

Books now being pulled out one-by-one and handed back into the crowd as silent onlookers gaze in fear at the names printed in gold on each of the book covers. The store silent, lone figures leaving, stepping out into the street, books dwindling until a few lie untaken by relatives who had packed up and moved on. These he will send to the state capitol.

Teddy and I Go Kong / Kenneth Bernard

It has been months since Teddy and I have been home. Sometimes it seems like years, but I know it has only been months because here and there I get intimations of real time and space. Teddy is my infant son. He was just born, but already he is aging rapidly. In the beginning he was all flippers and stumps, but then things began to grow out. I thought, for a time, he would be octoploid, but I was wrong. After the fourth month he settled down nicely. He loved his nursing but gave it up early, in fact after his seventh week. I took him, on that occasion, to see *King Kong*. It was a hit with him from the start. He cooed and gurgled throughout the movie. And we have since seen it a dozen times or more. Soon he will be a match for Kong, but of that later. It started out as a perfectly ordinary occasion. That is, Teddy was dressed especially for the occasion by his mother. He wore a blue sailor suit. I was given a diaper change and a bottle. In the theater I bought popcorn and thoroughly enjoyed it. Between the first and second showing of *Kong* I washed it down with orange soda. Between the second and third showing, I urinated. There was no fourth showing, but the theater remained dark, and Teddy and I slept like babies.

That night the paraplegics in W-4 held a strategy meeting. They were playing the C.P. basketball team the following night and, although they had only three good limbs among them compared to a full count for the C.P.'s, the C.P.'s were all violent shakers and could not call their plays fast enough. It was, as expected, a slaughter, the paraplegics winning 2-0. Four broken wheelchairs and some mangled mechanical limbs, but that was a matter for Properties.

The next day we went down to Times Square, had a quick orange drink and donut, and made the 10:00 a.m. movie. It was an early Wayne war movie, and the Japs fell like flies. I offered Teddy his bottle, but he knocked it out of my hand. "Corn," he said, meaning popcorn. I immediately gave him some. He had never spoken before. Overnight he seemed to have grown. I thought about calling his mother, but the day was still young. The second time through the war movie I felt I was having double vision.

And then I realized what it was. The Japs seemed to be Viet-Cong. In the paraplegic preview the Puerto Rican attendants turned into Cong fighters every night. W-4 became a battlefield, they infiltrated, and mutilated the men even more, cutting digits of fingers, ears, cocks. Those men were really screaming in terror. But during the day the P.R. attendants were very nice, especially about masturbation and things. And never took money. Only occasionally did they seem to be plotting in a foreign language.

By and large the C.P.'s were a dirty bunch, pooping and peeing in their pants when excited. Their cheerleaders never finished one cheer the entire evening. Corporal Puglisi, who had no legs, but one good arm, was top scorer, making the one basket (a three-footer) of the game. He also played dirty, punching the C.P.'s whenever he could since by the time they finished protesting, no one could remember the details. It was during the game that Puglisi got his idea for the annual pageant. Something about the way the paraplegic team rolled down the court ("in stately majesty," he said) made him think they should do "Victory at Sea."

Teddy meanwhile had fallen asleep. When he awoke, Wayne was mopping up again, and we left. We went next door and stayed a week. They were doing a Judy Canova festival, and Teddy learned to eat hot dogs and sing "I Didn't Know the Gun Was Loaded," a real Canova hit. He kept clenching his fist and I recognized it as a Kong trait. He was getting very big. As we worked our way down 42nd Street, the movies got raunchier. I wasn't sure I liked exposing Teddy, but he seemed to take it all in his stride. Sometimes he simply misunderstood. Installment eight of fifteen on *The Sensuous Man* was on tongue movements. All the men in the audience had their tongues out and were exercising by the numbers as per instruction. Teddy went right along with them, cooing and gurgling with delight. He clutched my arm throughout, and only later did I discover the black and blue marks.

"Victory at Sea" was a flop. It consisted mainly of a tableau that became a slowly moving flotilla on wheels, with Puglisi as admiral. It only dawned gradually on the select audience of concerned citizens that the flotilla was bearing down on *them*, but they had nowhere to go. Puglisi's secret orders were a stump for every guest, and he damn near succeeded. Everyone took the upset well. Polite smiles and titters. Raquel Raquel, popularly known as the bazoom queen, retrieved the situation with a rousing song, the first two stanzas of which went:

Kill a Jap, kill a Cong
With a bong, bong, bong,
And we'll all take vict'ry
In our stride!

Thrill the boys, Jews or goys,
Never say, "Oi, oi, oi,"
We're the vets, place your bets,
We have pride!

She was followed, after an encore (*Bullets or Bums*), by Gerald Panucci, a new Borsht comic, who told some really swell jokes like where does a quadriplegic get the ring when he marries? (And what happens when he gets a hard-on?) He felt it was better every time to take the bull by the horns and call a spade a spade. Ice cream and cake topped off the event, and it was all early to bed after a full day.

The more we saw *King Kong* the more we seemed to see in it. We, of course, went right to the heart of the matter in our wonderment—namely what would sexual union be like between Kong and the maiden? That is what throbbed behind every viewer's mind. And that is why those men raced through the jungle with such urgency. They must get to her before Kong has an erection and penetration takes place. Yet repeated viewings reveal Kong to be a perfect gentleman in that respect. Or was it simply that he could not find it? Or having found it, believe it was what it seemed to be? (*What?*) Beast that he was, he revealed the civilized man's flaw of too much thought and insufficient instinct. Had he settled down to quick domesticity, there would have been no frenzy. (No one can think for a moment that anyone would have wanted to save the maiden after she had been *used*. Like all women, the blond (?) beauty needed only a good consummation, and in time his finer qualities would have been apparent to her. In that tropical, magical, pre-Edenic jungle there might well have been little Konglets to while away the years, and a new legend for mankind. But it was not to be. Kong could not find it, or didn't know what it was. (*It?*) In this frustration, this loss, this dream movie rises to tragic heights. (Puzzling fact: Where *is* Kong's penis? It is never shown, yet he is only a big ape. What offense in having him approach the girl initially with an erection?—to give point to her screams.) (Question: Is Kong *female*? Is this a disguised lesbian movie, with Kong really a butch Queen Kong?)

Meanwhile, in W-4 it's quiet time. Medal of Honor winner and Paraplegic of the Year, Harold Rosenbloom, is visiting the men. It is official and it's a morale booster. Mainly because Harold has left W-4 and entered into the mainstream of American life. Married to an orthodox girl from Yemen (a former street cleaner in Tel Aviv), he has adopted half a dozen black orphans from the ghetto and had them circumcised. There will be no authentic, genital Rosenblooms because Harold, in the process of killing 78 *gooks* from three months to 91 years of age, has lost *all* appendages. He is a true quintiplegic. (The rumor is that his wife blows his nose, as is only

right.) He is also incapable of any gainful employment because he is stupid. However, he tells the men that, in addition to his total-plus disability, he makes \$14,000 to \$20,000 a year, not including expenses, speaking to paraplegic and community groups in the Northeast area. (Suburban housewives, he confided, get excited by stumps, anything stiff, steady, and ready, ha-ha.) Harold gets anything he wants because he gave for his country. No politician in his district would dare to run for office without having his picture taken shaking Harold's shoulder. Harold will be rich (he even endorses products) one day for he is a pioneer in a new career-field. Puglisi throws the only fly in the ointment. "What happens," he wants to know, "when we all get into the act and there ain't enough amputees to go around?" Rosenbloom replies that he has never considered himself an "amputee." Puglisi has to satisfy himself with that for an answer. But later Rosenbloom says that with 2,000-3,000 new paraplegics being produced a year, not to mention the fact of expanded wars, new wars, and secret wars (*and* the increasing domestic paraplegics), there is room for more like him. There is every reason to believe, he says, that more than half of them will be in permanent institution-type situations, thus providing a continuing circuit for morale-boosters like himself. None of it makes much sense, but Puglisi grunts and appears to be thinking about it. In honor of the occasion, the men have prepared a special demonstration that Harold will be sure to appreciate. Government research has just come up with its first hygiene unit for war heroes. Clarence Johnson, a black boy from Newark, demonstrates. It is a cross between a dental and electric chair, and Clarence is quite excited. The P.R. aides get him hooked up in about five minutes. Then Clarence, who has no arms, but all the control of the natural ex-athlete, gets to work with his feet and shoulders. After ten minutes he is a mass of sweat, but everyone is rooting for him. For a few seconds it looks as if everything will go kaput, but in a burst of concentration he comes through, he succeeds, he wipes his own ass for the first time in two years. There is a lot of the sound of one hand or foot clapping.* Obviously it is not as good yet as a Yemenite special, and Rosenbloom leaves quickly, which is rather rude of him. Next year the men are promised a total environment machine to handle toothbrushing, light washing, combing, scratching, even sex. The men argue a lot over who will be the first to live in it.

Teddy has positively bloomed. He now eats, in addition to Hershey Bars, hot dogs, donuts, popcorn, Baby Ruths, Mounds, Almond Joy, twizzlers of all flavors, pizza, hamburgers, knishes, Bit-O-Honey, O'Henry, Non Pareils, and chocolate kisses, which he unwraps himself and eats with kissing sounds. Although he still must crawl to the bathroom, he is toilet-trained.

* Clarence will be a frequent source of pleasure and amusement as the movie progresses. For example, on one occasion right after the machine wipes his ass it smears his face. "Let them eat shit!" he shouts with a shit-eating grin. He is used to setbacks.

He is growing hair in his arm pits, and elsewhere, too, I suspect. I called his mother the other day and we had a pleasant conversation.

"Where are you?" she said.

"At the movies," I answered.

"Oh," she said.

And hung up. We have always lived in New York City and enjoyed it. The only thing I don't like about Teddy's going to the bathroom alone is that they are so dirty. He comes back wet and stinking from the urine on the floor. Fortunately I have the extra diaper, which has become a rag of all purposes. My wife is from Connecticut, originally, and our first joke was my pronouncing her home state "Conneckticut." The bottle I have lost. Teddy never needed it. Some rat probably sucked all the milk away while we were sleeping. Last night I had the bizarre dream that I was Kong and my wife was the white maiden. Teddy, of course, was our first-born. It is unbelievable how large he is getting. Even though he can only kneel at the urinal, he gets everything in quite easily. It is possible that we are being followed. Or observed. I regret that movies these days do not have the *March of Time* or *Movie-Tone News*. I'm not up on things.

The paraplegics in W-4 are kept regularly posted, of course. They have a great interest in the wars because part of them, they feel, is still there. It is a psychic thing. Fortunately they have their diversions. Their head nurse, Hewlitt, for example, is gorgeous. She has ripe round buttocks, milk bursting breasts with large nipples, a small but strong waist, and zooming hips that make pleasant handful bulges where they meet her thighs. If you put your hand in the dark corner of her thighs and body, it is flesh like warm water, smooth and sinkable. But apparently no cunt. At least that is the word. Another diversion is TV. The food is terrible, but the men play games. Monopoly is very popular. All the sex magazines, of course. Jane Fonda, minus a leg, hangs on the wall. And Marilyn Monroe with a double mastectomy. Under Marilyn's picture: "War is hell." Raquel Raquel hangs with hooks covering her pubic hair demurely. The staff encourages these interests. They find it realistic. Some day these men will want to marry legless, even cuntless, girls and settle down somewhere. Perhaps that is why Hewlitt is head nurse. And who plays head night nurse? That is a very interesting question.

We saw Kong for the fifteenth time about six months later. The fact is, my wife is very hairy. She has hair all over her body and shaves it several times a day. What is quite clear but has never been commented on is that Denham, the impresario of the movie, is really a mad scientist in the tradition of Nathaniel Hawthorne's heroes. When he says "Beauty and the Beast," he has only one thought in mind, namely an unholy copulation. For this he needs, and finds, a dumb blond (I insist on that). He is also, obvi-

ously, a voyeur, because he intends to *watch*. Can you imagine that scene? —*King Kong laying Fay Wray*. Denham can, and it is surely a knock-out. It occurs to me now that the movie does show Kong's penis, at the very end, when he is climbing it to escape. When the planes come and shoot their tiny sperm bullets, it is not so much at Kong as at his penis, to the tip of which he has finally got Fay Wray. And when he lets go of it, he falls to his death. The penis is kept as a monument, hollowed out with offices and elevators, and called the Empire State Building. And New York is called the Empire State (the King Kong penis state: it is our answer to the jungle out of which Kong came). What must that do to the psyches of New Yorkers? But some of them know that it is really Kong's penis, still living among us, and steer clear of it. So Denham is a *voyeur*. He is also, among other things, a demon hymenologist. His alter ego is the black chieftain or witch doctor who says to Fay Wray in his guttural best, "You go to Kong!" I don't really mind my wife's hair, but it does raise certain doubts at times. Teddy accidentally strangled a man in the crook of his arm today. It was a drunk who had fallen asleep on his shoulder. In a week his body will smell and they will take him out. But we shall have moved on.

In the interests of normalcy, Dr. Prothero (Eddie Prothero, to his friends), a guidance counselor, used to bring his plump wife and children to visit W-4 often. "Let 'em see a little normal, everyday nookie," he used to say to the staff. His wife giggled a lot and took a good deal of poking until one day a hook got caught and ripped her dress off. In ten seconds, thanks to other hooks, she was a shivering, giggling, weeping, naked mass, and Dr. Eddie never brought her again. He thought hooks in his wife's cunt and up her ass was going too far. It was not normal. No woman ever got pregnant with a hook up her ass.

That is not Kong's problem. His problem is that he has to come all the way to New York City to find his penis. Meanwhile he has to sublimate a lot by fighting pterodactyls and lizards. He must be a little confused because he has carried his woman across the threshold and now what does he do? (Incidentally, what did he do with all the black maidens he had been receiving each year from the natives? The answer, I think, is obvious, although not mentioned in the film. He ate them. Those black maidens never really knew what they were screaming about. They must have been quite surprised when he put them in his mouth. He might not even have been hungry, but what else could he do? However, for Fay Wray it is different. King Kong never knew true love until Fay Wray. She is his destiny. He knows, on some deep instinctive level, that she is not to be eaten, that her use is something other. With Fay Wray something is born in Kong, and reborn in the world. And so he must go to New York City to claim his penis.) It is odd, in a way, that New York City should have Kong's penis.

There is a guilt about it, but buried. And Kong, in the jungle, has a sense of incompleteness. (There is never even a hint of a Mrs. Kong.) Although he is big, and a great fighter, there is something of the child in him. It shows, for example, when he holds Fay Wray in his fist (she is screaming) and he cocks his head quizzically at her. There is a certain charm and innocence that is not repeated until the end when the sperm bullets are hurting him and all he is doing is holding on to his penis with one hand and Fay Wray with the other. (Where is his mama?) What is this squealing doll and what does she want from me? He has no awareness yet, but it will come to him. He will have to go through hell first, and when he finds what he needs, what he lacks, it will be too late. For Kong must be destroyed before he finds his penis, gains complete possession of it. Once he regains it, there will be no stopping him. Fay Wray will have had it. At this perception we can see that Carl Denham is also either God or Satan or a gypsy fortune teller. Obviously Kong will never be a solid citizen. He will want only to screw Fay Wray. For that is his destiny and Denham knows it. But he is a business man also, so he wants to film it, then stage it. And perhaps that is his mistake. He is so busy filming and staging that he doesn't realize it is *happening*. Beauty has captured the Beast. Now it is the Beast's turn to capture Beauty. And that will be history.

(A small digression here. There is a wonderful scene where Kong, in search of Fay, is climbing up the side of a building. A middle-aged woman is sleeping alone in a room. Perhaps it is her first visit to the big city. Something, perhaps instinct, awakens her, and she sees Kong's eye looking at her. It takes up almost the whole window. Of course she screams her head off, which only makes Kong more curious. Is this possibly Fay? He reaches in and gropes with his hand as the woman continues screaming and tries to avoid the hand, but she cannot. Kong scoops her up, takes her outside the window, realizes she is not Fay, and crushes and/or drops her to her death. This is what you might call a nightmare come true. The folks back home were right. But it could have been worse.)

The big push in W-4 comes on a Tuesday night. Puglisi loses two fingers of his last limb to the P.R.-Cong invaders. He is sore as hell about it but doesn't lose his captaincy of the basketball team. The Cong are small and come through the air vents about 2:00 a.m. with foliage in their helmets. They speak Spanish and carry razor sharp machetes to make the men think they are Cuban cane-cutters. But they don't fool anybody. They are Viet-Cong, and they are taking over the city. Right now they are living by the thousands in the sewers. At night they come up like rats and waterbugs, infiltrating the weak links in the chain of civilization. Of course they smell, particularly of hair oil and garlic. A strange thing about them is that if you sleep you don't notice them because they leave you alone. Even if you are

awake but *pretend* to be asleep you can usually escape mutilation. Their main intent is just to pass through. After that, who knows where they go? Perhaps they raid the kitchen. Anyway, Puglisi is stupid. He is obviously awake and stares at them. They lop off two fingers, and he says, "Hey, what the fuck—" then is silent. Probably he is in a state of shock at seeing the blood spurt. But the Cong never forget they are P.R. attendants either. They give him an injection, stop the bleeding, and bandage. Puglisi then sleeps like a baby. Later, the next day, he will agonize and rant and rave about what the FBI and CIA are and are not doing. The country, he says, is going to the dogs. No one is inclined to disagree.

Meanwhile, Teddy and I have been seeing some Ronald Reagan and Ronald Coleman movies. (It is a Ronnie month.) Reagan loses a leg or two in one, but it is all very odd. Odd because Kong is somehow getting into their movies. At first he was just a shadow vaguely showing through the screen. It seemed he was there, in the theater, standing behind the screen, looking out at us, maybe waiting. It was a very scary thing. And then, suddenly, he's *in* the movie. Ronald Coleman is making love like a true Englishman. "My dear," he says, rolling the "r," "you are simply adorable tonight, ravishing, in fact. Quite." And as he is smiling at the woman, Kong's right arm comes from off screen, his hand grabs Coleman's neck and squeezes. Coleman turns white. It is clear he wants to say something off-handed and polite to cover the fact that he is being strangled. But he doesn't. He can't. He flaps a little, shrugs, and collapses. Then Kong's arm withdraws. The woman shakes Coleman. "Darling," she says (she is ad-libbing desperately), "darling, are you all right?" He obviously isn't any more, and she screams. And that, of course, is what Kong is waiting for. Maybe this screamer is Fay Wray. But it is also the end of the movie. It's been changed completely. In another movie, Robert Taylor is a buffalo hunter. He is killing all the buffalo. He is not eating them. At one point he is chasing a herd of buffalo. Suddenly they turn and chase *him*. And they are being led by Kong. Taylor is frightened. He whips his horse and croaks out harsh commands. But Kong and the buffalos are gaining. It looks pretty weird, Kong leading all those buffalos, but also sort of majestic. Soon Kong's hands are almost on the back part of Taylor's horse. The moment is very tense. The horse, of course, is terrified. He has never had a giant gorilla leading a buffalo charge at him. What is going through his head is impossible to describe. And then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly—*Teddy* lets out a blood-curdling roar that makes half the audience pee in their pants. My hair stands on end. He is becoming monstrous. I could never explain to his mother. Thank god he still recognizes me!

Saluting the flag is always a problem in W-4. Every morning the loud-speaker emits the national anthem and the pledge. Then some news flashes

of interest to the men, and stock quotations, followed by restful music. Raquel Raquel has gotten married for the third time. The lucky man is her body guard. It will make for a good working arrangement. On the J. Carson show, Raquel reveals that she wears only pajama bottoms to bed—"To let me nipples breathe," she says. It drives the audience wild. "And what about your cunt?" screams Puglisi. They turn off the TV, and so to bed. Which is not so peaceful as it sounds. The rats have found W-4 a haven. First of all, administration and personnel deny that there *are* rats. Then, the men have limited mobility against them. Third, food is plentiful, or rather garbage, which is not swept up or collected daily. Most of W-4 sleep with tubes on their penises. The tubes lead to containers on the floor which should be emptied regularly but are not. The rats lick the overflow (probably for the residual drug content). Sometimes they knock the containers over and drink directly from the tube, like babies. Conrad, who has all his limbs but is helpless from the neck down because of a spinal injury, is slowly getting his fingers chewed off because he has no sensation there. It took him a year to learn to breathe properly again. One night he woke up, saw a rat gnawing on his thumb, thought he was dreaming, and went back to sleep again. It is only a matter of time before the rats get into bed with him. But he is very philosophical about it. He has severe burns over much of his body because an attendant left him in a defective shower a month ago. He looked like a boiled lobster but felt nothing. The smell of putrescent flesh is giving the other men some relief from the rats. To help Conrad out, they throw their garbage under his bed to divert the rats from his body. Conrad wishes he could get a hard-on and talks a lot about Raquel Raquel. The men humor him. He cannot even feel himself defecating. Lately he has given up his crew cut for a hippie-style hairdo. Conrad was a marine at eighteen and got hit by rocket fire at nineteen. His family objects strenuously to his hair, and the latest word is that they will not visit him until he cuts it. They don't want the neighbors smirking and saying "We hear Conrad's gone hippie." Conrad has given several of the rats names and thinks he can distinguish their sexes. If he survives he wants to be either a radio announcer or a folk singer.

I can just imagine Kong leading a rat charge. On New York City. "Flash: thirty million rats, lead by the notorious Kong, have just demolished Perth Amboy, and are heading for the Hudson Tunnel. It is estimated that by the time they reach the Tunnel their ranks will have swollen to fifty million." Wouldn't that set New York City on its heels? And if they were organized—ten million over the George Washington Bridge, ten million through the Lincoln Tunnel, ten million scouring through Westchester, and so on—what a movie it would make. They would leave one exit open, say the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel. But the people in Brooklyn would have only that same single exit. Picture it. A million Manhattenites surging in at one end and a

million Brooklynites at the other. They meet in the middle, scream at each other to turn back, and get mashed against one another by the frenzied masses behind them. By the time the people at either end get the idea that the tunnel's impassable, it is filled like a gigantic strudel, a rat strudel. What a job to clean it out. I told Teddy about it and he nearly bit off my arm. He was very excited. I remind him that I am his father and he calms down. People definitely stay clear of us now in the movies. We've seen Garbo, Stanwyck, Bogart, all of them. I don't feed Teddy any more, although he is growing all the time. He does not seem to be hungry. I suspect that he considers people lollypops, but I have no evidence as yet. Next week we see the Weissmuller Tarzan movies, and I am apprehensive. I think spring is approaching.

Even in W-4 the seasons change. Rat babies everywhere. Raquel Raquel has annulled her marriage because of physical cruelty. Puglisi spins out theories endlessly. Conrad has dictated a proposal of marriage to her. The men are considering challenging the multiple sclerotics to a track meet. Hewlitt has admitted to a cunt. And the Cong have suspended night raids to celebrate Easter. The first Cambodian paraplegics have arrived, and it is a diversion to watch them adjust to limbless life or lifeless limbs. The ward has adopted a war orphan, Chang-Wu, a bright-eyed and alert Vietnamese who has a pet water buffalo he thinks is his mother. The secret aim is to get Chang-Wu to the U.S. so he can masturbate all of them in payment for their sacrifices. The new men don't find this funny. The Anti-Defamation League is sending a speaker next week, also the Catholic War Veteran's League. The movie very much has an on-going sense of life, and I am getting inklings of how it will all come out.

Kong is magnificent. He is *Civilization and Its Discontents* in a nutshell. Kong is dead! Long live Kong! Teddy pops off heads now. Like grapes. Whole theaters of headless bodies. The police are baffled. He is beyond clothes. Called spouse but could not utter a word. "I know it's you!" she said. And hung up. Things best settled resolutely. Brief stop at flea circus yesterday. Teddy totally tranquillized by the little creatures. Have not watched television at all! I dread the change of life. Sonja Henie was without question a superb ice skater. Teddy . . . still loves me.

The real hooker is that they are using real combat vets! R.R. has answered Conrad. Puglisi soon out to become Rosenbloom's *aide de camp*.

Teddy is in the latrine. He has been there two hours. He has grown so large he can't get out. He occupies all the space, and the walls are cracking. Soon the street wall will collapse and Teddy will step out. It will be the end for us. I have no hold on him. He is sixteen feet tall and over four thousand pounds.

This movie has everything.

Kong is good. Kong is great.