRIPTION OF THE CREATION OF THE "BIG BOPPER," RIGHT
FROM THE BEGINNING. "I'M SITTING ONE MORNING IN MY
SMALL OFFICE IN ASPEN, COLORADO, WHERE I LIVE, WHEN
THE PHONE RINGS, AND IT IS DINO...."

COVER ART BY FRANK FRAZETTA