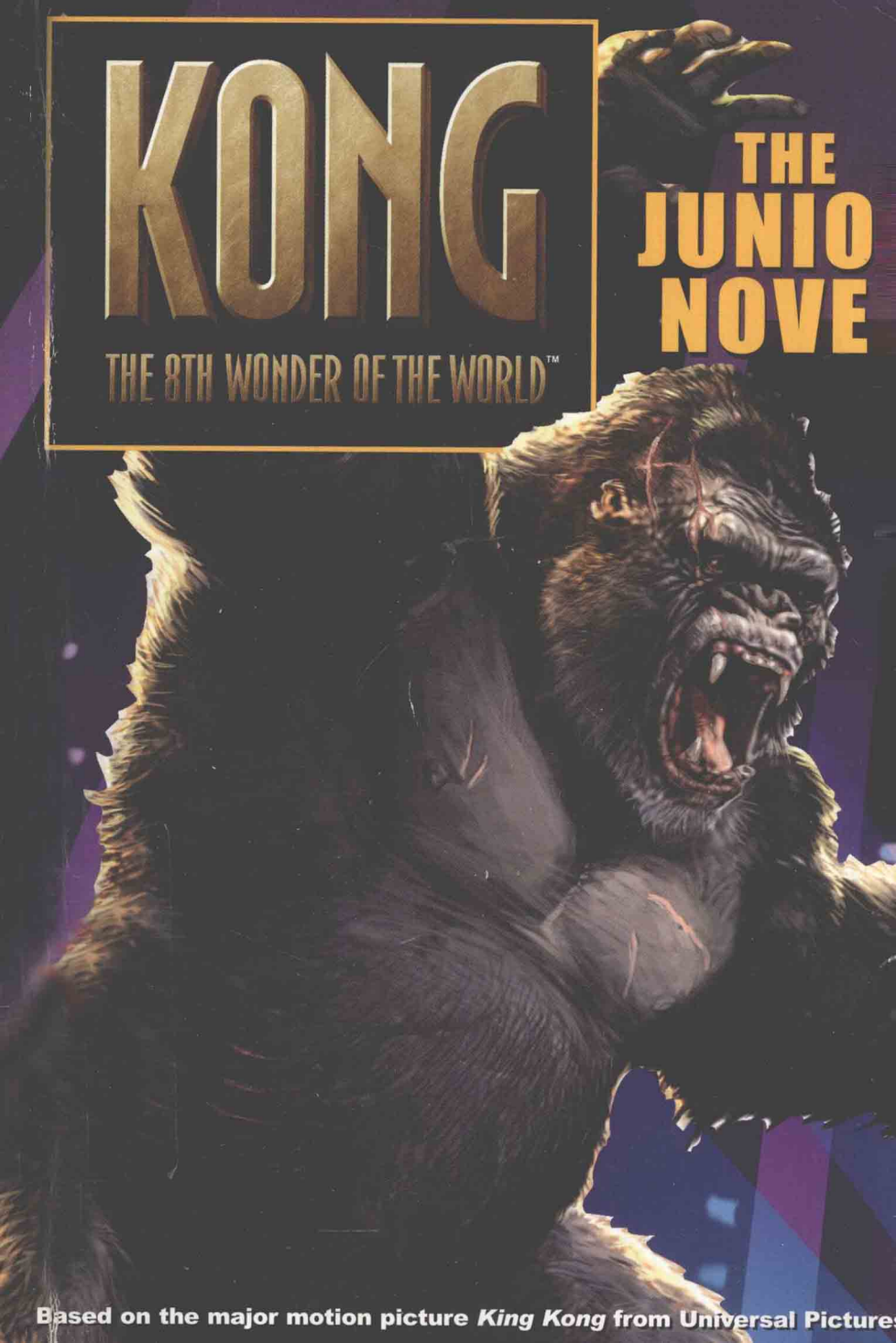


KONG

THE 8TH WONDER OF THE WORLD™

THE
JUNIO
NOVE



Based on the major motion picture *King Kong* from Universal Pictures

KONG

THE 8TH WONDER OF THE WORLD TM

THE JUNIOR NOVEL

Adapted by Laura J. Burns and Melinda Metz

Based on a Motion Picture Screenplay

by Fran Walsh & Philippa Boyens & Peter Jackson

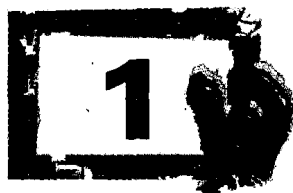
Based on a Story by Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace



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Engelhorn! Hoist up the mainsail! Raise the anchor!" Carl called to the captain of *The Venture*. Carl glanced behind him. The men who had invested in his movie weren't in sight—yet. Neither were the police. There was still time to escape with the canisters of film he'd already shot. The investors claimed he'd stolen them. But they were *his*. The movie was *his*. *He* was the director.

Carl was absolutely sure when he finished the movie it was going to make history *and* a huge pile of dough. He'd be able to pay back everybody he owed money to, including the investors and the captain, because Carl had found a film location that was nothing short of spectacular—Skull Island. No one knew the island was *The Venture's* actual destination yet, not even Captain Engelhorn or Hayes, Engelhorn's second in command. They would think Carl was crazy if he told them the truth. He wasn't sure even Mike and Herb, the

men who had been on the crew of every movie he had made, would have agreed to come with him if he had told them where he planned on going.

But the island was the only place Carl's movie could be finished. He'd felt it in his bones the second he heard that Norwegian skipper talking about it. The skipper had rescued a castaway, barely alive. Before he'd died, the castaway had told the story of Skull Island. He'd said the place was shrouded in fog, cut off from the rest of the world. He claimed that it held the remains of an ancient civilization and that the people who lived there knew nothing of the modern age.

Carl was going to be the man to bring this discovery to the world with his movie. The castaway had given the skipper a map to the island—and Carl had bought it from the skipper almost before he finished telling the tale.

The moment Carl returned to New York with the footage shot on Skull Island, everyone would know his name. Every investor in town would want to back his next movie. Every actor in the country would want to star in a Carl Denham film. Carl took another look over his shoulder. The coast was still clear.

"Cast off!" he shouted. "We've got to leave." He guided

Ann Darrow, his new star, up the gangplank, hoping she wouldn't notice how nervous he was. The last thing he needed was for anyone on the boat to know he was worried about being arrested before the ship left the harbor.

Ann stared at the sailors rushing around *The Venture*, getting the ship ready, loading crates. Smoke was pouring from the stacks. Ann felt as if she was in a movie already. She could hardly believe any of this was real. Yesterday, she'd actually stolen an apple from a vendor's cart to keep from starving. Today, she was setting sail to make a movie starring Bruce Baxter and written by Jack Driscoll, her absolute favorite playwright.

Carl stepped over to Captain Engelhorn. They had a whispered conversation, and then Carl turned to Ann. "Can't you see we're in the presence of a VIP guest?" he said loudly. Ann felt her face flush. She'd never been called a VIP before. She was a lot more used to people throwing squishy tomatoes and slimy lettuce at her after she performed her slapstick comedy act. Some people laughed, and that was wonderful. But she got hit with moldy salad makings just as often.

"So you are ready for this voyage, Miss Darrow? You are not at all nervous?" the captain asked Ann. He had

an accent. German, she thought.

"Nervous. No. Why? Should I be?" Ann asked, a few butterflies taking flight in her stomach.

Carl wished the captain would go do something—anything—on the ship. Something captainly. Something that didn't involve bothering Carl about when he would get paid—or worrying Carl's actress.

"I imagine you'd be terrified. It isn't every woman who would take such a risk," the captain answered. Ann's butterflies grew into buzzing bumblebees, pricking the walls of her stomach. If the captain thought she should be terrified, then—

Carl beamed when his assistant, Preston, rushed over and asked, "Why don't I show Miss Darrow to her cabin?" He whisked Ann away from the captain and his questions. Carl waited a moment, and then made his way through the ship's narrow corridors, heading toward his cabin. His star was safely taken care of. Now Carl needed to check in on his writer.

He opened his cabin door and ducked inside. Jack Driscoll sat at the table across from him. "If anyone comes to the door, don't open it," Carl told his friend. "You haven't seen me. Say I stuck my head down a toilet!" There was still

a chance that the police might nab him.

Jack raised a dark eyebrow. Clearly something was up with his old friend Carl. But he didn't have the time to figure out what. "I can't stay. I have a rehearsal for which I am now"—he checked his watch—"three hours late." He threw a few pages across the table.

Carl frowned. "What's this?"

"The script," Jack answered.

Carl sat down. "Jack, there are only fifteen pages here."

"I know, but they're good! You've got fifteen good pages there, Carl!" Jack didn't have time for this. He had to get back to his play. It was almost opening night.

"Jack, you can't do this to me," Carl moaned. "I have a beginning, but I need a middle and an end! I gotta have something to shoot."

The ship's engines roared to life. Jack stood up. Through the portal, Carl saw a couple of sailors releasing ropes. He realized all he had to do was keep Jack on the ship for just a few more minutes. Then his problems would be solved.

"All right, fine. We might as well settle up," Carl said. He pulled out his checkbook.

Jack smiled. He'd been expecting begging and pleading

from Carl, maybe even a temper tantrum. "I've never known you to volunteer cash before."

"How does two grand sound?" Carl asked.

"Sounds great," Jack said as Carl wrote out the check and signed it with a flourish. "Voilà!" He gave the check to Jack.

"You wrote the words 'two grand,'" Jack said, his smile fading. The bank wouldn't cash that. Banks didn't use slang. Or have a sense of humor. He could feel the ship vibrating under his feet. The engine was going full steam. He had to get off *The Venture*—and fast.

"What's today's date? The twenty-ninth?" Carl asked.

"Come on, it's the twenty-fifth," Jack snapped.

Carl crumpled the new check. "Let me just . . . it'll only take a second."

Jack understood now. Carl didn't intend to pay him. He was trying to trap Jack onboard the ship! "Never mind, pay me when you get back!" he blurted out as he bolted from the cabin.

Carl leaned back in his chair and grinned. *Too late, Jackie,* he thought. *You'll have plenty of time to write that script now. It'll take us a few months to reach Skull Island.*

It was too late for the police and investors to grab

him, too. Now he could concentrate on making his masterpiece. He couldn't wait to get his first glimpse of Skull Island. The castaway had said it was sinking. Soon it would be lost forever.

But not before the great director Carl Denham captured the island—and every creature that lived there—on film!



Ann studied her small pile of clothing the next morning, wondering what she was going to wear to breakfast. All her clothes were ragged—it had been far too long since she'd had any money for new ones. She glanced into the closet of her cabin. It was filled with beautiful dresses and nightgowns. They were costumes for the movie. Would anyone notice if she borrowed one?

She chose a floral dress and slipped it on. She wanted to be able to hold her head high when she met Jack Driscoll. She'd seen all his plays. Half of all his plays, she corrected herself. She couldn't afford theater tickets, but it was easy to slip in with the rest of the crowd returning to their seats after intermission. Ann had gone to see the second half of a Jack Driscoll play whenever she wasn't performing herself—if you could call doing fake falls and taking pies to the face performing!

She took a deep breath, checked her hair in the mirror, and stepped out of her tiny cabin. It was easy enough to find the mess hall, although she couldn't be quite sure that the smell wafting through the ship really came from food.

When she stepped inside, Carl immediately jumped up from his seat. "Ann, come on over!" he cried. "Let me introduce you to the crew. This is Herb, our cameraman."

Preston pulled out a chair for Ann at the table while she shook Herb's hand.

"Delighted to meet you, ma'am," Herb said with a smile. "And may I say . . . what a lovely dress!"

Ann felt a blush creep up her cheeks. "Oh, this old thing?" she joked. "I just threw it on!"

"Isn't that one of the movie costumes?" Preston murmured to Carl.

Ann felt the tips of her ears get hot.

"What does a girl have to do to get breakfast around here?" she said quickly, trying to change the subject.

Carl grinned and turned to a crusty-looking man who was busy shaving a sailor with a straight razor and stirring a pot of porridge at the same time. "Lumpy!" Carl told him. "You heard the lady!"

Carl gestured to a young, handsome man sitting across



the table. He was scribbling in a notebook, ignoring everything going on around him. Ann's heart skipped a beat. She knew she had to be looking at Jack Driscoll.

"Ann," Carl said. "I don't believe you've met—"

"It's all right. I know who this is," Ann interrupted.

"How do you like your eggs?" Lumpy called to her.

"Scrambled," she told him. She nodded toward the man he was shaving. "No stubble," she added with a smile. Lumpy chuckled and gave her a half salute.

Ann turned back to Jack. "Thrilled to meet you," she told him. "It's an honor to be part of this."

"Gee, thanks," he said.

"Actually, I'm familiar with your work," Ann added.

"Really?"

She nodded. "The thing that I most admire is the way you have captured the voice of the common people."

"Well . . . that's my job," he said slowly.

"I'm sure you've heard this before, Mr. Driscoll," Ann said, leaning toward him. "If you don't mind me saying, you don't look anything like your photograph."

His eyes widened. "Excuse me?"

"Wait a minute!" Carl said. "Ann—"

"Well, he's so much younger in person," Ann said to

Carl. She turned back to Jack. "And much better looking."

"Ann!" Carl said. "Stop! Right there!" He wished he could slap his hand over her mouth, but she was too far away.

Ann stared at Jack. He stared back at her, frowning. She thought he should be smiling. She'd just given him a compliment she was sure any writer would love to hear. "I was afraid you might be one of those self-obsessed literary types," she rushed on. "You know, the tweedy twerp with his head in a book and a pencil up his—"

Someone behind Ann gave a loud cough. She glanced over her shoulder—and saw Jack Driscoll. The *real* Jack Driscoll. The one who exactly matched his picture in the theater programs she'd seen. Older than the man across from her. Tweedier. And obviously insulted.

Ann opened her mouth . . . but what could she say? She'd just made a fool of herself in front of one of the most talented writers in New York.

"You must be . . . Ann Darrow," the real Jack said. He couldn't believe she thought he looked old. Or that she thought Mike the soundman was better looking than he was! Or that she didn't like his favorite suit!

Ann had to get out of there. She jumped up from the table and ran out onto the deck. Preston followed.

"Help me, Preston," she moaned. "How do I get off this boat?"

"It didn't go *that* badly," Preston said. But Ann knew he was only trying to be nice.

"It was a disaster!" she told him.

Preston sighed. "He'll come around. Trust me."

But she doubted it. As far as she could see, she had offended Jack Driscoll so badly that he was never going to forgive her.



Jack sat on a pile of hay in the large cage he used as a bed. He wondered if he'd get used to the stink of the hold by the time they reached their destination. He doubted it. The stench of the pile of dung left behind by a camel was the worst thing he'd ever had the misfortune to smell.

According to Choy, the sailor who had gotten him settled in his quarters, the crew sometimes captured animals and sold them. That explained the bottles of chloroform stacked against one wall. At least none of the animals was currently in residence. Jack had the place to himself.

"What have you got for me?" Carl asked as he entered the hold.

Scratch that. He only had the place to himself when Carl

wasn't down there checking up on him and the script. Jack stared down at the sheet of paper spooling out of his typewriter. "We're on the beach. The guy's been knifed. She stumbles backward as he sinks to his knees."

Carl's dark brown eyes gleamed. "That's great, Jack. He's on his knees, he's bleeding and? And?"

The ship rolled with a big wave. The cages rattled. Jack could feel his face turning green. He swallowed hard. "Ah, huh . . . yeah," was all he managed to say.

"Fend it off, Jack. You can make it to the end of the scene! Focus!"

Jack started to type. "Okay. She's staring at the body. It horrifies her. She's in shock."

Carl threw up his hands. "And she screams!" he exclaimed.

Jack dutifully typed in the scream, although he wasn't sure if Carl's star, Miss Ann Darrow, would be able to handle even that much acting. She was hardly more than a chorus girl. Why didn't Carl understand that?

"Compliments of Lumpy, the chef," Jimmy, the youngest of the sailors, called as he strode into the hold with two steaming bowls of gray slop. "Lambs' brains in cheese-and-walnut sauce."

Jack squeezed his eyes shut. He couldn't stand to look at the stuff, let alone eat it. Not with the waves rocking the ship—and his stomach. Jack wondered if even Lumpy—who was also the vet, the barber, the dentist, and chief medical officer—managed to eat his own cooking. He was so scrawny that Jack doubted it.

"Okay. She's screaming. He's sinking to his knees. There's blood everywhere, lots of blood." Carl practically rubbed his hands with glee. Jack was giving him good stuff, just the way Carl knew he would.

"That's not how it is. When a man's knifed in the back, there ain't much blood," Jimmy interrupted. "And he doesn't scream. The only sound he makes is a rush of air, like when you puncture a ball. He drops fast, like a stone. It's the shock."

"It's just a movie, kid," Jack told him.

"There's no such thing as a slow death, see?" Jimmy continued. "Not at the end. At the end it's always fast. The light in a man's eyes, one minute it's there, and then, it's gone. Nothing."

"Are you getting that, Jack?" Carl asked. Jack needed to get this stuff down. It was details like these that would make the script sing.

“Jimmy!”

Jimmy, Carl, and Jack all looked toward the voice. Hayes stood at the entrance to the hold. “You run those ropes up on deck like I told you?” Hayes asked.

According to Choy, Hayes was almost like a father to Jimmy. Choy had told Jack that Hayes had found Jimmy stowed away on the ship years before, half starved and beat up. The whole crew had basically adopted the kid, but Hayes especially had taken a liking to him.

Jimmy shot Hayes a nod and dashed up the stairs. Carl leaned over Jack’s typewriter to make sure Jack had gotten down all of Jimmy’s details about how a man looked when he was dying.

You shouldn’t be worried about the script, Jack wanted to tell his buddy. You should be worried about your star. He doubted Ann Darrow knew how to do much more than fall on her behind to get a laugh.



Several weeks later, Jack couldn’t believe he’d ever had a moment’s doubt about Ann’s acting ability. She was amazing. She could interpret his words better than any actress he’d ever worked with. The two of them had grown very