

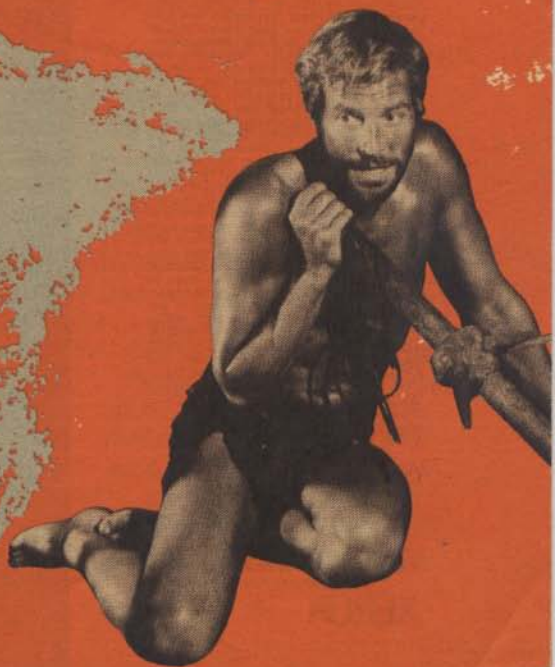
XEROX

THE MAGAZINE FOR READING AND ENGLISH

Read[®]

VOL. XXII/NO. 2/SEPTEMBER 22, 1972

Man Into Ape? (p.8)



MEDIA



Making Monkeys Out of Men

If you've been going to movies during the last few years, the face on the opposite page may look a little familiar to you.

It doesn't? Look again.

The man—and it is a man—is in the final stages of becoming a gorilla. Not for real, of course, but for a role in the movie *Planet of the Apes*.

You might remember that movie—about a topsy-turvy planet where apes are intelligent and humans are wild animals. There have been three other *Planet* movies since the first. The most recent one is *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*. And with each new sequel, people seem to go ape over them more than ever. Why?

One reason might be the unusual ape makeup. It didn't just happen. It took months of research, designing, changing, and redesigning to create the realistic chimpanzees, orangutans, and gorillas. And one man saw it from beginning to end—John Chambers, professional makeup artist.

In the fall of 1966, Mr. Chambers was in Spain making Robert Culp into a Mandarin spy leader for an *I Spy* TV segment. A Hollywood studio

called, asking him to create the ape creatures. He accepted.

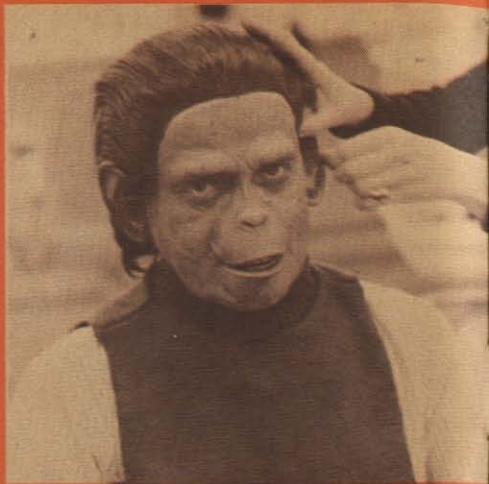
"Someone suggested Neanderthal-like men for the apes," Mr. Chambers told *Read*. "But when I read the script, I saw *animals* in the parts, not ugly people."

Working from photos of chimps and gorillas and from live animals, Mr. Chambers fashioned some experimental faces out of clay. But he had to make some changes before they could be worked out on actors' heads.

"I had to modify the noses on the chimps," he said, "to make them look like small human noses. The normal chimp has little ugly slits for nostrils. Projected on a big movie screen, those slits could have scared people out of their seats. So I made the masks look more pleasant because we wanted the chimps to be liked."

But what is the makeup made of?

"The basic mask," Mr. Chambers explained, "is made of a fine latex that starts out liquid and dries to a soft rubber. It looks like skin and is loose enough to allow natural perspiration to pass through. This mask is attached to the actor's own skin



On the left, the forehead, nose, and chin pieces are being fitted together to create the face. On the right, a three-quarter wig of human hair is added.

with a sticky substance called *spirit gum*.

"The teeth are made of artificial stone—just like false teeth worn by humans. The hair is real human hair from Korea. And the ears are made of soft rubber attached to the actors' heads."

How was the chimp face assembled?

"First we made an impression of the actor's face with a soft type of plaster," Mr. Chambers continued. "Then we backed it up with a plaster of Paris shell. On this shell we built three pieces of makeup called *appliances*.

"The first appliance was the forehead. Sometimes it was attached to the second, the nose appliance. The nose had a breathing canal that went from the chimp's nose to the actor's mouth. The third appliance was the chin, which included the lower lip."

All this makeup created a few problems for actress Kim Hunter, who played a chimp doctor. She said she felt trapped under the makeup. And visitors to the studio treated her as

if she were a freak. Some would poke at her face and ask if the ears were her own.

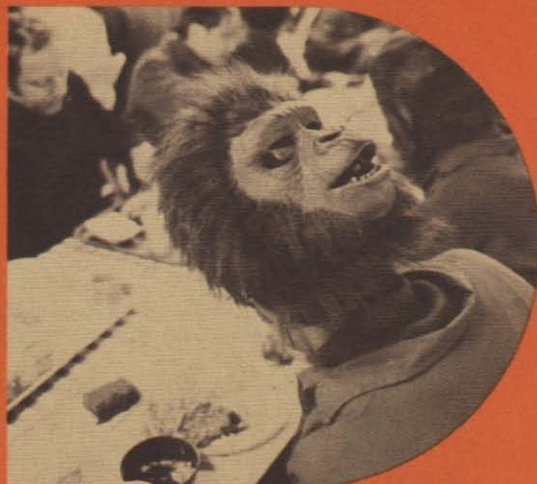
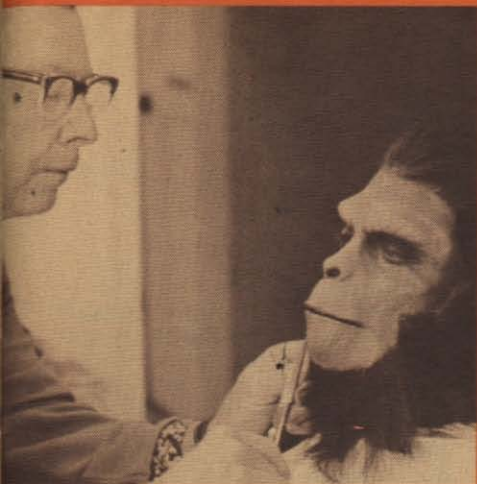
Wasn't this makeup expensive?

"Yes," Mr. Chambers said. "Each time the mask was removed at night, it was ruined, and we had to build a new one. Each set of three appliances cost about \$150. Multiply this figure times each major character times each shooting, and you get quite a sum."

Mr. Chambers added that he was able to save some of the appliances and use them on minor characters in nonspeaking roles. The gorillas in the background or crowd scenes wore full-face masks that were less expensive and could be used over and over again.

In addition to suffering under the heavy makeup, the actors lost some sleep along the way too.

A morning makeup session took 3½ hours to transform a human into a simian, and the evening reversal took 1½ hours. Actors usually arrived for makeup at 3 a.m. By 6:30 they were ready for breakfast. This brought on another annoying problem



A makeup artist trims the facial hair of a nearly completed chimp (left). On the right, a stunt man found a good place to keep his gorilla mask while eating lunch.

for the actors: How were they supposed to eat?

"The actors were screaming that they would starve to death," Mr. Chambers said and laughed. "But we took tests and found they could eat through straws. We had meat and vegetables chopped into fine pieces. The actors sometimes ate with forks, looking into mirrors. Stunt men [gorillas] sometimes sat across a lunch table and fed each other if they couldn't remove their masks."

This seemed like a lot of trouble just to make a movie. Why make the apes? What is the interest in seeing them on the movie screen?

"Well, we love to go to zoos and watch apes," Mr. Chambers offered. "We feel they're imitating us, and we see ourselves in their antics. We feel they're somehow related to us. Besides, talking animals in nursery rhymes have always been popular. These movies are a modern version of those nursery rhymes."

Mr. Chambers told us that the *Planet* movies are popular with all

ages. But after the first film was tested before releasing, the 12-15 age-group gave the most intelligent response.

"Those were kids who took the film seriously," he said. "They analyzed everything deeply and gave their honest opinions. They could tell the characters apart. And they felt the apes were *real* enough to be believable."

"But when something was bad, they told us. Many kids spotted a mask on a gorilla in one short scene. They noticed the holes in the eyes of the mask and could tell where the mask ended and where the actor began. This looked too fake to them. We changed the makeup in that scene because we fully trusted the kids' judgment."

Mr. Chambers continues to hear from teen-agers. Most of the writers want to know the hows and whys of movie makeup.

We can see why. Judging from the *Planet* movies, making apes out of men is no monkey business. ■