

Ephemera of the Apes TV series



In this chapter I summarise details of the filming of the TV series, from recollections of the people who were there, gathered as background for my Tribute article.

First I located published interviews with people who were involved in filming the episodes. Cast and crew who were involved in every episode were Fred Blau (Roddy's make up), Ron Harper (Viridon), Ron Stein (multiple small roles) and Dan Striepeke (make up). There were two recurring semi-regulars (Lenard and Colman) though Booth Colman gave no details about filming and on-set mood. Some cast and crew were only involved in one or two episodes.

Then I located the order in which the TV series episodes were filmed. The production code numbers confirm the order in which the TV series episodes were filmed.

Next I cross referenced the occasional cast and crew to the filming sequence. This order number gives us 'data points' for filming and production sequence over the 14 weeks.

Filming order/title	Mark Lenard	Guests who have been interviewed
B-501: "The Good Seeds"	#	Geoff Deuel, Eileen Dietz, Bobby Porter, Jacqueline Scott
B-502: "The Gladiators"	#	
B-503: "Escape from Tomorrow"	#	Bobby Porter, Biff Elliott
B-504: "The Legacy"	#	Zina Bethune
B-505: "The Trap"	#	
B-506: "The Cure"	#	Biff Elliott
B-507: "The Liberator"		
B-508: "Tomorrow's Tide"		Jim Storm
B-509: "The Surgeon"	#	Jacqueline Scott
B-510: "The Deception"		Jane Actman
B-511: "The Horse Race"	#	
B-512: "The Interrogation"	#	Beverly Garland
B-513: "The Tyrant"	#	Klair Bybee, Gary Combs (stuntman), Ralph Senensky (Director)
B-514: "Up Above the World So High"	#	Joanna Barnes

Additionally I located pre-screening newspaper interviews. For example 6 July 1974:

Ron Harper and James Naughton, who plays the crashed astronauts in the new television version of Planet of the Apes, said they think Friday night is really not the ideal time for the show because many young people go out on dates.

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Overall the comments were very positive. Everyone reported a happy set with a good working environment, though the working days were long and there were a lot of time pressures. Those in heavy, sweaty ape make up and costumes reported tiring to exhausting days. The actors reported not a lot of time for rehearsals and retakes. No-one reported a decline in mood as the series progressed, even as the ratings were low.

- Roddy was reported with a wide variety of adjectives, all of them positive.
- Ron was described with three P's: personable, pleasant and professional.
- James was described as lovely, kind and giving.

Mark Lenard channelled Urko in saying if he wanted more time for a retake, he'd stamp his feet and grunt and they'd give him more time. ☺

LENARD: Oh, sure; I don't think you can work exclusively in a series for a long time without being affected by it, but I also think it's very valuable. I think you learn how to use the time that you have most effectively. They don't push you.

You see, if you're a series regular—if you're a guest, that's something else again—but if you're a series regular and you don't like it, y'know, and you want to do a scene again or to rehearse it again, they may not let you reshoot it, but you can certainly break off in the middle if it's not going right. And if you feel that you need a little more preparation, you can demand it.

Well, you can ask for it.

I mean, they're usually saying, "let's get going," and "we gotta be moving," but if you stamp your feet a little and grunt, they'll give you the time. Sometimes you come up to the necessity, y'know, of having just a certain amount of time and you do your best work. The things that suffer, of course, are things like production values, technical aspects; they might need more time. That takes up the bulk of the time, anyway, in shooting. The acting takes up a minority of the time.

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(interview by Chris Claremont)

¹ CBS-TV stars on road pedalling fall season, The Rock Island Argus, 6 July, 1974, p. 30

² Urko Unleashed Marvel Magazine "Planet of the Apes" UK, no. 22, pp. 10-25

Mark Lenard (first 6 eps, last 4 eps filmed) reported that as the series progressed:

LENARD: Well, you certainly do about what is or is not in character, and about a lot of other things, too, depending on, y'know, the individual and how good his judgement is and how much you can discuss with the particular director. There's a lot of latitude there. You don't just change the script, you may...the script is a script but it's a piece of paper. It's on paper. When the scene comes to life it may turn out totally different.

I do a lot of changing and a certain amount of improvising with the other actors and with the director; we don't change the script itself too much, though we do change the scene. Or else we kind of recreate it, y'know,

from the paper to the tube, to the film. It's very flexible, and the people who are in the series, the regulars, are the ones who know the most about what the whole Ape culture is supposed to be like, what their characters have been like, and how to be consistent. At first, it was difficult, we had to send down memos, or make quick calls to producers or somebody saying, would they do this, would they do that, and so forth.

And there was nobody who knew except the producers and the writers, at first; but that's changed now.

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(interview by Chris Claremont)

Chris Claremont conducted four interviews over a couple of days during filming of 5th and 6th episodes. His interviews with Ron Harper, Mark Lenard and Marvin Paige were all published. For some unknown reason his interview with James Naughton was never published.⁴

Bobby Porter (1st and 3rd filmed episodes) reports no script changes were made by actors on the set, though they may have been made by the writers or the creative producers before filming (pers comm, October 2024). Beverley Garland (12th episode) reported the script was supplied 10 days in advance of filming and Bobby Porter confirmed there could be as many as 10 revisions before filming commenced.

Bobby Porter also reports the mood on set was professional, respectful and work was executed with pride. He particularly mentioned Ron and James being prepared and professional (pers comm, October 2024). Bobby Porter also reports the filming location and costume/make up was exhausting, and the days were long (pers comm, October 2024).

³ *Urko Unleashed* Marvel Magazine "Planet of the Apes" US, no. 06, pp. 28-43

⁴ ⁴ Chris Claremont, *Simian Scrolls* issue 17, p 12

Regarding Ron Harper, Chris Claremont reported:

As for the rest of it? He's an incredibly considerate man, willing to put up with guests on the set, fans, the hassles of a long day's shooting, the persistence of reporters and freelance journalists, you name it. When you first meet the man, he gives the impression of being someone who knows, absolutely, where his head is at. He does what he does, and does it well, with no second thoughts or regrets.

He's a very soft-spoken man, a very relaxed man. And he smokes a pipe. Actually, he smokes pipes (not simultaneously, you clot!) and it's not unusual to find him slouched in his Director's chair between takes, scanning his script, puffing quietly on a briar. Then again, you could just as easily find him talking motorcycles with Jim Naughton.

Ron Harper's a nice guy. To watch, to interview and—it seems—to work with.

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MARVEL: How much rehearsal do you have for each episode?

RH: Not very much. The only rehearsal you do is just before you shoot the scene.

MARVEL: So it's not even as extensive as a soap opera?

RH: Right. On a soap you rehearse the day before; then you come in the next morning at about seven-thirty and you rehearse all day until you shoot it at about one o'clock or two. It's a lot more rehearsal.

You know what determines how much rehearsal you get on a TV show? The lighting man. The cameraman. Because the only time you rehearse is while he's lighting.

MARVEL: While he's setting up?

RH: Yeah. And if he's very fast, then you don't rehearse really well. If he's slow, you can rehearse it more.

MARVEL: Does it bother you, doing it, essentially, off the top of your head?

RH: No, not really. I topple at times when you get into a deep scene—and we do have them occasionally, important scenes—strangely enough, because the format is not apparently the early one... what'd you ask me?

MARVEL: The rehearsals; do you mind not having them?

RH: Actually, no; not so much. I... it's not Chekov or Shakespeare, that you really have to figure out a lot of the mysteries underneath the character. It's sort of, basically, I sort of know what the character is, how he would react—which is basically a matter of choices.

No, it doesn't really bother me. I'd much rather err in that direction than I would of boring myself to death by doing something I already know.

⁵ *A Half Hour with Harper* Marvel Magazine "Planet of the Apes" US, no. 04, pp. 36-47

RH: It's tough to do. And there's very little to do in New York, you know.

MARVEL: There's little to do anywhere, these days.

RH: I guess that's true, isn't it? A friend of mine just

(ref to economic downturn)

came out this week, an actress, and she said her agent was coming out and I said, that's funny; my agent's coming out and I know another who's coming out. And she said, she's never seen New York as bad as it is, currently, this year. Even when I was there I didn't find that there was very much to do. I don't really see how most actors could support themselves; most actors can't, unless they're doing soaps.

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(interview by Chris Claremont)

I will let you read the rest of the cast and crew comments yourself.

Please pay particular attention to Ralph Senensky's comments on pages 13, 19 and 20. Ralph has said the episodes needed more than 7 days each to film and he reports the cast and crew were basically able to do the impossible – they completed a scheduled 3 days of filming in just 2 days – and did so with utmost professionalism.

Booth Colman's comments of interest are here because they relate to the entire series. ⁷

BOOTH: No, today you have to take the work as it comes. There isn't much choice in these matters. I think the standard is perhaps a little lower than it used to be for television. There's so much going on, so many projects in the wings. I think that was one of the troubles with our 'Planet of the Apes' series. The studio had so many projects

waiting to come on that they didn't really develop 'Planet of the Apes' as well as they might have if they'd spent a little more time and effort on it. I've always felt that. Including having people in charge who show a little more affinity for that kind of story. If you're going to do weird, strange stories you want someone at the helm who has a fondness for that type of thing. I'm talking about someone like Edgar Allen Poe or a modern equivalent of sorts, like Ray Bradbury. Someone who was comfortable with that kind of story. Because otherwise there's a sameness about it and something that doesn't fit what you're trying to convey.

⁶ *A Half Hour with Harper Marvel Magazine* "Planet of the Apes" US, no. 04, pp. 36-47

⁷ Jeff Krueger, *High Council*, Simian Scrolls issue 12, pp. 20-26

JEFF: Did you guys have a good feeling about the series going into it? I know there was a lot of excitement about it. They didn't have to shoot a pilot.

BOOTH: Yes. That's true. We were very expectant because it was as close to a ready-made hit as you could reasonably expect at that time in Hollywood. And it's true, we didn't have a pilot. It was an immediate sale. I don't know the details of all that but the network and the studio were all very pleased with it. I've always felt we could've had another year out of it, maybe one or two, if it'd been handled just a little differently. I'm talking in terms of story and that sort of thing. Yes. Because the potential was certainly there, and the audience, which they weren't fully aware of. I don't know, they thought it was some kind of kids' show or something and it had a tremendous adult audience, which they found out about later.

JEFF: When was the point where you realised the series probably wasn't going to make it?

BOOTH: You hear these things, sort of rumours get around and so forth that they were not going to renew it.

Well, as I say they had so many projects waiting to come on, waiting in the wings, that was understandable. They just had too much on their plate at that time.

Geoff Deuel, Simian Scrolls issue 18, p. 23 (1st episode filmed)

Did you have much time with the 'human' actors - Ron Harper and James Naughton ?

Yes I worked with them and again they were very nice. I came to find out later on [some 40 years later] that my wife's boss roommate in college was James Naughton!

Your co-star who played Jillia [Eileen Dietz] has previously told us that a big problem for her was her "sweaty feet" inside those ape shoes! Was it unbearably hot for the 'chimp' actors out on the Ranch ?

Yes, the weather was extremely hot! Summer in Southern California and you would perspire and itch and become kind of screwy. You just bucked up and bore it.

Eileen Dietz, Simian Scrolls issue 16, p 33 (1st episode)

Your character takes a shine to Galen and you share most of your scenes with him. What was it like working with Roddy McDowall?

He was actually one of the nicest people that I have ever met in my life! He showed me a few things, like how to walk and stand, stuff like that. He was definately an actor's actor.

So, you really didn't get to know any of the cast?

Oh, James Naughton, I did! But I think that, now, should I ever bump into him, I'm sure that he wouldn't remember me! These days I keep running into his brother, David!

Do you look back on your visit to the *Planet of the Apes* with fondness?

Oh, yes! Not only because it was so much fun to do but because of the wonderful cast! It was my first job in Hollywood so, it will always have that special place in my heart. The first is always the best, it's a bit like your very first kiss! You'll always remember it!

Bobby Porter, Simian Scrolls issue 18, p 27 (1st and 3rd episodes filmed)

Was the TV set a happy one? Did everyone seem to get along? There are stories that James Naughton and Ron Harper, although never hostile, were often somewhat cool towards each other.

I never witnessed any animosity between the two talented leads. I see Ron at conventions once in a while and he still looks great!

Jacqueline Scott, Simian Scrolls issue 16, pp. 29-31 (1st and 9th episodes)

But if he never saw you as a human on the set he might not have even recognised you.

No, absolutely he wouldn't have! He did say to me, "The make up doesn't seem to bother you as much as it does other people" and I said "Well, of course, it's miserable to wear but what are you going to do? Put it on and sit around and complain all day?"

Sitting around in the California sun in the makeup and all that burlap you were wearing must have been nasty!

It's funny, somebody else said that. I don't recall that too much but (groaning) I remember those appliances... they were hard. I remember once I was in them for 18 hours!

You said that Roddy McDowall was the "salt of the earth".

Oh he was a lovely man. It was the first time I had worked with him but we never met as 'people' only as apes!

Do you remember anything about James Naughton?

I know now that he's a great big musical comedy star! I heard that name a while back and I said "Oh my gosh, it couldn't be that human in those rags"!

Biff Elliott, Simian Scrolls issue 13, p. 41, (3rd and 6th episodes)

Did you manage to get any time with Roddy McDowall?

A little. Roddy was one of the most sweetest, wonderful and giving guys that I have ever worked with in my life. we had a ball! He was a great English actor with a wonderful sense of humour (laughs) he was always fooling around and had us rolling on the ground laughing! He used to drive Booth Colman crazy!

Was the mood on set for the later episode, "The Cure" any different from that of the pilot. Now the ratings were coming in was there any sense of impending cancellation?

No, I certainly wasn't aware of any.

Zina Bethune, Simian Scrolls issue 8, p.3 (4th episode filmed)

SS: Most of Arn's scenes were played opposite Virdon - What was it like to work alongside Ron Harper?

I found Ron Harper very professional, very personable. We had no problems at all. It was a new series for him, so I think he was excited about the boost to his career and that is always nice to be around.

SS: The TV show had a punishing schedule, did this affect you in any way?

The set didn't seem stressful to me. Everyone got along. If there was any of that, I didn't see it. Often when you come in as a guest, you don't see the same dynamic of the relationships as you would if you were there week after week.

I think it was a tough show to get done in a week's time. There were many factors - make up, miscellaneous locations, lots of story, chases, fires. there was a lot going on! The combination of monkey make-up and other effects took time. When you have all that in one week, it's tough to get it in the can.

SS: Did you get to see much of James Naughton, Roddy McDowall or Mark Lenard?

James Naughton seemed to be a lovely person. When we were on location on the back lot of MGM (Lot 11 - I think this was the "Earthquake" set). There was a stray puppy running in and out of the shots. James fell in love with him and took him home. I am a big animal activist, so that meant a lot to me.

Roddy McDowell was very exciting to work with not only because of his history, but because he was an exciting person to share a performing space with. I very much liked working with him. I thought he was a very special person and I felt honoured to work with him. He did have some concerns that his face was wearing down from all the ape make-up through the years.

Jim Storm, Simian Scrolls issue 17, pp. 40-41, (8th episode)

What is your overall memory of Planet of the Apes and your thoughts on the TV Episode that you were involved with?

That I wish every job could have been so enjoyable. From the producers, cast and crew, it was a remarkable experience.

As for Roddy, Like Roscoe, he too was a true gentleman and a professional to the core. He would greet you when you first came on the set. Welcome you, engage in conversation and always refer to you by your name at all times. A remarkable man. I remember that between takes he carried his camera all the time !

How about the main cast?

It's been said that relations were cool between Ron Harper and James Naughton but I never saw any evidence of that. As far as I could see, they were getting along just fine.

Jane Actman, Simian Scrolls issue 19, pp. 3-6 (10th episode filmed)

You share some important scenes with Roddy McDowall. What was he like to work with?

Roddy... I could write forever about him! One story will show you what he was like as a person.

It was in his contract that he finished at 4pm everyday, he was exhausted being on a tv schedule and all the apes calls were 4am if you were in the first scenes. It was a Friday, I was scheduled to finish around five or six that day, which mattered because I was going to an Elton John concert - this was the 70's, so that was huge! - I had one short scene left for the day, it was in the same set we were already shooting in, so it was all going to work out. Then someone told me, no, we have to break down that set, go to another and shoot a long scene of Roddy's so that they could get him out on time. This meant I'd be there at least another couple of hours, so no concert.

Someone told him and he went to the AD and insisted they finish my scene first, he said, "she shouldn't have to miss Elton because of me". I was so surprised and so grateful!

That's what Roddy was like, warm, giving and a wonderful actor.

How about James Naughton...You had some intense scenes with him. Did you get to rehearse kissing him without make-up? :0)

Jim Naughton was also a kind and giving actor, I loved our scenes together but no, I didn't get to kiss him as a human... which is very sad!

I remember very strongly shooting the scene where I go to feel Jim's face and Roddy steps in. After we finished there was silence on the set and Jim Naughton said, "I just fell in love with a chimp"! Who wouldn't want to hear that from Jim Naughton!

I think that was the first scene where I felt I'd gotten Fauna right, that I'd found her.

How was the mood on set ?

It was actually really good, everyone really pulled together and they were there for each other. It was an exhausting show to do, very little sleep, by the time you got home you fell into bed and got up again a few hours later to go back. The people who I really relied on for support were the makeup people and wardrobe people, they knew what you were going through physically and helped in any way they could.

Do you have any anecdotes or amusing stories relative to the TV Episode ?

I don't really have many stories, it was seriously all about getting the work done in the time we had to do it so there wasn't as much down time as there usually is on a set.

Beverley Garland, Simian Scrolls issue 12, pp 14 – 16 (12th episode filmed)

Were the scripts available to read and revise before shooting began?

We received the script about ten days in advance of the shooting, and I can't recall our making any significant changes in the dialogue. But three or four days later, when we were called in to go over the fundamentals of being an ape - how to walk, how to talk etc - I think that is when I suggested to the director that because Wanda was a doctor, she could be wearing glasses. He liked the idea. So Wanda wore glasses.

I didn't work with Roddy on "Apes", but I had the great pleasure of working with him on the movie "Sixth and Main" in 1977. He played a man with no legs. As an actor he was excellent. As a person he was funny, attentive and one of the nicest I have ever met.

You also shared screen time with Booth Colman, Mark Lenard and James Naughton. Did you enjoy working with them? Did you know any of them beforehand?

No, I did not know nor had I worked with Booth, Mark or James (prior). However, they were fun to work with !

Gary Combs, Simian Scrolls issue 19, pp. 35-36 (stuntman, 13th episode filmed)

Ratings results were worrying by the time your episode was shot. Was there any tension on set?

It seemed to be a happy set at the time.

What is your overall memory of the TV Episode that you were involved with?

I always tried to get the most out of a day at work and I recall it was a good time.

Klair Bybee, Simian Scrolls issue 20, pp. 13-14 (13th episode)

What are your memories of Ralph Senensky [Director] and, was there much time for direction and rehearsal?

Everything was done so fast... I didn't even have time to learn my character's name let alone the Director's!

There wasn't much time for preparation for the role... I wanted to look like a servant by hunching over and trying to be more like my master but at the same time being fearful I might anger him.

Senensky has made it quite clear that it was asking 'far too much' for each episode to be filmed in just seven days. Do you recall any panic?

Every work I've ever done there has always seemed to be a 'panic'... Always racing against time and costs, etc. I just thought that was normal!

Ralph Senensky, director, pers comm, Dean Preston, October 2016, (13th episode filmed)

"Ratings for the series were low because the episodes frankly were not as good as the feature films. That they were good enough to attract a core/cult audience is a tribute to the producers, actors, writers, directors -- everyone involved in their production."

Ralph Senensky, director, on his own blog site, (13th episode filmed)

"Jerry Finnerman, in his Archives of American Television interview said it was the most difficult show he had ever filmed, and that he was not sorry to see it end."

"Because we were filming at the ranch in late October early November, daylight hours were shorter. That and the physical action in the scheduled sequences necessitated the extra time at the ranch to complete them.

When we returned to the studio on the 6th day, there were still 25 pages of script to shoot that had been originally scheduled for 3 days, and it looked like we were going to go an extra day. I was not aware then, as I am now because of what I have read about the situation, that there was pressure from the network because of the low ratings the show was getting, and the studio, fearful of an early cancellation, wanted to avoid extra costs.

Stan Hough came to me at the beginning of the sixth day of filming and in a very gentlemanly way asked, since the remaining scenes to be filmed were all in the Prefect's office, would it be possible to complete the film in the next two days. With the enormous help of Jerry Finnerman and a remarkably professional cast, we completed 15 pages on that sixth day and wrapped production the following day on schedule."

<https://senensky.com/the-tyrant/#comment-78061>

Joanna Barnes, Simian Scrolls issue 12, pp 32-33 (14th episode)

Can you tell us anything about what it was like to work with Roddy?

He was such a dear man, a true professional and a real joy to be with at work - or anywhere else, for that matter.

Can you recall any off-camera practical jokes during the recording of 'Up Above the World So High'?

Sorry - no! They had to turn those shows around so quickly there was very little time for horseplay. However, it was a pleasant set to be on and the cast and crew were usually in good humour

Fred Blau, Simian Scrolls issue 14, pp 14-17, (make up, all episodes)

Roddy was legendary for being a nice guy, did the constant arduous makeup routine ever bring out a darker side?

He was probably the most professional actor that I ever worked with. He was so conscientious about his make up that it was a make-up artist's dream. Never did I ever see a dark side.

Did he ever express any disappointment with the scripts?

We never discussed the future of the series. The general consensus on the set was that the scripts "sucked."

It has been suggested that there was a certain "coolness" between Ron Harper and James Naughton

I wasn't aware of any, I don't get involved with that kind of stuff. Don't fix it if it isn't broken.

What are your recollections of other cast members?

I mainly worked on Roddy and some of the other walk on cameos. The basic cast members were very compatible with one another and it was usually always a mellow set.

The Apes TV Series was launched without a pilot, on the assumption that it was going to be a smash hit. When the axe came down on the series was there any sense of creeping impending doom or was it a sudden surprise?

The series was a given as far as the producers were concerned. All of us on the set saw the demise coming because you can only have the gorillas chasing the chimps and brought to court in front of the orangutans so many ways until you repeat yourself. I felt, in my opinion that the writing became stale. Yeah, we saw it coming.

Ron Stein, Simian Scrolls issue 19, pp. 33-34 (all episodes)

Did you get any opportunity to interact with Harper, Naughton or McDowall?

Off camera I would interact with all of them all the time while I was setting-up stunts or I'd be doing scenes with them. They were all great and everybody got along very well!

Several episodes have fights between gorillas and the astronauts. How enthusiastic were the leads about doing their own stunts?

Ron and James were great at doing their own stunts. It made it easy to film with the star in the shot.

You played 'Turvo' in the first broadcast episode "Escape from Tomorrow" and a gorilla guard in the final episode "Up Above the World So High"... Do you recall if the mood changed on set as the viewing figures came to threaten cancellation ?

It had always been a very happy production and so we were all totally devastated by the cancellation! After we heard the news Roddy got us all together and we went out to lunch still in our outfits! We took everyone at the restaurant by total surprise – it was great fun!

It was actually Ron Harper who suggested I be promoted to 'head of stunts' after we worked on the episode "The Legacy". As the stunt co-ordinator I was responsible for all the action on the show. I was always trying to come up with different and interesting stunts.

To be perfectly honest it was all great. I look back on it all with great fondness. It was the most fun and interesting show that I have ever worked on!

Dan Striepeke, Simian Scrolls issue 14, pp 3-7, (make up, all episodes)

What are your memories of Roddy?

He was the perfect pro, a consummate actor. He was the heart and soul of the company. He never let on about being tired, or hot, or uncomfortable. He was always ready and usually had a good joke or two for us.

SPECIAL THANKS TO HUNTER GOATLEY who maintains the most comprehensive POTA archive online, a valuable resource without which much of POTA information would have been lost.



Harper's relationship with James Naughton was more casual, "Jim and I worked very hard together on the show, but we weren't as close as we could have been. There was a funny moment when we had to sneak into a gorilla guard house. Jim was supposed to whisper, 'No noise.' So Jim knocks out a gorilla with a judo chop and yells at the top of his lungs, 'No noise!' I cracked up and fell to the floor. I said, 'Jim, I think you've just defeated the purpose of your line!'"

Colman enjoyed working on Planet of the Apes, but he was not impressed with the way the series evolved. "The first feature had an originality and eeriness. They also had the advantage of shock. A TV series couldn't maintain that without highly ingenious stories. I would have gone after a writer like Ray Bradbury, who has a creative ability for the weird and unworldly. I preferred stories that said something and had a point of view rather than the usual claptrap. The props, costumes and actors were superior; the material was decidedly inferior. It was rushed into production before stories could be properly prepared. It was just as quickly and mistakenly canceled. It could have built a solid audience under other circumstances."

Director Ralph Senensky, who directed the segment "The Tyrant," says, "Originally, the series was about the relationship between the two cultures. The tyranny of the apes over the humans. That's what played best on the series. The minute you had the apes wrangling with each other or talking, it got dreadfully boring. It's also hard to do anything like Planet of the Apes on a seven-day schedule."

Assistant director Bill Derwin adds, "Planet was physically the toughest TV series ever made. How the actors and extras playing the apes handled it, I'll never know. Imagine what it would be like to be even slightly claustrophobic and to wear heavy, hot, scratchy uniforms. And to work at the Fox ranch where it always seemed to be 110 degrees. You're on a horse you can't ride, and you have to hit your marks and remember your dialogue. Most of them could manage, but for those who couldn't, it was impossible to fake it. A couple of actors literally fell apart. They ripped off their makeup and tore off their uniforms."

Tom McDonough, a gorilla stand-in and extra, admits, "The makeup was miserable. We carried umbrellas for shade. It was especially hard for me because I have blue eyes, requiring me to wear contact lenses to make my eyes brown. With the dust kicked up by the horses, it was terrible. The makeup took three and a half hours to apply. Your head was completely enclosed in hair, rubber and glue. We had to drink through straws."

Veteran stuntman George Robotham pleads guilty. Robotham had tackled everything from dangerous explosions to underwater stunts, but he could not face the demands of being a gorilla. "In a mishmash of 5,000 fights and 5,000 falls in my career, Planet of the Apes is one show I don't want to remember," he says. "I spent two hours with that makeup on my face. Paul Stader was the stunt coordinator, and I went to Paul and said, 'Paul, I don't need this crap. Let somebody else do it. See you later!' The makeup was miserable."

James Naughton has not spoken about his time filming POTA and people will inevitably fill a vacuum with speculation. The one interview he did with Chris Claremont of Marvel Magazine at the time of filming was never published.⁸

James was a 1970 graduate of Yale Drama School, had been selected into their repertory group upon graduation, had a successful career debut off Broadway in **Long Day's Journey Into Night** and then made an acclaimed movie **The Paper Chase**. As with many other actors, the economic downturn in New York that started in 1972 had caused a downturn in theatre revenue and so he had moved to Hollywood with his wife and two small children seeking work. In an interview with Anne Diffily in 1990⁹ he said

"I had turned down the role (POTA) for about three or four weeks. But I finally got to the point where I had a rent payment that was two weeks overdue, and I had about \$300 left in the bank, and I had a wife and two kids. So I said yes. We made the series for about five months, and that was it. I made a very dear friend in Roddy McDowall."

In another interview with Barry Dougherty in 2002¹⁰ he said

"I wasn't dying to do that show (POTA) but I was living in LA and had a \$400 rent payment that was about two weeks overdue, which was a lot of money at the time. I had two children, I was in my twenties and I had said no to this project three times. Finally, another week went by and I said, 'I guess I better say yes.'

But with the money I made I bought the house I was renting."

He also said in 1990 after working on other series that in television¹¹

"They take a decent premise and they force you into a format that makes you want to gag. Acting in TV series pays the bills and keeps the kids in school. There's a reason to do it, but it's not a lot of fun. It's tough when you can't be proud of your work."

So basically James Naughton took the role because he needed the money, and the role was not one he would choose except for that necessity.

However Ron Harper's comments in later years may have given people the impression of conflict between the two of them.

"We respected each other as actors but, away from the set, he was a little cool. Jim's part was originally intended to be funnier than what he turned it into. The producers conceived of the role of Pete as a comedic foil for my character since they didn't really need two heroes in the show. But I don't think Jim was interested in playing the comic guy which had to make his stay on the show a little uncomfortable."¹² (1995)

"Pete was conceived of more or less as a comic foil to Alan Viridon, who was the hero. ... But (James) doesn't have that much of a light touch. So instead of having something that we could have bounced off of each other, it was really like two heroes and it was less interesting. ... Pete Burke as it evolved was very heroic and I think we missed

⁸ Chris Claremont, *Simian Scrolls* issue 17, pp. 12-13

⁹ *Life is sweet in the 'City of Angels'*, Brown Alumni Monthly, May 1990, pp.33 - 37

¹⁰ *The Cool Naughton*, Barry Dougherty 'The Friars Club' (2002)

¹¹ *Life is sweet in the 'City of Angels'*, Brown Alumni Monthly, May 1990, pp.33 - 37

¹² TV Zone Special #17 ("Lost Voyagers Special"), June 1995, interview conducted by Marc Shapiro

some opportunity to take some lighter touches. ... I did not dislike him, we're not very close, you know, we worked together, we never saw each other after socially or anything."¹³ (1997)

"Some people felt that, if the part of Burke had been played with a little bit more humor, the combination of a hero and a 'reluctant hero' on the series would have been a better combination."¹⁴ (2008)

Herbert Hirschman (executive producer) had said the TV series would be a serious drama with "a few feeble attempts at humour".¹⁵

Even the critics empathised with the difficulty James faced bringing comedy to this role.

And the inclusion of comedy in the shows is "certainly an issue" said Naughton.

"We have to split the difference between being good and on top of it, or maybe that's a cover for a real, frightening need," he added.

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Some writers don't trust actors. A segment of Planet of the Apes had the character of Galen (Roddy McDowall) falling off a cliff and explaining he fell because it was dark. The character of Burke (James Naughton) then had a line that went, "No kidding. Next time wait for the lights to change." The author had written a direction for the actor: "try levity." A line like either of those would try my levity, too, to say nothing of my patience.

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When I read about James, he is often mentioned in relation to the sports he plays or has played. Over more than fifty years he's been listed as playing soccer, baseball, basketball, golf, tennis, pickleball, cycling, squash and racquetball. However it has been mentioned several times in relation to POTA TV that he rode a motorbike and explored the canyons around the Fox Ranch.

This seems odd to me, as I can't imagine him leaving the set between filming scenes to just randomly ride a motorbike off road. This was well before mobile phones and if he'd had a fall and been injured, he could have been missing for hours, which would both make a serious dent in the production schedule and blow the budget out.

Ralph Senensky – Director of The Tyrant – stated

"the Twentieth Century Fox Ranch, was in Calabasas, within the 30-mile limit, so cast and crew reported to work at the ranch rather than reporting to the studio to be bussed to the location."¹⁸

The fact a motorbike is only ever mentioned in relation to POTA makes me wonder if it may simply have been a pragmatic commuting option. At the time he, his wife and two small children were living 12 miles away in Thousand Oaks. According to Google Maps the

¹³ Ron Harper, interviewed by Jeff Krueger (Anaheim, CA) 27 July, 1997

¹⁴ Tom Weaver, *I Talked with a Zombie: Interviews With 23 Veterans of Horror and Sci-Fi* 2008

¹⁵ Charlotte News, 10 August, 1974, p. 32

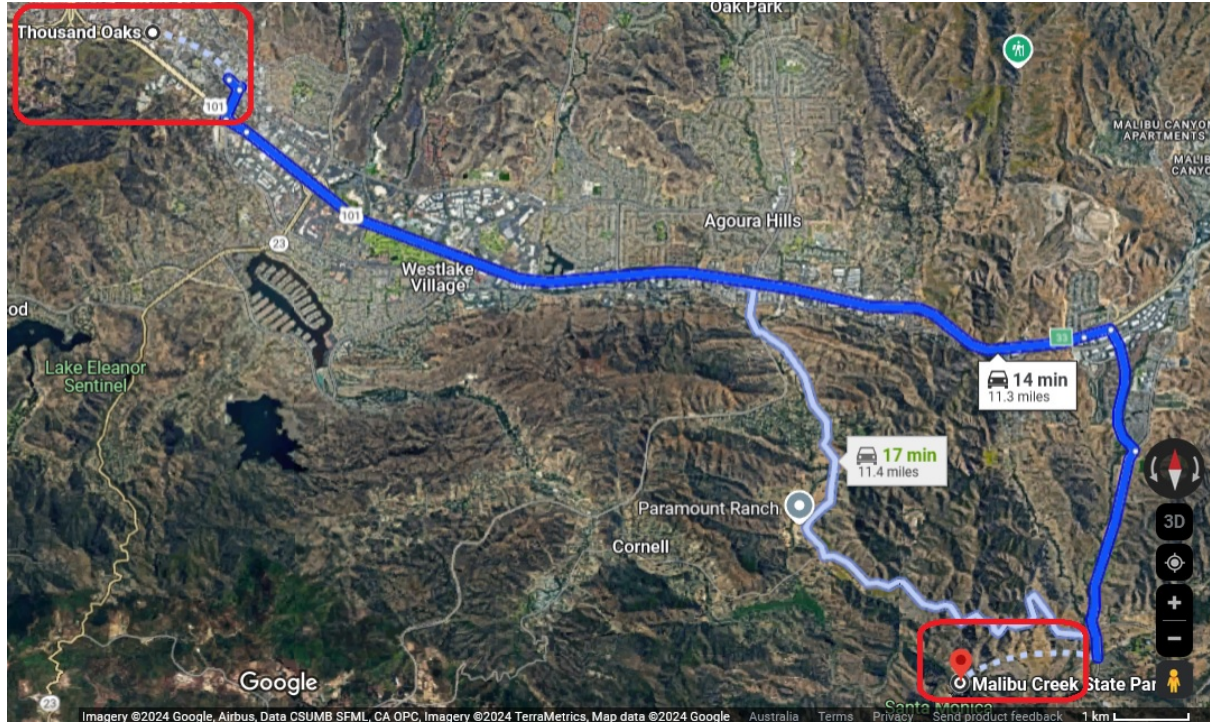
¹⁶ The Lincoln Star, 25 August, 1974, p. 74

¹⁷ The Journal, 8 November, 1974, p. 30

¹⁸ <https://senensky.com/the-tyrant/#comment-78061>

commuting time today between Thousand Oaks and the Fox Ranch is only about 15 – 20 minutes. Fifty years ago the backroads were rougher and travelling times were longer.

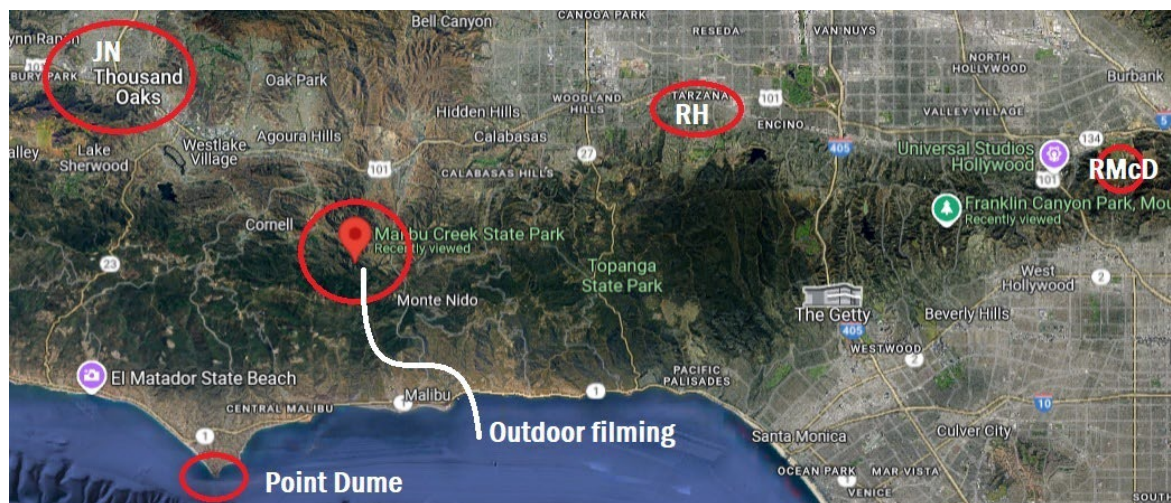
If the car was needed by his family, a motorbike would be a practical choice for him to commute to the Ranch. I included this hypothesis in a draft to James dated 8 November 2024 and he didn't correct it when he returned the draft, so I presume tacit confirmation.



Ralph Senensky also noted

“Roddy was the last due in for an ape conversion, and again, as I remember, there was a special contractual accommodation that provided him transportation from his home to the studio in the morning and a return home at the completion of the day’s filming.”¹⁹

A quick look at a map of a larger area at this point is also instructive. Ron Harper lived in Tarzana and Roddy McDowall lived in Studio City.



¹⁹ <https://senensky.com/the-tyrant/#comment-78061>

Eileen Dietz (1st episode filmed) has twice reported there was no socialising after filming for the day was finished, but this is understandable given long Summer days filming in Summer heat on location.

You know it's quite strange, but on most of the jobs that I have done, at the end of each day everybody would go off for a coffee or cup of tea. One thing I clearly recall about *Planet of the Apes* is that, to my surprise, everyone just went home!

It was probably because we were recording miles from the nearest town and everyone just wanted to get home, so, for me it was all "work, work, work" with very little socialising!

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"In New York, whenever a show was finished, the cast and crew would always get together for a drink and talk about the day's work. But in *Apes*, after we wrapped for the day, everybody just left. They all disappeared. I remember standing there alone, going (plaintively), 'Where did everybody go?' It took me awhile to realize that it was nothing personal. Everyone lived so far away that they had a long drive to get home. They didn't have time to sit around and chat."

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Ron Harper said days on location ran from 5am to dark²², and he then went home to phone his wife who was filming a daytime soapie in NYC. Roddy's work day ran from 4am to 4pm²³, so neither of them waited around to socialise.

James' wife and two young children were at home and he was an active and involved father. Like everyone else at the end of a long hot day, he probably just wanted to get home.

Dedicated to Jeff Krueger, 1964-2024



My sincere thanks to

- *Dean Preston,*
 - *Bobby Porter,*
 - *everyone who contributed to Simian Scrolls*
 - *and the staff of Marvel Magazine for all their work collecting these reminiscences over many years.*
- Susan Cunningham 2024*

²⁰ Eileen Dietz, Simian Scrolls issue 16, p. 33

²¹ Eileen Dietz, Infinity 05, p. 24

²² The Columbia Record, 13 July 1974, p. 13

²³ Jane Actman, Simian Scrolls issue 19, p. 4