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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DONKEY KONG CIRCUS PART 1

***** 1

DONKEY KONG CIRCUS PART 2

***** 9

DONKEY KONG PART 1

***** 21

DONKEY KONG PART 2

***** 33

DONKEY KONG Jr. PART 1

***** 41

DONKEY KONG Jr. PART 2

***** 52



DONKEY KONG CIRCUS

PART I

Mario tapped the final nail into place, then wiped the sweat from his brow as he stepped off the ladder. He took a few steps back, looking up at his handiwork.

"And there you have it!" he exclaimed, smiling as he read the words: **Mario's circus**, in bold lettering across the large sign.

It was mounted above the doorway that was the entrance to a grand tent, lights dangling from ribbons going every-which-way.

As he watched a nail came loose and the heavy sign hung crooked above the door.

"Well, I think it looks better this way."

Mario pocketed his hammer and stepped into the giant circus tent.

"Ah! Mario!" Mayor Hollen T. Colepepper exclaimed. "Is it up?"

"As well as it will," Mario answered, smiling as he clapped his hands together. "Well used that sign, corner's a bit rusted, but it'll hold til the show's over I'm sure."

"You need a new one," Colepepper laughed. "Maybe someday you'll make enough money to pay me back, then you can *buy* a new one!"

"Yeah," Mario grumbled, moving on passed him. "I'd get more people comin' if you'd let me do the show my way."

"You came to *me* for your start, Mario," Colepepper warned, holding his suspenders by his thumbs. "Don't you forget."

"You won't let me!" Mario called back. He waved away the mayor, walking towards the construction crew towards the back.

"What are you doing?!" He shouted. "The *blue* curtains go over the blue stage, those are red."

The crew started tearing down the curtains, nearly ripping one.

"No, no!" Mario yelled, running up to them. "Just, get off. I'll do it myself!"

Shoving the crew aside he looked up at the torn curtains. He sighed, annoyed with having to deal with a new setup crew every time he changed cities.

"Having trouble?" Colepepper asked casually as he stood beside the ladder Mario was climbing.

"Give me a set crew," Mario demanded, not looking down as he laced the strands of curtain through the nail. "One that knows what they're doing. And aren't colorblind!"

Colepepper laughed. "Yes, it's a lot to get used to," he agreed. "But it is what you wanted."

Mario climbed down, the curtain now draped over his shoulder. "What I *want*," Mario clarified. "Is to have one, good, opening night." He jabbed a finger in Colepepper's face and raised an eyebrow, warning him not to do anything that might ruin that.

When he thought he'd made his point, he lowered his hand and started dragging the curtain over to the red stage.

"Of course," Colepepper nodded after Mario had left. "It's already been taken care of."

He stomped away, returning to the employee tents.

Later that night, when at last the stage was set and everything was in its place, they opened for the first show of the week.

Mario prepared himself behind the curtains, looking at his usual attire in the backstage mirror. Red overalls and matching red hat weren't exactly customary ringmaster clothes, but as long as people knew him as he was, he didn't much care what he looked like.

"You look like a plumber," Mario told himself. "... Or a rail worker..."

"And what's wrong with that?"

Mario whipped around, nearly knocking over the mirror. "Pauline!" he smiled. "You came to opening night!"

"Of course I came!" Pauline laughed. "There's been talk all over town of something big happening tonight. Do I dare ask what the secret is?"

Mario itched the back of his neck. "Secret?" he asked. "Well... I don't any secret. And I certainly don't remember telling people anything big was happening at the show."

"Then you haven't seen the fliers?" Pauline asked.

"Fliers?"

Pauline handed Mario a rolled up poster she'd pulled out of her purse. "They were spread all over town," she said. "**Mario's Live-Fire act!** Everyone knows about it!"

Mario shook his head, crumpling the paper in his hand. "It's that Colepepper!" he hissed. "I can't do anything with fire! What's he expecting?"

Pauline shook her head, then looked back at the curtain. "I'm not sure," she admitted. "But the show's starting. If you don't go out and do something-"

"Oh I'll do *something* alright," Mario said, bumping passed her and grabbing the curtain. "Saved you a seat out front, keep an eye out." He gave her a smile and threw open the curtains, the spotlights centering on him just in time.

"*Ladies and gentlemen,*" Mario exclaimed, grabbing the microphone stand as the circus music played from the band on stage. "*Boys and girls! Spectators of all ages, I welcome you back to Mario's Circus! The finest circus in all of Italy!*"

There was a bit of scattered applause and Mario moved to the edge of the stage as the circus acts began filing out. First were the juggling clown twins, each having a sack at their side which they used to add more rubber balls to their act or throw into the audience for the kids. Next was the man on stilts, bending low to hi-five the front row. And finally the trapeze act which climbed up onto the rafters above the arena.

"*Over at the Blue Stage to your left you can see these acts as they perform various dangerous stunts! And on the Red Stage to your right are a few games for the kids! Sack throwing, Ring the bell, and Ring Toss to name a few! Finally back on the center stage, sit and enjoy our brilliant trapeze act! Whoa-*"

Mario ducked as one of the performers swung over his head.

"*And stay until later for the main event, my **Live-Fire Act!***" Mario bowed and waved as he stepped back behind the curtain, ripping off his hat as he looked for Colepepper.

"Colepepper!" Mario hissed. "Where are you!?"

"Mario!" Colepepper laughed as he came up behind Mario. "Seems word finally got around to-"

Mario smacked him. "Got around to me," he growled, jabbing a finger at him. "If you're going to tell the

town you're puttin' me up to something dangerous, you're gonna run it by me first!"

"Don't worry about it," Colepepper smiled, resting a hand on Mario's shoulder. "You've walked a tight rope before, seen it myself. This time, you'll just have a better excuse not to fall!"

Mario shoved him away. "Nope," he said. "I'll be doing a fire act, yes, but not that."

"Well then what?" Colepepper chuckled.

"I'll spit fire," Mario smiled.

Colepepper nodded. "I guess that's just as showy-"

"And you'll try to dodge," Mario finished, dropping his smile.

"Well I don't-"

"You want to mess with my show, I'll make you part of it." Mario fitted his hat back on his head, looking up at the mayor. "You have three seconds to decide before I kick you out of here myself."

Colepepper shook his head. "Mario," he sighed. "Mario, Mario, Mario... I didn't pull you out of Brooklyn so you could pull a stunt like this. You- *eh!*" Colepepper grabbed the top of Mario's head, telling him to be quiet. "You owe me, everything. All of this... it's mine. So you see..."

He brushed off Mario's shirt, and straightened Mario's hate.

"You'll do as I say," Colepepper hissed. "And walk on fire, because that's your job."

Mario glared at Colepepper. "I'll make money from this," he threatened. "And I'll pay you back... and when that happens, I'll be coming after you."

"I wouldn't bother," Colepepper said, walking away. "By the time that happens... I'll be long gone anyway." He tipped his own hat, and nodded towards the curtains. "I'd

say they're about ready for you. Shouldn't keep them waiting."

Colepepper walked away, laughing, and Mario took a moment to find his smile again before going back out on stage.

Mario sat down in a comfortable chair back in the employee tents, resting after the circus was over. It was midnight, and pitch black outside, most of the crew had already either returned home or fallen asleep in their in their tent.

He rubbed his eyes, unable to sleep. Eventually he started pacing the length of the tent, but decided that wasn't enough space and left.

Colepepper's words kept running through his head. How he'd be long gone by the time Mario made any money from the circus...

"And just what do you mean by that?" Mario muttered.

He stopped at the top of the hill the circus was set up on, looking over the city of Verona. It was a big place, yet even still he was surprised by how many people showed up. He supposed people liked seeing dangerous stunts...

"Well I ain'tdoin' it again," Mario huffed, sitting down. He looked at the ground, wondering what he'd have to do instead.

He couldn't do anything to Colepepper, not while he was in control. He needed a way out of Colepepper's grip... but how?

"Mario?" Pauline asked, standing behind him.

Mario waved. "Hey Pauline."

She sat down beside him, smoothing out her dress.

"I waited back in the main tent," she said. "Luca said he saw you come this way."

"Sorry," Mario smiled. "Colepepper's got me wrapped around his finger... And we're not making much off this."

Pauline nodded. "I know it's not my place," she said. "But might I make a suggestion?"

"Of course," Mario nodded.

"Play his game," she told him. "Do something bigger, something that will wipe that smug look off his face."

Mario nodded. "That's up to him... I could make plans, but he seems to have final say in everything, especially if I don't know what he's thinking until opening night... No telling what he expects of me tomorrow..." he looked at his timepiece. "Or I guess, today now."

"He may not tell you," Pauline agreed. "And you're too busy setting up and working here to check for yourself, but I could keep look out in town. Make sure he's not changing the rules on you."

Mario patted her leg. "Thanks," he huffed, getting to his feet. "And you're right, I need to come up with something bigger. I'll do something tomo-today. As much as I hate what he did, we did make more money than usual. If I can keep this up... Within a year I could pay him off."

Pauline's face lit up, then her smile faded. "But- and I know it was my idea, sort of... just, be careful though. Nothing with fire."

Mario nodded, thinking about how close he came to falling earlier that night. "Noted," he agreed. "Maybe I can convince him that I can't pay him back if he kills me."

That night, Mario paced back and forth in his tent trying to come up with a new act. He usually did something with hammers, even did an acrobatic act when he was younger... Eventually he gave up, sitting back in his chair.

In the morning, when he finally woke up, it was to the sound of a large truck nearly backing him over.

Mario ran outside to see the moving truck parking behind the main tent, and right in front of Mario's. Colepepper was talking to the driver and a few men from the crew were unloading what was inside.

"Colepepper!" Mario growled. "What's all this?"

"Ah! Mario!" Colepepper waved goodbye to the driver and led Mario to the stack of boxes and containers the crew unloaded. "Have I got something to show you!"

"No," Mario hissed. "Last night was the last time you do something like that."

"Now Mario-"

"No!" Mario barked. "I know you've invested just as much into this as I have, and I'm the one holding it all together. So unless you want to lose me, I suggest you listen to me when I say; You do *not* get to be making these kinds of decisions without me! I am not some puppet of yours! Understood?"

Colepepper laughed. "Sure," he chuckled. "But let's just wait and see how you feel after I show you this. Trust me, you'll be the King of showbiz soon enough!"

Mario shook his head, looking at the boxes. "What is it?"

Colepepper motioned for one of the crew members to remove a sheet that had been covering a cage. "Mario," he said. "Meet the new star of your show."

The gorilla sitting in the cage looked up at Mario.

Colepepper smiled. "Let me introduce you... to Donkey Kong."



DONKEY KONG CIRCUS

PART 2

Mario stared blankly at the animal in the cage. "That... is a gorilla."

"Yes it is!" Colepepper laughed. "Another venture of mine was unsuccessful, so we got him at a discount!"

"What other venture?" Mario asked skeptically.

"Aha, don't concern yourself with that," Colepepper said, already heading off somewhere. "Keep it on a short leash, and make he stays away from kids."

"Cole-"

"He juggles!" Colepepper called, disappearing behind the tent. "He's already trained, just use him!"

Mario looked down at the gorilla. "Donkey Kong, huh?"

The gorilla looked up at him, holding onto the bars of his cage and whooping. "DooooonkeyKooooong!"

Mario chuckled, looking for the nearest crew staff. "Can I get some help over here?! I don't want this stuff just sittin' here!"

The act later that night went surprisingly well. The audience reacted well to the gorilla juggling act, and after a few days it became more popular than any other act.

After a few weeks Mario found out that in their

spare time the rest of the cast were each training with Donkey Kong. He ran through the man on stilts' stilts, juggled with the juggling clown twins, and he was a fit perfect for the trapeze act!

After two months they decided to put it all together as the Grand finale every night. People from all over Italy were coming to Verona to see the circus which Mario renamed: **Donkey Kong Circus!**

Even just his regular act, juggling pineapples, still seemed to impress the audience. Posters were put up all over the city depicting Donkey Kong performing his act. Though some people mistook the fireworks in the background for balls of fire, yet they still applauded for the show nonetheless.

"I don't believe it!" Mario exclaimed, going over the money they'd made that night. "Colepepper finally had a good idea when he gave us Donkey Kong; this show's never been better!"

"How long until you pay him off?" Pauline asked.

Mario shook his head. "Still a while," he sighed. "A couple months... but that's not too much to ask in payment for a gold mine like this."

"I guess not," Pauline smiled.

Mario stood up, picking up a letter he'd sat on his desk earlier and forgotten about.

"Who's it from?" Pauline asked.

"The bank," Mario sighed. "Something about raising bills since we're makin' more money now." He ripped open the envelope and pulled out the notice. A moment later he crumbled it up and stepped passed Pauline.

"What happened?" Pauline exclaimed.

Mario threw open the tent curtain and stormed out.

Just opening the door to the office building, he could smell the smoke. He marched straight down the center hall, and pulled open the large doors at the end.

"Colepepper!" Mario called. "I've got a few things to say to you!"

SMACK!

Mario flinched before realizing he hadn't been the one who got hit. He stepped into Colepepper's office and saw him standing off to the side with another man.

"You had one job," Colepepper growled, pulling his glove back over his hand. "Do you *realize* how much money I've lost because of you?"

"I'm sorry," said the man, backing away. "It was defective, everything just started falling apart there was nothing I could do!"

WHACK!

"Hey knock it off!" Mario barked, helping the man back to his feet. "What's going on here?"

"Mario!" Colepepper said cheerfully, as if nothing had just happened. "Apologies, another prospect of mine fell through. Mr. Dreary, if you could leave us please."

Mr. Dreary hobbled out of the room, rubbing his cheek.

"And what prospect was this?" Mario hissed.

"Nothing you need concern yourself with!" Colepepper laughed, grabbing Mario by the shoulder and leading him to a chair. He sat behind his desk and lit another cigarette. "Now, how can I help you?"

Mario handed him the crumpled notice. "No," he said. "You don't get to do this. I've done what you said, and I've been payin' you back. You don't get to change the rules."

"I can do as I please," Colepepper corrected. "This whole city's in debt to me, and if I want to demand a higher

price be paid, who are you to argue."

"I can go above your head," Mario threatened. "This doesn't end with you."

Colepepper leaned forward in his seat, a cold smile on his lips. "And why would they believe you? As I said, I own you and everyone else. I could take the world away from anyone. If I told my superiors that you were, say... a jewel thief? A mugger? I could have so many people coming after you, you'd never be able to show your name in any eastern country for the next century."

Colepepper stood, staring down at him, knowing he was untouchable. "You will do as I say," he warned. "Or I *will* take your home, and your circus, everything, away from you. You will pay our new price, or else."

Mario huffed, glaring up at him. "You can't get away with this for long," he grunted. "One day, the people beneath you are gonna realize there's more of them than there are of you." He got up, and walked back to the door.

"Oh and Mario," Colepepper called. "I want you to come up with a new act. Something... *dangerous*."

Mario slammed the door shut.



A week later Mario sat alone in his tent, staring at his bed from behind his desk. *A new act... A new bill... Two days ago you replaced my staff...*

He turned his attention to his lock box. *Your money's cursed, Colepepper.*

Suddenly there was shouting outside, and the lights around the main tent all lit up. Mario hurried outside and called for order, but the crew were all running around in a blind panic.

"What happened!?" Mario barked, grabbing

someone by the collar.

"Donkey Kong escaped!" the staff member stammered. "He broke something of Harris' and Harris scared him off-*eep!*"

The staff member ducked as a light bulb was flung passed her head.

Mario looked up at the top of the big tent, seeing Donkey Kong ripping things off the streamers and throwing them down at people. "D.K.! Stop!"

The gorilla howled, throwing something a broken piece of a wooden pole at Mario.

"Bad gorilla!" Mario shouted, pointing a finger at him. "Get down here!"

Donkey Kong laughed, sitting at the top.

Mario sighed. "Harris!" he called, pushing passed people. "Harris! Someone get me Harris!"

"Harris quit," Luca said, stopping Mario from going on a rampage of his own. "Been tryin' to find ya since this started, but he said he don't want to have a job working with a 'crazed animal' that might kill him."

Mario huffed, shaking his head. "Great... great... Lost a good act..." He turned in place a few times, debating where to go. "I'll talk to him tomorrow. Have somebody get me a ladder."

"Uh- right away sir."

About an hour later, after Mario had climbed up and finally gotten Donkey Kong to come down, he once again sat in his office. This time however, he was sitting by his desk staring at the caged gorilla. If it was possible, he was also angrier than before.

"What do I do with you?" Mario mumbled.

It wasn't like this was the first time Donkey Kong had pulled something like this, but it was the first time it went this far. Luca had had a problem with D.K. for a while now, always stealing food and his stilts. But worst of all was Donkey Kong's endless need to run away.

"S'not like we treat you bad," Mario huffed, folding his arms on his desk and resting his chin on them. "I talk you on walks... you get plenty of exercise, and you get along with everyone... usually."

Mario tilted his head slightly, and Donkey Kong mirrored him. "Where'd you come from?" He'd asked this to Colepepper a few times, but he'd never gotten an answer other than "A failed prospect," or "No need to concern yourself with this."

Donkey Kong smiled.

"Mario?"

Mario looked up, wide eyed at the gorilla. Then he saw Pauline standing in the open curtain. He rubbed his eyes. "I thought you were the monkey..."

"I heard about what happened," Pauline said. "Is everything okay?"

"No," Mario admitted. "No, it's not. I got Colepepper's grip around my throat; I got my acts quittin' on me; and I got a defective ape that only does good on stage."

Pauline sat down on the bed beside Mario. "You told me that if you didn't start paying more, he'd take everything."

Mario nodded.

Pauline looked away. "I... was offered a job over in Paris."

Mario smiled widely. "That's wonderful!" he said cheerfully.

"My first real gig," Pauline laughed. "Up on stage in

front of hundreds of people... If I worked at that, and did good there, I could use that money to help here. I could get Colepepper back from behind. He'd never see it coming."

Mario nodded. "Excellent," he said. "But that doesn't change that Colepepper wants us to do something more dangerous. With time, we could pay him off, and sooner than he expects so he can't change things on us again, but he'll go through with his ways if we don't up the ante here..."

Pauline looked at Donkey Kong. For a long moment she was silent, and Donkey sat down and stared back, a confused look on his face. "Don't hurt D.K.," Pauline finally said, standing. "Don't stoop to his level, alright?"

Mario nodded.

"Promise me," Pauline told him.

Mario put his hands up. "I promise; no hurting D.K."

Pauline stepped passed the cage and pulled open the curtain. "I leave in two days," she said. "I'll try to help you come up with an act in that time, but for now, just get some sleep."

"Right."

Pauline left and Mario returned his gaze to Donkey Kong. "Sorry," he said sarcastically. "I guess we really *can't* throw fireballs at you."

Donkey Kong huffed and laid down to sleep.

"Yeah," Mario muttered. "You and me both."

—

Mario stepped out on stage, the spotlight not reaching the audience, hiding them in shadows.

"We have a very special show for you tonight folks," Mario said proudly. "A brand new act! Don't try this act at

home folks, it's dangerous! Come on out, Donkey Kong!"

The curtain was pulled open slowly, showing the backstage setup. Or at least it would have, but all the furniture and prop storage had been removed.

But the crowd cheered nonetheless for the giant ape that walked onto center stage. He roared at the audience and they all threw pineapples at him to juggle.

Mario laughed, seeing Donkey Kong perform his act, jumping up onto a unicycle. He rode in circles for a while, but eventually the pineapples turned into fireballs.

"Stop that!" Mario ordered.

"I told you I'd take everything away from you," Colepepper said, grabbing Mario from the back of the neck. "I make good on my promises."

"You won't get away with this!" Mario choked. "I can fight this!"

"No," Colepepper corrected, the audience's fireballs turning into guns. They surrounded Mario, trapping him. "You really can't."

Suddenly Mario was falling. Looking up he could see the lid of the trap door as Colepepper closed it on him.

He shouted, angrily smashing his fist into the wall of his office.

"Don't let him get to you," Pauline told him. "He won't win if you just keep holding out."

"I can't hold out any longer!" Mario yelled, pushing her back. "It's all gone, everything I had is gone!"

"That's not true," Donkey Kong said, sitting on the desk. He pulled a book off a shelf and handed it to Mario, but the title looked faded and muddled. "I believe I can help you. Just leave it up to me!"

"I don't think I can D.K.," Mario sighed. "I haven't exactly forgiven you either."

"Allow me to make up for it," Donkey Kong said,

jumping off the desk and pacing the small office. "I have an idea that just might work."

"He's right!" Pauline agreed. "It'll all work out in the end."

"Maybe," Mario nodded stepping up to the office doors. "You better be right about this."

He opened the door and stepped out onto the cliff, looking out over an endless sea. "Any word from the mainland!?" he shouted over the roar of the waves.

Colepepper hobbled up beside Mario. "I'm sorry," he cried. "They're not responding!"

Mario laughed. "Of course not!" he exclaimed, clapping his shoulder. "I warned you your friends would leave you. You lost Colepepper! You lost everything!"

"You're killing me here!" Colepepper shouted as Mario stepped back onto the plane. "You leave me here and I die!"

"Everyone pays their price," Mario told him. "Shouldn't have made yours so high."

The plane flew away, leaving Colepepper alone on the island.

Then he heard the gunshot.

Mario lurched forward, nearly falling out of bed.

Two years had passed since Pauline left for Paris. She'd called, telling him how she'd been offered a full time job there. He'd told her to take it, but now he was wondering if he should've gone down with her, tried to find a normal job in Paris.

He knew he couldn't though. Too many people would be out of work from the circus, and Colepepper wouldn't let him leave anyway. Colepepper seemed to have

anticipated Pauline's plan, and continuously raised Mario's bills on a whim.

Mario had of course gone to the authorities first, but they were owned by Colepepper as well. He'd called senator's office's, but none ever called back. At one point, Mario considered hopping on a plane, finding Pauline, and hiding back in Brooklyn, but Colepepper wouldn't allow that, and he knew that wasn't fair to Pauline anyway.

He was trapped in an endless cycle of just getting close of his goals, and Colepepper pushing him back down again.

Even the other acts were suffering, and their audience was slowly getting smaller. After Harris quit, Angelo and Giovanni were quick to follow. Eventually Mario started putting his staff in costumes and sending them out to do what they could, but soon Colepepper gave them strict orders to stick behind stage, and once again Mario was forced to go out of his way to find new ways to work around Colepepper.

But now...

There was nothing left he could do. He'd tried everything; bribery, cutting deals, rallying the other people who owed Colepepper... he'd done everything short of begging, and giving up completely.

He knew now it was time to do one of those.

So Mario stepped out of his tent into the cold morning, walking around the large tent he no longer took the time to really care for, and heading back into town. As winter was coming, less people were walking the streets of Verona and it was quiet as Mario made his way to the Mayor's office.

He walked in and towards Colepepper's room.

"We need to talk," Mario said, closing the door behind him.

Colepepper smiled, seeing the defeated look on Mario's face. "Come to make another deal?"

"Yeah," Mario said, sitting down. "You win. I'm done fighting this, you win."

"Oh goody for me!" Colepepper cheered.

"Shut up," Mario growled. "I ain'tgoin' without terms of course."

"Of course."

"The circus is yours," Mario sighed. "All I ask is a ticket to Paris-"

"To be with your girl," Colepepper chided. "Yes? What then? Muddle around? It's not like I'd just let you go that easily."

"It's a good deal," Mario mumbled. "I'd suggest you take it."

"Or what?" Colepepper asked. "What would you do to me?"

Mario stared at him. Colepepper's smile was twisted, all-knowing. Mario had no power to stop him, and no one on his side who could do anything except get themselves in debt.

Mario raised a finger at him. "I could-"

"Mario!" The doors flew open behind him, startling him.

"What?!?" Mario barked, rubbing his back after bashing into the arm of the chair.

"Donkey Kong has escaped again!" Luca shouted. "We checked everywhere, but he's gone!"

"Luca!" Mario barked. He shook his fist at him, but couldn't come up with anything to say.

"That ape giving you trouble?" Colepepper chuckled.

Mario took a deep breath and grabbed the door away from Luca, but he stopped before he left. "What did

you mean by that?" he asked, turning back to Colepepper.
"You expect him to?"

Colepepper shrugged. "Considering *your* luck... yeah!
Haha!"

Mario stepped up to Colepepper's desk and grabbed him by the throat. "You're gonna tell me *exactly* where you got that gorilla."

"What's it matter?" Colepepper gasped.

"Because if you don't," Mario growled. "I'll kill you."



DONKEY KONG

PART I

Colepepper stepped off his boat, looking up at the jungle trees that surrounded them. "Can you believe it? An uncharted island inhabited by civil monkeys." He looked over the trees, seeing the enormous gorilla head carved out of a mountain. "Men, this is the greatest discovery of mankind."

"Yes, sir," said the boat's pilot. "Would you like to tranq them yourself, or should I?"

Colepepper smiled, taking the gun. "Start unloading the crates," he ordered, headed into the jungle. He pointed to a few hitmen standing beside the make-shift dock. "You're with me. Come on."

His men had gone ahead a few days ago, before sending word back to the mainland to inform Colepepper of his discovery, so he made quick work of getting to the jungle village hidden deep in the trees. When he arrived, he told his men to spread out, surrounding the village, and keeping their guns aimed at the trees. Up above them, houses hung like baskets on the branches, and rickety wicker bridges swung between them in the warm breeze.

According to intell he'd received, these gorillas seemed to have an affinity for coconuts, so Colepepper pulled one of his bag and tossed it into the village center. A few of them looked at it for a moment, but they didn't go near it.

They were smart enough to build houses, Colepepper thought. I thought you'd be hesitant.

Suddenly more coconuts were tossed into the center, and for the next few seconds the gorillas didn't seem to care where they came from. But once they started picking them up, Colepepper hit the switch on his belt, activating the grenades inside them.

They cracked open, spewing knock-out gas.

The majority of the gorillas seemed to be effected, but for the ones that weren't...

"Move!" Colepepper shouted.

His men jumped out of the trees, shooting the gorillas that tried to attack them. Many apes fled up the mountain, but soon enough Colepepper had enough subjects anyway. "Start getting them in crates! I want them off this island by sundown."

THWACK!

Colepepper flew sprawling across the village center and hit a tree. Behind him, a very angry ape was charging at him.

"Dirty ape," Colepepper swore, firing several shots at the gorillas chest.

It toppled, huffing on the ground, unable to move. But it refused to sleep, staring up at Colepepper.

"You're a tough one," Colepepper chuckled. "You're not that big, but you've got spunk... You might cause trouble for me."

"Hey Colepepper," one of his men said, pointing at the other end of the clearing.

Colepepper watched the last two gorillas running away; a female, and a child.

Colepepper looked down at the gorilla that still struggled to stay awake. "You've got a family!" he laughed, cocking his gun. "I think I've got just the place for you."

One last tranq and the ape was fast asleep.

"This is the one givin' you trouble?" Asked Dr. Andrea. He was a friend of Colepepper's, and a scientist who specialized in... experimental testing.

Dr. Andrea looked down at the gorilla, a locked chain around his neck that kept him close to the wall and far away from any lab equipment. "What makes you so special?"

"My men gave it a name," Colepepper said. "Donkey Kong."

"... Donkey?" Dr. Andrea asked.

"Yeah," Colepepper nodded. "You know, like, 'King Kong,' and Donkey like-"

"Yeah yeah, I get it," Dr. Andrea waved him away, placing stickers along Donkey Kong's arms. "Please excuse me, now. I'll update you on my progress if I make any."

Colepepper tipped his hat, smiled at the sad look on Donkey Kong's face, and walked away.

Colepepper went quiet.

"Well?" Mario grunted. "What did you do to that ape?"

"I didn't do anything," Colepepper corrected. "Dr. Andrea led the research team; they wanted to know just how smart those monkeys were."

"And how smart were they?" Luca asked.

"Smart enough that one of them started saying his own name," Colepepper answered.

"Donkey Kong," Mario nodded. "So what

changed?"

Colepepper stood by his office window. "They tested him," he answered. "Shocking him every time he got the wrong answer. Soon, what had once been a sign of intelligence, became a sign of how badly we'd hurt him."

He turned to Mario. "And then," he sighed. "I pawned him off on you; figured it wouldn't matter."

"Well it does matter," Luca said. "What are we standing around here for? Why aren't we out looking for him?"

"Because Colepepper knew where he went," Mario answered. He looked Colepepper dead in the eye. "So? Where did he go? Back to the island? You said he was protecting his son there, right?"

Colepepper shook his head. "Nope," he chuckled. "Took his kid. Wife too. Most likely he's back at the-"

Crack!

Colepepper slumped against the window and Mario rubbed his knuckles.

"Where's that research lab?" Mario growled.

He made more of a show of it all than he should've.

Colepepper spoke loudly on the phone, calling in 'favors' and ordering the police to escort him to the research facility. The sirens blared far louder than they needed to, and as early as it was people were obviously annoyed. Not that they could do much else but stand on their porch or in their windows as they glared at Colepepper and his troops as they drove through the city.

Mario told Luca to go and calm things down back at the circus, and rode in silence beside Colepepper in the truck at the center of the escort. He tried not to look at the

people watching him through the windows of the truck, but he wondered if they thought Colepepper had finally bought Mario.

When they were finally out of the city, Mario forced himself to just watch the farmland they were passing by.

Nearly two hours later, when they arrived in Modena, the escort seemed to speed up. They sped through lights, and the sirens seemed louder than before.

"What are we doin'?" Mario asked. "Why are we makin' so much noise?"

"I know that ape will have headed down here," Colepepper answered. "Just making sure he knows we're here too."

You're afraid he'll be angry at you, Mario chuckled silently. *That's what all the protection's for.*

At last, they arrived at the facility and the escort stopped, a few masked goons getting out to secure the area. Colepepper and Mario stepped out of the truck and started for the building, the goons keeping an eye on them.

The whole time, Mario felt like he was going about this the wrong way. Even as they entered the research facility he wanted to call off this whole operation... but he knew this was Colepepper's game. What could he do to stop a two hundred fifty pound gorilla alone? He needed Colepepper's help whether he liked it or not.

But still... the escort, the goons... it felt like he was taking it too far, and Mario was caught in the middle.

"Dr. Andrea!" Colepepper exclaimed, greeting his friend. "Everything ready?"

"Of course," Dr. Andrea answered, setting a clipboard down on a counter. "Gave the order only moments ago."

"Order?" Mario asked. "What's ready? What are we doing?"

"We're going to capture your monkey," Colepepper smiled. "Obviously."

"This seems excessive, Colepepper," Mairo growled.

"Who is this?" Dr. Andrea asked, giving Mario an annoyed look.

"This is Mario," Colepepper answered. "He's who I gave Donkey Kong to."

Dr. Andrea turned pale. "And he didn't..." he laughed. "And how many men did you lose to that beast?"

"A few left on their own," Mario admitted, glaring at Dr. Andrea. "But turns out, you treat something nice, they don't plan on killing you."

Dr. Andrea shook his head, moving passed them, back out into the hallway. "Either way," he said. "We'll have that animal back in its cage soon enough-" he froze for a moment, then ran out towards the lobby.

Mario and Colepepper quickly followed, then ducked behind cover as they saw what was happening outside through the windows facing the front courtyard outside. The goons were being torn apart by a very angry ape.

Mario gave a sigh of relief however, seeing that the guns the goons were carrying were only tranquilizers. But it definitely wasn't stopping Donkey Kong. He threw goon against goon, and goon against building, and parts of building at the goons.

And when he was finished, he looked at the doors to the facility. Dr. Andrea was cowering behind the front desk, but Colepepper was stuck looking directly back at Donkey Kong, like a deer in the headlights.

Donkey Kong broke open the door and walked towards Colepepper. He threw the bench away and grabbed Colepepper by the throat, staring him in the eye.

Mario stood slowly, holding his hands up like was surrendering. "Calm down," Mario said. "It's alright. Relax."

Donkey Kong huffed, Colepepper struggling in his grip.

"I... Remember... *you*."

Everyone froze.

Dr. Andrea sat frozen in terror, his mouth wide open. Colepepper seemed to have fallen unconscious from shock, hanging limp in Donkey Kong's giant hands. And Mario felt his legs go weak, and he was at a complete loss for words.

Donkey Kong turned to leave, dragging Colepepper behind him.

"W-wait!" Mario called.

Donkey Kong broke part of the wall getting out, ignoring Mario. Then in an instant, Colepepper pulled a few large tranquilizers from his pocket, and jabbed them all into Donkey Kong's leg.

The ape fell forward, caught off guard and unable to fight against the surprise attack. Colepepper stood, brushing himself off. "And there you have it," he said proudly. "You have the cage ready?"

Dr. Andrea got to his feet, still a little shaken up. "Yes," he answered, staring at the sleeping gorilla. "It'll be here soon."

"I'll take it from here," Mario said, stepping up. "Once we get him on a truck-"

"You are done," Colepepper told him.

"Excuse me?" Mario growled.

Colepepper turned to him. "You're done," he repeated. "Once this ape is under lock and key once more, we'll continue with the experiments."

"I'm not gonna let that happen!" Mario barked.

"That's not your decision," Colepepper smiled. "See, you've already given up the circus, so you've got no real reason to claim this gorilla anyway. And besides that—Ah! *Besides* that, it was mine in the first place. And I've decided, this project wasn't such a failure after all."

He pushed passed Mario to return towards the trucks.

"Then why was I here at all!?" Mario shouted. "Why'd you bring me for this?"

"You were... an unnecessary precaution," Colepepper answered. "Just in case I needed a distraction."

—

With no say in the matter, Mario was shipped back to Verona. When he arrived at the circus they were already taking down the tent, and Mario found a letter on his desk explaining how he'd lost everything.

He crumpled the letter and slammed his fist down on his desk. And of course, that was when Pauline stepped in.

She paused for a moment, unable to look Mario in the eye. "I heard about what happened," she said softly. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Mario told her. "It's Colepepper's fault... Why are you back so soon?"

"I wanted to help!" Pauline said, glaring at Mario like she thought the answer should've been obvious.

"There's not much either of us can do now," Mario sighed, sitting down in his chair. "Colepepper has Donkey Kong, and he's gonna go back to running experiments on him."

"Experiments?" Pauline asked.

"Not sure what kind," Mario shrugged. "But they

shocked him last time, every time he gave a wrong answer. Colepepper said they drove him stupid... but you should've seen the way this ape..."

Pauline sat down. "So we need to get Donkey Kong back," she decided. "How do we get around Colepepper?"

"The only thing I can think of is gettin' him outside his own authority... But he won't go for that; we can't get him out of Italy without a fight."

Pauline nodded. "Luca said they found these gorilla's on a special island. Any chance we can get him to go back there?"

"That's where he's going anyway," Mario said.

"How do you know that?"

"He locked Donkey Kong in a cage, and took him." Mario stood, walking around his desk to the curtain. "Now that he knows these apes are smarter than they originally thought, he'll be going back for more. He'll want to capitalize on this."

Pauline followed Mario and they stepped outside just in time to see the big tent fall down. The circus was done.

"We'll get him at sea," Mario said. "We can't let him get away with this."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Pauline asked. "Let's hurry and catch him."

Mario took one last glance at his crew as they folded up their lives and shook hands before parting ways. They'd spent so much time trying to build this into something, spent so much of their time for this. He hated that it came from Colepepper's pockets.

He hated how tainted his time here felt.

Three and a half hours later, Mario and Pauline finally made it down to the west coast. They hid just behind a rise, watching Colepepper loading his ship. Donkey Kong was unconscious on the ship's deck, and Colepepper stood beside his cage giving orders.

"How do you want to go about this?" Pauline whispered.

Mario thought for a moment. "The police come to mind," he finally admitted. "But I have a bad feeling that if they get their hands on D.K. they won't treat him much better than Colepepper."

"Fair enough," Pauline nodded.

"You're killing me here!" Colepepper shouted. "You leave me here and I die!"

Mario huffed. "I think... we sneak onto the boat."

"What?" Pauline hissed. "That's suicide!"

"We sabotage them," Mario explained. "Get on board, and when they make it to the island and they all get off, we take the boat and leave."

"But then they'd be on the island with the gorillas," Pauline said bluntly. "Colepepper's men have guns."

"Tranquilizers," Mario corrected. "That'll last them only so long. When they're out of ammo, and those apes wake up, Colepepper will have no way off the island. And on top of that, D.K. will be back home, where he belongs."

Pauline was silent, and she grabbed Mario's arm before he could stand.

"That's murder," she told him. "You're positive there's no other way?"

Mario shook his head. "I told you, if the authorities get ahold of the apes, they won't be much kinder to them. If we face Colepepper ourselves, *we'll* be dead. There must be a loser here, and I'm making the decision to let that loser be Colepepper."

Pauline looked over the rise. They were almost done loading. If they went with Mario's plan, they'd have to execute it soon.

"Alright," she said quietly. "Alright, let's sneak aboard."

They sat up on their knees and started to head around the hill, but they didn't make it very far before the barrel of a gun was pressed against the back of Mario's head.

"Hey boss!" the goon shouted. "He's here! Just like you said!"

Mario stood up, facing Colepepper as he came off the boat.

"Well here we are!" Colepepper beamed, raising his arms like he was expecting a hug. "What *exactly* did you hope to accomplish?"

"Well I'd tell you," Mario answered. "But I don't want to."

Colepepper chuckled, then cracked his fist against Mario's skull. "I think I'm done toying with ya," he hissed, crouching and looking Mario in the eye. "But these circus *freaks* on the ship."

"Sir?" asked the goon holding Mario down.

Colepepper turned and started walking away. "We'll leave them on the island," he ordered. "Let them fend for themselves against the gorillas!"

Mario and Pauline were forced to stand, then were pushed towards the ship. As they boarded they passed by the crates, and Mario made his move there.

He ducked to the side and kicked the crate that carried Donkey Kong. Mario was pulled back, but the job was done. Donkey Kong had woken up again.

The gorilla pounded the cage bars and everyone either ducked for cover or were thrown towards the cage as

a sacrifice. Mario and Pauline were chosen as the most worthy candidates. As they hit the deck, the cage broke and Donkey Kong stepped out, angrier than ever.

"Somebody shoot it!" Colepepper barked.

Donkey Kong grabbed the nearest goon and threw him at some of the others. Then someone threw a cage at the back of Donkey Kong's head, toppling him. The cage crashed down on Pauline.

"Pauline!" Mario shouted. "Colepepper! Where are you!?"

Colepepper had disappeared, but his goons were still fighting. Donkey Kong, however, had picked up Pauline and jumped to the top of the ship. He roared, and for a brief moment everyone stopped firing, terrified and knowing that at this point Donkey Kong's frenzy seemed to make him impervious to their tranqs.

But Donkey Kong took advantage of that brief moment, and leapt from the ship. He charged passed the goons who were still too stunned to do anything useful, and took off away from the docks with Pauline still in his grip.

"Pauline!" Mario shouted, jumping off the boat after Donkey Kong. He skid to a stop when Colepepper's men pointed their guns at him.

"Stop!" Colepepper ordered. "... Let him go."

Mario glared at Colepepper, but he didn't care what his motives were right now. Whatever game Colepepper was playing, Mario would win later.

He sped passed Colepepper's men and went after Donkey Kong. Colepepper watched until the red of his overalls had disappeared beyond the hill.

"Let him go," Colepepper mumbled. He took a deep breath and ordered his men to finish loading the boat. With or without Donkey Kong, they were leaving now.



DONKEY KONG

PART 2

Mario ran as fast as he could, but Donkey Kong was faster. Within minutes Donkey Kong was too far away for Mario to see, and Mario was getting tired. He'd run all the way from the ports in La Spezia to a construction site over in Arcola, and Donkey Kong didn't even show signs of slowing.

But at least he stopped.

Donkey Kong swung up the side of the unfinished building, knocking down floors that hadn't been stabilized yet. When he reached about the sixth floor he sat Pauling on the floor above him and stared back at Mario.

Just my luck, Mario grumbled. After all this, not a single carpenter in sight...

He looked at how high the building was; about twenty six floors in all. Mario hoped he wouldn't have to climb the whole thing, but the stern look on Donkey Kong's face told him he'd keep running until he couldn't run any more.

Then I'll corner you at the top, Mario decided, stepping onto the first floor. He looked around for a way up, spotting a half broken ladder a little ways away. Before he could even move though, a barrel was thrown down at him. He jumped out of the way before it crushed him, but just barely.

Shards of wood scattered and Mario jumped

towards the ladder. Another barrel rolled under him and Mario realized Donkey Kong was throwing them so they'd drop to the lower floors. His thoughts were confirmed when he saw another barrel drop from above through the holes in the floor.

Tools scattered everywhere, along with bits of glass and metal.

What are you doing?! Mario shouted in his head. I thought we were on the same side!

He jumped another barrel and ran to the next ladder. Lifting himself up, he just barely missed another barrel thrown like a missile towards his head. It exploded, but not like the others had. This one had caught fire.

After hurrying out of the way of the flames, Mario looked over the edge of a hole in the floor and saw that one of the barrels he'd jumped over had made its way to the first floor, and knocked over a barrel of oil. Something had sparked it, and now fires were slowly climbing up the rafters after Mario. The barrel that exploded had caught fire immediately.

You're gonna bring the whole place down, Mario thought, heaving as the next ladder shook. It held as he made his way up, but he had to roll out of the way to dodge the next barrel. It crashed into a wall, and a hammer slid towards Mario's feet.

He had ignored the other tools as there was always more danger around him at the time, but this time he didn't hesitate to grab the hammer. This time, he was ready for the next barrel, hitting it out of the way and charging towards the ladder to the floor below Donkey Kong.

Mario could see Donkey Kong pacing through the rafters above him, and he swatted another barrel as Donkey Kong threw it right at him. They were getting harder to dodge, less time between them and he was too close to

Donkey Kong.

When finally he reached up and pulled himself onto Donkey Kong's level, he threw his last barrel. The speed of this last barrel was faster than the others, and the force of it knocked Mario back, despite him defending himself with his hammer which broke upon impact

In the time it took for Mario to catch his footing, Donkey Kong had grabbed Pauline and started climbing upwards again.

Great, Mario huffed, trying his hardest to follow him.

As he hoisted himself up he immediately noticed the many holes in the platforms around him. He could see straight up to Donkey Kong, and beside him again, was Pauline.

"Pauline!" Mario shouted, hoping she'd wake up. "Pauline!"

Donkey Kong huffed, looking around for something else to through at Mario.

Fine then, Mario thought, searching for the way up. There were pulley systems around him, but none of them looked safe. For the most part, they all looked like makeshift climbing gear the construction crew used to get around. But in his hurry to get away from Mario, Donkey Kong seemed to have damaged them just as much as he'd damaged the lower floors.

The automated pulleys seemed to slam up into the ceiling, or against the ground. If Mario got caught he'd be crushed flat.

But the ladders were too far up... there were so many holes in the floors that he knew he couldn't jump across.

Then the floor gave an ominous creak. The building heaved and Mario grabbed a wall to steady himself. He

could smell the smoke coming up from beneath him, the fires doing more and more damage.

Even if I get Pauline, Mario thought. How am I supposed to get down?

Then Donkey Kong roared in frustration, angry that he had nothing to defend himself with here.

At least that buys me a little time. Mario started for the pulley system. Here goes nothing.

He jumped onto the moving platforms, rising upward. It was moving faster than it had appeared at first, and he had less time than he'd expected. With not much space left, Mario jumped sideways, crashing down on a platform in the center of the room.

It shifted beneath him, and over the edge he could see fires eating away at the broken ladders.

Knowing this platform wouldn't last much longer, he jumped to the next pulley. Then he jumped to another platform, laying on his back and trying to catch his breath. But this platform wasn't stable either, and in an instant it had broken, swinging from the wall it was connected to.

He leapt as it fell, grabbing onto a ladder that he half expected to fall from the walkway above him. But as he climbed up he faced Donkey Kong again. The ape stared at him for a brief moment, a look of almost panic in his eyes, then he once again grabbed Pauline and started up higher in the building.

"Wait!" Mario shouted. "Donkey Kong, get back here! Stop this, now!"

Donkey Kong didn't listen. He jumped from floor to floor through the rafters, dodging the machines that had already begun to be installed this high. Conveyors were already moving, and large buckets of sand glided along them.

Who designed this building?

The machines hissed and thumped as the tubs of sand fell off the ends of the conveyors, spilling over the ground. It made it hard to move around, but not as hard as the oil spilling down from above. Not only did it make the floors slick, but the fires were catching up. Soon Mario would be surrounded by flames.

Enough is enough, Mario growled, climbing ever higher. He stumbled along the conveyor belts, as it appeared to be the only passed them and the only way to reach the ladders upward, and called out to Donkey Kong.

"You're gonna get us both killed!" Mario shouted. "Give Pauline back, and come down!"

Donkey Kong howled, pounding his fist on the ground.

"I know you can understand me!" Mario argued, jumping up to the next platform, nearly slipping on oil. It was dripping down, and the fires seemed to be leaping up after them. "You *have* to know what you're doing is wrong!"

"Go!" Donkey Kong shouted.

Mario looked down. The fires have reached his current floor. "I can't do that!" he said, looking back up at Donkey Kong. "You destroyed any chance of that happening!"

Suddenly a machine clanked and the conveyor stopped, throwing Mario forward. A tub had tipped and gotten stuck, and the fires were already beginning to melt it. The gears in the machine grinded to a halt, sparking.

Mario hurried to his feet and jumped to another platform as the conveyor beneath him exploded. He grabbed at the platform as he slipped over the edge, fire flickering below him.

"Pauline!" Mario shouted. "Wake up!"

He could see her shift, but after being swung around

so much by Donkey Kong and getting hit in the head with a steel cage, he knew she was hurt.

What are you doing? Mario thought, not understanding what it was Donkey Kong was after. Was he protecting her? Was he using her as leverage to keep Mario away? Did Donkey Kong even know what he was doing?

Doesn't matter, Mario hoisted himself up to the next level, running towards Donkey Kong this time. He didn't want give him a chance to get away.

A moment later he regretted that decision.

Donkey Kong swung his fist at Mario, throwing him back. He skid along the steel beam, nearly falling over the edge.

Donkey Kong glared down at him. "Don't... hurt him."

"Wha-?"

Donkey Kong leapt away, grabbing Pauline. "You promised." He grabbed ahold of the rafters above him and started climbing towards the top of the tower.

Mario brushed himself off and stepped up the ladder to the next floor. The whole building felt like it was falling apart, he could even see some of the rivets coming loose. If they weren't careful, they'd end up crashing straight through the tower, and into the fires below.

The ladders here at least seemed sturdier, but now that they were close to the top, he needed to find a way out. Donkey Kong was cornered, but so was Mario.

"M-Mario!" Pauline called.

Mario looked up at her, watching her stumble to her feet. "Pauline! Are you alright?!"

Pauline nodded. "I... I think so."

Donkey Kong stood in front of her, watching Mario.

"What do you plan to do now!?" Mario shouted. "We're stuck, thanks to you!"

"No!" Donkey Kong huffed. "You lied!"

"Lied about what!?" Mario argued.

One of the rivets coming loose cracked, and the platform above him shifted.

"I'm trying to help you!" Mario explained. "Colepepper's the enemy here! Not me! Not you! Help me think of a way down, and we can talk about this!"

Donkey Kong looked over the edge of the building, seeing the ground so far below. He wasn't afraid of heights, having lived in trees his whole life, but he understood from the same experience that a fall from this height would kill anyone.

"I'm gonna come up there!" Mario said.

Another rivet popped out of place, causing the floor above him to fall under its own weight. The metal buckled and bent, and it was clear the floors above it were ready to give in as well.

Mario looked down at the fires, trying to think of an escape, but he couldn't.

"Donkey Kong," Pauline said. "Help us. Please."

Donkey Kong shook his head.

"Donkey Kong!" Mario called. "Whatever you think I did, I'm sorry! I was trying to get you back to your island, that's all!"

Donkey Kong grabbed Pauline and jumped down, shaking the floor as he landed. Mario stumbled backwards as Donkey Kong stood over him. He saw the frightened look on Mario's face, the worried look on Pauline's.

Donkey Kong reached out his hand to help Mario to his feet. "I'm.. sorry."

Mario nodded. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Let's get off this building-"

SNAP!

Suddenly they were falling. The air itself seemed to

freeze, and for a moment they floated there. Then the air was rushing up at them, and they could feel the fires they were falling into.

"Mario!" Pauline shouted.

Mario grabbed her out of the air, but he had no idea what else to do.

Then Donkey Kong caught them and tucked them under his arm. He reached for a falling steel beam and swung, using his weight to bend the metal. The heat of the fires melted it, and it finally snapped. But Donkey Kong knew what he was doing, trees fell in the jungle all the time.

He tucked into a ball and rolled across the surface of another building. Skidding to a stop, he let Mario and Pauline go, and they watched as the tower fell.

Mario chuckled, shaking his head in amazement. Eventually he sat down, his legs shaking too much for him to keep standing. "I *really* that was somethin' Colepepper owned."

"With our luck?" Pauline sighed, rubbing the back of her head. "I don't think so."

"You might want to get that head of yours checked."

They all turned to see Colepepper standing behind them on the roof. "Looks like it hurts."

Donkey Kong jumped at him, but he'd spent his strength. After fighting the tranquilizers from his escape from the docks, to climbing the building and then leaping off, even his energy had finally run out. And the excessive amount of tranqs Colepepper fired were more than enough to finally put Donkey Kong back to sleep.

The gorilla slumped over, huffing as he fought against it, but it was useless.

"Colepepper," Mario growled. "This is going too

far. It's one thing to undermine my circus, and another to torture animals... But this... *military* of yours. The poaching of animals as smart as they are and trying to run this country into the ground by blackmailing everyone and it's-it's... It's *everything* about you Colepepper!"

Mario stepped up to Colepepper not caring about the men behind him. He was done worrying about whatever grip Colepepper had on him.

"Let's settle this once and for all," Mario demanded, fists shaking in pure rage. "You and me. I got nothin' else to lose! You don't get to contr-"

"Shut up," Colepepper chuckled. "Like I'd ever agree to a duel with the likes of you. And besides..." He pocketed his tranquilizer and pulled out a real gun. He pointed it passed Mario, aimed at Pauline. "I think you've got *plenty* to lose."

Someone grabbed Pauline from behind, using chemicals to knock her out.

"Pauline!" Mario barked. "You let her go, Colepepper!"

"You touch me, and she dies," Colepepper smiled down at Mario. "Understood?"

"What do you *want* from me?" Mario growled. "What's your plan here? Rule the world? Torture every animal? Own every cent? What? What good's it all gonna do you? What's the point?"

"I don't want any of that," Colepepper laughed. He pointed the gun at Mario. "No, see... All I want, is to see people like you, *fail*. To *crush* you beneath my shoe. It just so happens I can do that best from the top."

He turned away. "Never say I don't care for the little people," he grinned. "I just like them better when they squirm like bugs."

Mario fell to his knees, defeated.

"Somebody find a cage for that thing," Colepepper ordered. "And another for the gorilla."



DONKEY KONG Jr.

PART I

Colepepper watched the last two gorillas running away; a female, and a child.

Colepepper looked down at the gorilla that still struggled to stay awake. "You've got a family!" he laughed, cocking his gun. "I think I've got just the place for you."

One last tranq and the ape was fast asleep.

"Hurry Jr."

D.K. Jr.'s mother pulled him away from the hut, but young and confused as he was he wouldn't budge after seeing his father fall like that. He shoved his mother back, charging the man who had hurt his father.

Colepepper however, didn't even flinch as the ape-child fell to the ground, skidding through the dirt. His men had grabbed hold of the mother as well, already stuffing her in a cage as she tried to fight against them.

"What a weak family," Colepepper sighed, disappointed. "You're gorillas! You should be strong enough to fight back!" He stepped up to the mother and looked into big sad eyes. "I know you're at least *smarter* than this. I wonder, were my men mistaken?"

"No sir," said one of his men, saluting Colepepper. "We assure you we've made no mistake. These apes are smarter than any animal we've ever seen."

Colepepper looked back to the carved mountain. "Yes," he agreed, the stone gorilla's eyes looming over him.

"I suppose." He bent down again. "Can you speak?"

The mother huffed, spitting in his face.

Colepepper flinched. "Throw her in a hole!" he roared. "Break her legs or something, I don't care." He started walking back towards the son. "Don't you dare shoot them however, just in case they're as smart as you let on."

"Of course," said the goon.

They carted off the last of the apes but Colepepper took a few moments to stay back in the village, looking up at the basket houses in the trees.

Did you really build these yourselves? Colepepper wondered. Humans have worshiped strange things in the past... Could people have built this island, and gorillas inhabited it?

He started circling the village, trying to find screws or signs of Human life. Eventually finding graves he dug up the contents buried just beneath the surface. The first thing he looked at was the skull of course, which was undoubtedly simian.

Of course, if Humans were here in the past, they would have been buried deeper.

Colepepper made note of this, hoping to have answers one day, and left to return to his ship.

D.K. Jr. woke up sitting in the back of a cage on a pile of dry grass. He realized immediately that he wasn't in the jungle anymore, the tall white walls around him told him that much.

Then a man walked in; fur-less and bitter faced. He stalked over to D.K. Jr. and stood there for a moment before kicking the cage.

Jr. jumped back, pressing against the far side of the cage.

The man spoke, smiling down at him, though he couldn't understand the sounds the man was making. But he opened the cage and reached inside to grab him. Jr. swatted at him, but then something pierced his wrist.

Jr. howled, blood dripping from the wound as the man pulled away the needle. The cage was slammed shut again and Jr. was trapped.

Finally the man left, and Jr. was alone.

He pawed at his wound, worried about where his parents were, and what would happen to him.



A year after taking the apes from their island, Colepepper finally returned to his lab. Dr. Andrea had kept him updated on the progress of the apes, as promised, but it had been a while since he heard from his lab in the south.

"Dr. Marco," Colepepper called, stepping passed the dusty couches in the lobby. "You've let this place go; I could fire you for that."

He made his way down the halls to the large operating room. Papers were thrown across the room, desks had been emptied of their contents, and cabinets had been smashed. In the corner of the room however, was a large cage for a familiar gorilla; Donkey Kong's son.

Colepepper stepped closer, studying the ape. It seemed healthy enough, which meant he was being fed, so Marco had to have been here recently. But what annoyed him the most was the little costume Marco had made the ape wear; a baby's outfit with the initials **J** written on the front for Junior.

"Dr. Marco!" Colepepper shouted.

CRASH!!!

Colepepper stumbled, alarmed by the sudden explosion of furniture getting shoved aside. Dr. Marco jumped out of his corner, looking around like he was expecting to see an army coming after him.

"What happened!?" Marco yelled. "Jr! Did they- Oh..." he breathed a sigh of relief, seeing Colepepper. "Apologies sir."

Colepepper looked around the messy room. "What... happened? Why haven't you said anything in nearly six months?"

"Six months?" Marco mumbled. "I suppose it *has* been a while, I'm sorry. But, I *did* discover something you're going to like!"

"And that is?" Colepepper turned to glare at D.K. Jr.

"I studied his genetic makeup," Marco said proudly, stepping up to the cage and petting Jr. on the head. "I had thought they were just simple gorillas, that perhaps they had simply learned or evolved a slightly different way. But this is much better than anything I could have ever hoped for! This discovery could change the course of Human history!"

"Get to the point," Colepepper growled.

"They call themselves Kongs," Marco explained. "I actually called your ship's pilot to confirm this, and they agreed that they didn't call that ape Donkey Kong, but that he named himself that."

"What?" Colepepper hissed.

"He knew how to speak!" Marco exclaimed. "But it was more than that! They could only speak a few words, but it proved my theory, and then I found more proof!"

"You're not making any sense, Marco," Colepepper warned. "Explain, from point A to point B, *please*."

Marco nodded. "Of course," he smiled. "First, I

discovered that they have a mix of both Eastern Gorilla, and Orangutan DNA. It was later that I discovered they could speak as well."

"Stop stop stop," Colepepper growled. "What do you mean 'they'? I only gave you this one; does it speak?"

"Speak Jr," Marco said proudly. "Introduce yourself."

Jr. glared back at Colepepper, remembering him as the man who had kidnapped him and his family. But he was smarter than they thought, he knew that, for now at least, it would be best to remain quiet.

"Hello," Jr. said, shocking Colepepper. "My name, is Jr."

Colepepper stood still for a moment, finally giving out a soft chuckle. "Incredible," he mumbled. "I mean, Donkey Kong could say his name, but it always seemed to sound... *mocking*, like he was simply imitating the name we'd given him..."

"He gave it to himself," Marco corrected. "Remember?"

"Of course," Colepepper nodded. He faced Marco directly. "Anything else?"

"Yes," Marco smiled. "The reason they're able to speak at all..." He turned around, riffling through papers on the floor. Eventually he found what he was looking for and hurried back to Colepepper, shoving the paper into his hands. "Look!"

Colepepper sighed. "I don't understand any of this."

"Just a few months ago, I discovered something besides the Simian and the Tarsier DNA." Marco turned back to Jr., patting his head again. "There's *Human* DNA as well. Colepepper... this is, without a doubt, the missing link in Human evolution."

'A year passed.

Colepepper killed Dr. Marco to keep him quiet. It was easy to convince anyone that he'd simply died, given the state of his home and how nobody had heard from him in such a long time.

I don't understand why it is he wants to keep my existence a secret, but I know this; I'm getting closer to finding my parents.

The name Donkey Kong comes up more and more frequently since I'd been moved north. He called this place Modena, and according to him, my father, Donkey Kong, is in a place called Circus, run by a fool of man named Mario.

Colepepper tells me Mario kidnapped Donkey Kong, but I know better. I don't know who Mario is, but my father is safer with him than with Colepepper, and that means I have a chance to find him...

I only hope I can find my mother as well.'

Jr. tucked Marco's diary into his dirty jumper, reaching through the bars of his cage to set the pen back on the counter. As far as he knew, Colepepper had no knowledge of his diary, as Marco hadn't been able to tell him how he'd taught Jr. to write as well as speak, but either way he didn't want to risk losing it.

And he couldn't have put it away soon enough, as a moment later there was a sound like explosions outside. Jr. pressed his ear to the wall and tried to listen. He heard shouting, popping, and the distinctive sound of his father's roar.

"Father!" Jr. shouted, trying his hardest to bend the bars of his cage. "Father I'm in here! Father!"

Something crashed, like a wall being torn down.

"Father!" Jr. screamed. "I'm here!"

There was silence, and for a brief moment Jr. thought his father heard him. But that moment lasted too long, and Jr. began to fear the worst.

He couldn't have lost, Jr. thought. Could he?

He had to get out, but the steel bars wouldn't budge! He hung from them, tugging at them, but it was useless. He was still too small to do anything.

Then suddenly the door opened, and Colepepper walked in. His clothes were dirty like he'd slid through debris, and he seemed angrier than usual. He didn't say anything or even blink as he fired a tranq at Jr.

Mario stood beside Donkey Kong's cage, waiting for orders. *How could I let things go this far?* he wondered, turning to Donkey Kong.

"You get it, right?" Mario asked.

Donkey Kong huffed, refusing to answer.

"I don't like this any better than you do," Mario sighed. "I'm open to suggestions."

"This island is empty now," Donkey Kong said softly. "Your kind took my people. What could I do against that?"

"Not my kind," Mario corrected. "*Colepepper*. He's a twisted man if ever there was one... But I can't beat him on my own. If we did though, we could get your people back."

Donkey Kong shook his head. "I've heard the other white coats speaking. They've either killed or driven my family insane."

"They could be lying?" Mario suggested.

"They didn't know I could listen," Donkey Kong

said sadly. "They had no reason to lie. The ones they captured are gone now, but hopefully those who survived have fled."

Mario nodded, sitting down. "I still can't believe you can speak."

"Why?" Donkey Kong asked. "Is man the only ones allowed to speak?"

"Before we met you we didn't know anything else *could*," Mario chuckled. "Yet here you are; a talking ape..."

Donkey Kong huffed. He propped himself up on his arms and stared over the cliff where he and Mario were sitting high above the vine covered mountainside. Colepepper had put Mario and Donkey Kong where they were specifically so they could see all that he'd done, without being able to do anything to stop him.

They watched Colepepper's men tearing down Donkey Kong's village, moving the last of the crates inland. Colepepper had been slowly building another lab on the island. It was almost complete, and when it was, whatever Colepepper was planning would be complete as well.

"Pauline's in there," Mario said quietly. "Somewhere... And I can't do anything to get her out."

Donkey Kong gripped the bars of the cage. "I should not have panicked," he said. "When I took her, I thought she was hurt, and that you were on Colepepper's side... If I had been calm then... This is my fault... my people, your friend... it's all-"

"Colepepper's fault," Mario told him. "Whether you cooperated or not, Colepepper would've had a plan for it... He always does. There's nothing either of us could've done."

Donkey Kong narrowed his eyes, focusing on a point in the middle of the large clearing in the forest where Colepepper's factory was set up.

"My son," he growled, pounding his fist on the bars.
"They have my son!"

Mario leaned forward a little, seeing the smaller gorilla in the white leotard. "Is he alive?"

"Even if he's hurt," Donkey Kong said. "Colepepper will be dead by the end of the day."



DONKEY KONG Jr.

PART 2

Junior woke up back on Kong Island. Dazed, he sat up and tried to get his eyes to focus. When he could see clearly again he was annoyed to discover that he was still in a cage. What's worse, was Colepepper standing over him, barking orders at his men.

Junior kicked the steel bars, getting his attention.

"So you're awake," Colepepper smiled. "Welcome back!"

"Why are we here?" Junior asked.

"Because I had to know if it was just you two," Colepepper answered. "Or... if the rest of your kind were just as smart."

"Kong's are smart," Junior growled. "But only me and my father speak your language."

Colepepper laughed. "Well I got an offer for ya." He had his goons point their guns at Junior as he opened the cage. "You can either head into the forest, and disappear with your life. Or..." Colepepper pointed up to the cliffs where Mario and Donkey Kong sat. "You can go and try to free your father."

Junior looked up at him suspiciously. "Why?" he asked. "Why let me go, *or* save my father?"

"It's called a test," Colepepper smiled. "I just want to see what you'd do."

Junior watched Colepepper, then looked to his

father. "Will that man defend himself?"

"I sure hope so!" Colepepper chuckled. "Is that what you'll do?"

"You'll be sorry." Junior started for the mountain.

So he isn't a coward, Colepepper thought. *But is Mario?*

"What is he doing?" Mario mumbled as they watched Junior run towards the mountain.

"Colepepper is plotting something," Donkey Kong huffed.

"He wants me to defend you to save Pauline," Mario realized. "He wants me to fight your son, or let her die."

Donkey Kong gripped the cage, looking down at his son.

"I'm sorry," Mario said, uncoiling the whip Colepepper had given him. "It's him or her."

Donkey Kong punched the steel bars. "There is a way out of this—"

Thwip!

Suddenly Donkey Kong keeled over, a powerful tranquilizer dart on the side of his neck. Mario looked back down the cliff to see the goon put away his gun, and Colepepper was still watching.

Okay Colepepper, Mario thought. *What game are we playing today?*

Junior charged up the mountain, swatting away the nitpickers that buzzed around his head. He jumped up to

the vines, climbing towards the top cliff where Mario stood.

Crack!

Junior dodged as the whip snapped above his hands. He swung sideways and grabbed onto the cliff a bit further away, staring down Mario. Donkey Kong was unconscious and the look on Mario's face told Junior he wasn't going to back down.

"Let him go," Junior demanded.

"So you can speak too," Mario said. "Stand down and no one gets hurt."

—

Colepepper grinned. *Which decision will you make?* He clicked a button on his walkie talkie. "Alright, move the ape."

—

Mario cracked his whip again, hoping Junior would stay away or give up. But then he heard the sound of a helicopter.

The chopper came around the mountain and a crane was lowered with a goon. The goon attached the crane to Donkey Kong's cage before Mario could stop him. "Put him down!" Mario shouted, grabbing onto the cage as it was the chopper started moving again.

Junior gave chase but they were moving too fast. They were sat down further in the forest, placed on a walkway built around the trees.

What are you doing? Mario thought. *What am I supposed to do here?*

If Colepepper wants to play like this, Junior

thought. *He's got another thing coming.*

Junior set after them again, bolting down the hill and jumping to the low hanging vines.

—

Colepepper laughed. "Release the Snapjaws."

—

Mario glared at the goons in the trees watching him. Junior swung through the trees towards him, but they wouldn't stop him. Mario had to do it himself, he had to defeat Junior.

But why move me? Mario thought. *What's the point in that?*

Junior stood at the top of a tree across from the platform Mario stood on. Then suddenly he yelped. He jumped to another tree as a small robotic set of jaws crawled out of the foliage.

"Colepepper!" Mario shouted. "What's the meaning of this!?"

"Figured you were having trouble taking care of him yourself!" Colepepper called up, walking towards the bottom of the tree Junior stood on. "Well? Finish him off!"

Mario stared down Junior, gripping the whip. *I don't want to have to do this,* Mario thought. *Just give up.*

Junior jumped away from another Snapjaw, making his way closer to Mario. Mario swung his whip, and Junior reeled backwards as he landed on the wooden walkway. Then the cage was moving again.

"No you don't," Mario muttered. He snapped his whip at the goon standing on top of the cage, the only holding onto the cable to move it. Mario knocked the tranq

gun out of his hand with the whip and climbed on top.

"Think about Pauline," Colepepper warned, speaking through the walkie talkie on the goon's belt. "Fight the monkey, or she dies."

Mario looked down. They were moving over the facility.

"I think I'll take the chance," Mario said. He shoved the goon off the side of the cage, watching him fall down into the forest. "This ain't your circus, Colepepper."

Mario unlatched the crane's hook as they passed directly over the building.

They fell.

Sorry D.K., Mario grunted as the cage hit the unfinished roof.



Mario woke to Colepepper laughing. He felt dizzy, and when his sight cleared he felt dizzier, looking all the way down the deep industrial pit of Colepepper's facility. The ceiling above them had caved in when they crashed through, but Donkey Kong had woken up as well, staring up at Colepepper who stood above them at the edge of the cave in.

Then Mario noticed Junior unconscious on a leash beside Colepepper.

"Just let him go," Mario huffed. "Just let all of us go, please. I'm tired, and we just want to go home."

"Bargaining now?" Colepepper chuckled. "Now that you've got nowhere left to go, yer done fighting?"

Mario shook his head. "No, I think I'll keep fighting," he answered. "Just wanted to give you a chance to turn around one last time."

Colepepper shrugged. "So be it. I-"

"Hold on," Mario said. "Answer me this first; why? Why do any of this in the first place? Why not just announce your discovery, take the credit, and move on like a smart man? Why go to all this trouble, to mess a man already down on his luck, who just wanted to run a circus like his old man? Why?"

Colepepper nodded, thinking about his answer. "Well you see, for one, I was never very fond of you especially. And two, I had to make sure I had a staple in this land first, so no one else could claim it. Actually had to drop an old friend of mine who made a pretty interesting discovery just a bit too soon."

He handed off Junior to a goon and sat down on the rickety roof's edge. "So you see, the reason why *you* are here, Mario, is because I need something fun to pass the time while I finished the building. And now, I think we're at the last game, and if you're still up for fightin' after that..." Colepepper smiled. "Well, we'll see what happens. Men, lower that thing into the building."

"Shouldn't we just drop him in?" asked the goon.

Colepepper took the leash back, and shot the goon. "You!" he smiled, handing Junior to another goon. "Take this thing down to the lowest level."

"Yes boss," the goon nodded, walking away to the elevator.

"Well," Mario sighed. "D.K., any last minute thoughts?"

"We need to tear this place apart," Donkey Kong growled. "Ape, man, we are toys to Colepepper. If we are going to die, we will make him feel it."

Mario looked down at Junior who was awake now, and straining against his leash to get to his father.

"Mario," Donkey Kong said. "There's nothing we can do now, I am chained and caged... We are surrounded.

We will die."

"But we're not given up," Mario nodded. "Alright, let's tear this place down."

"Let him run!" Colepepper laughed.

Mario looked at the scaffolding beneath him, the chains holding Donkey Kong's cage also seemed to run down through the floors beneath. The platform he stood on was incomplete as well, and weak.

"Alright Junior!" Mario called, cracking his whip. "I've still gotta protect my girl, and that means if you want to win, you gotta kill me!"

Junior paced below him, thinking.

"I don't think this building'll hold long!" Mario smiled, cracking his whip again. "So you'd best hurry!"

Junior looked at the chains.

"Free me son!" Donkey Kong yelled, shaking his cage. "Break these chains!"

Junior hesitated, waiting for Colepepper's men to stop him, but they didn't. Junior unclasped the first chain, and the pillar it was locked to creaked.

"This really what we want?" Mario whispered.

"I do not know," Donkey Kong admitted. "But you must make the performance believable."

"I owned a circus!" Mario laughed. "Performing's in my blood!" He looked down at Junior. "Hey back away from those chains and face me like a real ape!"

Junior growled, jumping from one pillar to the other to unclasp the second chain. The platform creaked again, settling as its balance shifted.

"Shouldn't we keep them from breaking the building?" a goon asked Colepepper.

"They can't do that much damage," Colepepper said. "Besides, if Mario tries anything, we just threaten Pauline again."

"Um, sir?"

Colepepper glared at his goon. "Um, *what?*"

Mario tried to steady himself. He wasn't too fond of this plan, but they were out of options and out of time to think up something new. He knew they couldn't just start over if he screwed this up though.

He grit his teeth as Junior unlocked another chain.

"Keep going!" Donkey Kong roared. "Bring this building down son!"

Mario cracked his whip. "Come on!"

The platform wobbled, the pillars holding it up slipping out place. With only one chain left, Donkey Kong grabbed the cage door and Mario braced himself. Then Junior unclasped the final chain.

It all happened at once.

The platform cracked, the pillars toppling as the floor slanted beneath them.

The locks on Donkey Kong's cage broke from the force of him falling too quickly, the chains that kept it tied to the platform now gone.

And Mario was in free fall, staring up at Colepepper, knowing he lost.

—

Crash

Mario opened his eyes, looking up at the blurry lights above him. He was alive? Yes? No? He was in so much pain it was hard to tell.

But he heard shouting too, and fires. Something had happened.

Dizzy, Mario tried to see what was happening, but he couldn't even sit up. He could make out a few shapes above him though, a large brown shape swinging from the

falling rafters of the building.

"Mario!"

Mario's vision snapped into focus. That was Pauline's voice!

"Pauline!" Mario yelled, but he couldn't get enough air his lungs to tell loud enough.

"Pauline," Mario choked. "Pauli I'm right... I'm right here..."

Mario saw the steel beams pinning his legs down. He couldn't even feel it, like the injury just hadn't registered yet.

"Mario!" Pauline called out again.

"Here!" Junior shouted.

Suddenly Junior was at Mario's side, trying to lift the beam. Donkey Kong dropped down beside him, Pauline on his back.

"What happened?" Mario mumbled, Junior pulling him out of the debris. "Colepepper, the fires... Wha-?"

"Later," Pauline told him. "We need to get out of here."

Mario nodded and Donkey Kong hoisted him up. He jumped and climbed his way up the walls of the fallen facility, and when they reached the top, Mario saw the extent of the damage done.

Colepepper's men lay scattered on the ground, and the fires ate away at the building as it fell apart. But what's more, there were other apes in the jungle.

In front of them, on his knees and defeated at last, was Colepepper himself.

Mario smiled.

"I managed to escape," Pauline explained. "Broke a goon's hand and shot him with his own tranq. When I got far enough away, they found me, the rest of the Kong's that were in hiding."

"And you led 'em back here just in the nick of time." Mario nodded. "Good... Then it's finally... over... You son of... a..."

Mario slumped over, the short adrenaline burst now over.

"Mario!" Pauline shouted, catching him as he fell.

This time when Mario woke up, he was on the boat. He had bandages wrapped around his head and a splint keeping his leg together. He hadn't realized he'd been injured so badly, it was such a blur.

But he remembered they beat Colepepper, and that at least made him feel a little better.

He sat up, and grabbed a nearby crutch, then hobbled out of the medical station and onto the main deck. He found Pauline speaking with the Kongs and hobbled towards the end of the ship.

Colepepper was locked in a cage just on the edge of the beach.

"Colepepper!" Mario barked. "You lost Colepepper! You lost everything!"

Colepepper kicked the inside of the cage. "So what!?" he shouted. "I have friends in high places, soon as we get back I'll have your hide-"

"Get back?" Mario chuckled. "What makes you think you're leaving the island?"

Mario looked from the frightened face of Colepepper to Donkey Kong who stood in front of the rest of the Kongs. "You don't mind, do ya?"

Donkey huffed, bowing.

"You're killing me here!" Colepepper shouted as Mario looked down at him from the boat. "You leave me

here and I die!"

"Everyone pays their price," Mario told him. "Shouldn't have made yours so high."

"Thank you again for your help," Pauline said moving towards the ship. "I'll make sure we find and return the others to the island. I don't how, but I will."

"Thank you," Donkey Kong nodded. "Have a safe trip home." He patted Pauline's head and moved to grab Colepepper's cage. "There are other ships here... I think we will take care of finding our own."

"You sure?" Mario asked.

Donkey Kong nodded. "We'll... take it from here." He gave Mario a thumbs up, and dragged Colepepper away screaming.

Pauline stepped into the ship and looked back at the island as the Kong's disappeared into the jungle.

"And that's it," Mario nodded. "Let's go home Pauline."



Six years passed since the day they left Kong Country. The doctors told Mario he would walk again, but due the extent of his injuries, he wouldn't be doing any circus acts anymore.

Pauline continued her career as a singer in the grand halls through Italy and France, and eventually she and Mario found a house in the south end of Italy. They bought a boat and began making yearly trips to the island.

Upon hearing of his injuries however, Donkey Kong labeled Mario, the Jumpman, as he could hardly walk now. Mario didn't mind the joke, as for man Donkey Kong meant Dumb Ape.

As for Colepepper, the Kongs had coerced him into

telling his facilities to return the Kong's they stole, and then was left in the facility in Kong Country to rot.

And finally, all was right in the world.

That is, until one day, when Mario and Pauline received a knock at the door.

Mario grunted, forcing his legs to keep moving.

"Let me get it," Pauline told him.

"I need to move when I can," Mario said. "Don't worry, I'll be fine."

He made his way to the door and answered it, Pauline standing beside him.

They were both surprised to see a white stork, with a bag in its beak. From out of the bag popped out two little heads, two baby boys, one wearing a red hat, and the other wearing a green one.

"Well I'll be," Mario mumbled.

