

# Return to the **PLANET OF THE APES**

**W**hen French author Pierre Boulle's 10th novel was published in 1963, it was widely considered to be one of his lesser works. Certainly, said the pundits, it was neither as important nor as commercial as his previous smash, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, which became an Academy Award winning film.

The novel was called *Le Planete Des Singes* (or "Monkey Planet" in English), and like the prognosticators, who thought *Star Trek* would die when the TV show was canceled or those who suggested that comics would disappear after the advent of video games, the pundits were wrong.

Producer Arthur P. Jacobs was an old-fashioned Hollywood executive who had climbed his way up the ladder to a position of recognition among the elite of the movie business. He had most recently finished *Dr. Doolittle* and latched onto the film rights of Boulle's novel. He had the rights and the basic idea of what he wanted to do, but he didn't have a script, a star, or a studio. In Hollywood, that puts you on a par with the valet who parks your car. (The valet probably has an option on something, too.) Jacobs, though, believed in the property, and he doggedly pitched the concept around town in his unrelenting attempts to get the film made.

Even while he couldn't get a positive response from the studio heads, Jacobs started building his team. Charlton Heston was already a well-known and highly respected actor when Jacobs approached him. The star of such classics as *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments* was intrigued.

"The novel was singularly uncinematic; there wasn't even a treatment outlining an effective script," Heston wrote in his 1996 autobiography (entitled *In The Arena*) "Still, I smelled a good film in it. All Arthur had was the rights to the novel and a portfolio of paintings depicting possible scenes. He came up to the house and displayed them, along with what Hollywood calls 'The Pitch.' When Frank Schaffner came by, he liked it enough to commit as director, but Arthur was a long way from persuading a studio to put up any actual money to make the movie."

With Heston and director Franklin J. Schaffner (Oscar winner for directing *Patton*





...DAMN DIRTY APES!

The legions of *Planet of the Apes* comic and magazine collectors have long known that the dictum of legendary DC editor Julie Schwartz is true: “Magazines and comics that feature human-like gorillas on the cover... sell!”

in 1970) attached, the film still went nowhere for the next year and a half. If there truly is a “Development Hell” as it’s called in the trade, Arthur Jacobs and his project were in it.

“Star Wars and the still-enduring cycle of space operas that followed came later,” Heston recalled. “Then the project recalled the Saturday serials of the 1930s. ‘No kidding, talking monkeys and rocket ships? Buck Rogers and Ming the Merciless, right? Gedouttahere!’”

During that time, though, Jacobs was able to elicit some interest from Richard Zanuck, the head of 20th Century Fox. He was interested in the concept, but he wondered how audiences would react to the apes? Would they be believable or would moviegoers just laugh.

By J. C. Vaughn





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In the amazing age of special effects wizardry that constitutes Hollywood today, it's hard to over-estimate the importance of the believability of the apes in the first film in its day. This wasn't going to be the guy-in-a-gorilla-suit stealing the pretty young woman in some 1930's or '40's grade B adventure. If this film were to be made, it would be a multi-million-dollar undertaking. Neither Zanuck nor his board of directors wanted to be seen as spending their stockholders' money on this movie if people were just going to laugh at it.

Jacobs, Heston, and Schaffner suggested a test film to show that the ape characters could be taken seriously. The result not only sold Zanuck, who in turn sold the Fox board of directors, it became one of the enduring underpinnings of the franchise's myths.

For many years this film was unknown to

fans, but once revealed there was much speculation as to whether or not it still existed. It was if not the Holy Grail than certainly a close second to Apes' fans. Until the recent documentary *Behind the Planet of the Apes*, only snippets of this film had ever been seen by the public. Even with the extended cut in the documentary, few have ever seen the entire test.

Starring Heston as astronaut Colonel Thomas (which, of course, became Col. Taylor) and Edward G. Robinson as the orangutan Dr. Zaius, this five-minute test film featured an early, much less detailed version of the ape faces which would later win acclaim for creative make-up supervisor John Chambers.

From the test one can see that Robinson would have made an interesting Dr. Zaius, but it would have been an almost entirely disparate version of the one portrayed by Maurice Evans (an acclaimed Shakespearean actor known to American audiences chiefly as Samantha's father on the sitcom *Bewitched*).

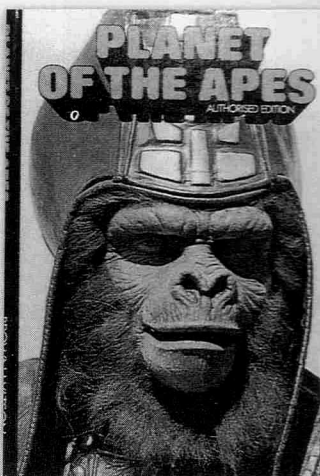
Although this script was more talky and differed dramatically from the finished version, there are some elements that survived in the feature film (particularly toward the archeological dig scene at the end where Taylor and Zaius exchange some of their best dialogue in the cave). Regardless of the differences and similarities, the test film enabled Zanuck to get the money to give the go ahead to Jacobs.

## Next stop, The Twilight Zone

Jacobs had been in regular contact with writer-producer Rod Serling, known to fans of science fiction (and great television) as the man behind *The Twilight Zone* and later, *Night Gallery*. Serling's connection with *Planet of the Apes* pre-dated Jacobs' by several years.

The film rights had first been optioned by the King Brothers, "...who did mostly Indian elephant pictures shot for about \$1.80—because elephants weren't even scale then," Serling told Marvel's *Planet of the Apes* magazine in 1974. He was con-

Ed Hannigan's  
artwork from  
"Evolution's  
Nightmare" in  
POTA #5.



Apes around the world—  
(above) one of the British  
Apes annuals, and (below)  
Guide prices on the Marvel  
and Gold Key Apes maga-  
zines and comics.

## PLANET OF THE APES GOOD 'N' CHEAP

SOURCES: *The Guide: The Overstreet Comic Book Price Update* #2 (Dec 1998) and *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* #28 (Apr 1998)

### PLANET OF THE APES (Marvel Comics)

#	GD	FN	NM
#1	2.50	7.50	24.00
#2	1.50	4.50	12.00
#3-10	1.10	3.30	9.00
#11-20	1.25	3.75	10.00
#21-29	1.75	5.25	14.00

### ADVENTURES ON THE PLANET OF THE APES (Marvel Comics, color reprints of b&w magazine movie adaptations)

1	1.10	3.30	9.00
2-5	2.00	5.00	
6-11	1.00	2.80	7.00
Buckler #2-c,			
Nasser #7-c,			
Starlin #1-c, 6-c			

### MOVIE COMICS (Gold Key)

Beneath The Planet of the Apes			
#30044-012			
Pull-out poster, photo-c			
w/poster	6.00	18.00	60.00

vinced a movie could be made inexpensively, so he wrote a treatment with a scene-by-scene breakdown for the company. The rights next were acquired by Blake Edwards, known then for *Peter Gunn*, but later famous for the *Pink Panther* film series. Serling said Edwards told him not to worry about the budget. The resulting screenplay, he speculated, would have cost \$100 million to produce (in 1974!) and was very similar to the original novel in that there was an ape civilization on a par with our own.

When Jacobs acquired the rights and a more modest budget (\$5.8 million was the final reported figure) was arranged, Serling again went back to the typewriter. He wrote three drafts of the screenplay before the duties were handled over to Michael Wilson, who had previously worked on *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, among many other projects.

Among the many contributions to the mythos which stem from Serling's drafts, the structure of the film itself and the final scene in which Taylor realizes that he isn't on some distant planet after all.

Wilson, even according to Serling, was the one who added the inverted humor to the screenplay. Lines like "The dearly departed once said to me, 'I never met an ape I didn't like,'" or "You know what they say. 'Human see, human do,'" clearly helped inject the audience with the world-turned-upside-down feeling the character Taylor was supposed to be experiencing, though they did so in a humorous fashion.

With Charlton Heston as Taylor, Roddy McDowall as Cornelius, Kim Hunter as Zira, Maurice Evans as Dr. Zaius and Linda Harrison as Nova, *Planet of the Apes* was ready to roll... and roll it did! In addition to the average pitfalls that face a film crew, *Apes* had at least two, which were somewhat unique. The actors playing the lead apes spent four hours at the beginning of each day getting into make-up and two hours each night getting out of it, and if that wasn't enough, Heston caught the flu and almost couldn't work.

Like the scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* where Indiana Jones just shoots the mammoth, menacing swordsman (which came about because Harrison Ford had dysentery and could barely stand), the timing of Heston's illness lead to a great moment.

When he returned, his voice was weak. It was a struggle to get the dialogue out, but that effort paid off with one of the most famous movie lines in a science fiction film: "Take your stinking paws off me, you damn dirty ape." If he had been healthy, the line would have been the same, but would it have had that same raw quality? One can only speculate.

The film was released February 8, 1968, and a small dynasty was born. It was hailed on many levels. Though it is obviously a discourse on racism, it stirred up none of the reaction that a movie with a then-modern setting dealing with similar issues would have raised. To be sure, many of the viewers were children and they didn't care about messages. To them, it was just a great movie. According to all reports, *Beneath the Planet of*



*the Apes* and the other sequels were afterthoughts, reactions to the boffo box office reports for *Planet of the Apes*.

[Editor's note: Merchandising, too, was very much an afterthought then, but for more details on Apes collectibles check out Terry Hoknes' excellent contribution on POTIA collectibles elsewhere in this issue. SEE PAGE 44.]

Rod Serling wrote a proposal for the sequel, as did Pierre Boulle (some of Boulle's *Planet of the Men* proposal made it into the third film, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*) and others.

Although Heston did not want to participate in *Beneath*, he agreed to reprise his role as Taylor in the early scenes and again at the end of the film, donating his agreed-upon Guild-minimum fee to his son Fraser's school.

Roddy McDowall was tied to another project, making this the only live-action *Apes* film or show he didn't act in. He was, however, in the film, as it begins where the first one left off. Since his character, Cornelius, was an ape, McDowall could at least visually be replaced. Heston's Taylor, though, was the character the audience was supposed to identify

**NBC's *Return to the Planet of the Apes* was the last new filmed Ape entertainment produced.**

## EDITORS OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

The mid-1970s wasn't exactly the easiest time to be an editor or editor-in-chief at Marvel. As matter of fact, after Stan Lee and Roy Thomas, the "chief" was almost a turnstile until Jim Shooter arrived.

### Marvel's Editors-in-Chief

Roy Thomas.....	#1-3
Marv Wolfman.....	#4-10
Archie Goodwin.....	#11-29

### P.O.T.A. Editors

Tony Isabella.....	#1-3
Don McGregor.....	#4-8
Archie Goodwin.....	#9
John Warner (associate editor).....	#10-23
John Warner (editor).....	#24-29

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with, so replacing him was trickier.

James Franciscus was cast as Brent, an astronaut sent out after Taylor's original crew. He follows a different route, but basically ends up going through the same sort of things Taylor did, even finding out that he's back home on Earth, not some weird way-off world.

While the story lacks in originality (it was, after all, the sequel), it is still a gripping adventure and serves as a further exploration into the world the apes have built.

In the story by associate producer Mort Abrahams and writer Paul Dehn (*Goldfinger*), viewers discover that mute humans

hunted by apes are not our only inheritors. Below the surface of a nuked New York lives a race of radiation-scarred mutants with amazing telepathic powers. These mutants, lead by a man called Mendez XXVI, fear Brent (although it's not said why with their powers they couldn't tell he was telling the truth), but they fear the approaching ape army even more. Brent and Taylor are reunited and as the apes attack,

they set off a bomb, a last reminder of our civilization. Short on the subtle social commentary of the first film, *Beneath* goes for its legacy in one big action. Taylor, dying, presses the button that destroys the world.

*Beneath the Planet of the Apes* was released in 1970, and that should have been that. Except it did well enough that Fox want-

ed a sequel. Again. Since Colonel Taylor had just blown up the Earth in the year 3955, it didn't seem like there would be much ground on which to base a third film. To the financial types at Fox, that was just an annoying detail, a detail Arthur Jacobs was only too happy to confront and turn into another film.

*Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971) was written by Paul Dehn, who would then go on to write the screenplay for the fourth film and the story for the fifth.

In *Escape*, Cornelius (once again played by Roddy McDowall), Zira (still portrayed by Kim Hunter), and the previously unmentioned Dr. Milo (Sal Mineo) escaped the destruction of the Earth only to be sent back in time to the then current 1970s. Milo is killed right away before he can explain to their new human friends exactly how he figured out how to work Col. Taylor's spacecraft (which sank in a lake the last time the viewers saw it).

Many of the racial and societal themes addressed in the first film were confronted again from the reverse angle as the apes are made into first oddities, then celebrities, and then fugitives. Finally, they are killed in an attempt to prevent the downfall of man and the society they had come from.

Yes, the films had killed their leading characters. Now no one from the first film was left alive. That could have been that if *Escape* hadn't performed at the box office, but it did. This time, though, Arthur Jacobs and his staff were prepared. During the story, Zira gave birth to a babe she named Milo. At the end of the film, we see that the humans have killed a baby chimp, but not the right one. Milo lives on with circus owner Sr. Armando (Ricardo Montalban).

*Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972) is set in what was the near future, 1991. The dogs and cats have been killed by a plague, and apes have replaced them. First they were pets, but now they are slaves.

It is a bleak, brutal, and dark future explored in a fairly unflinching fashion by writer Dehn and director J. Lee Thompson. It is, as one would suspect, a further and perhaps more direct attack on racial issues.

Roddy McDowall was the only remaining cast member, this time playing the grown-up version of baby Milo. Now he goes by the name Cesar. In short order, he escalates the level of ape discontent into a full-blown insurrection. Man, in this city, is overthrown.

"Tonight, we have seen the birth... of the planet of the apes!" Cesar told the cheering throng of rebel apes. Only that dialogue and

**Mike Ploog's fluid artwork brought apes and humans alike to life.**



Jason & Alexander from "Terror on the Planet of the Apes," an on-going story in the Marvel magazines.







their other words in that scene were "looped," or dubbed in later. The original speech, perhaps lost to time, featured a call to genocide as well as the call to arms. Fox insisted that it be cut rather than be perceived as encouraging such behavior (the Watts Riots of the '60s were still fresh in everyone's minds).

## Alpha... and Omega

When *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* began production, Arthur Jacobs knew it would be the last in the series. Budgets had dwindled from each picture to the next, dropping from \$5.8 million for the first film to \$1.8 million for *Battle*, and Jacobs wanted to move onto other projects (he had produced Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam* for director Herbert Ross in 1972). With Cesar (McDowall) now the leader of an agrarian ape-human city, the former slave masters (the humans) must now struggle for equality with their former slaves and current masters. The situation for the humans is, by and large, much better than it was for the apes in *Conquest*, but it is not freedom. This subtle point was not as powerfully carried out as it could have been with a larger budget, but that was not to be the case.

While of interest to *Apes* fans, there is little to recommend the last feature to outsiders. There is, though, one interesting point in this film that even many die-hard fans aren't aware of. There are two distinctly different prints of *Battle for the Planet of the*

*Apes*. In the second, more rare version (which follows the final draft of the screenplay), the viewer sees a few key scenes regarding the Alpha Omega bomb. The viewer also sees Mendez, the Governor's aide, decide not to use it. In this version it is clear that he is the forefather of Mendez XXVI from *Beneath*.

*Battle for the Planet of the Apes* was released in 1973, and Arthur P. Jacobs died suddenly in 1974. At the time, Ape-mania was in full swing. The Marvel Comics magazine *Planet of the Apes* was launched. For some reason it was made clear that Marvel could not adapt the upcoming television show, but they could adapt the films and create original stories [see sidebar]. While the royalties generated by the magazine and other products were not even a blip on the radar by today's *Star Wars*-inspired standards, *Apes* merchandise was a big seller.

That same year, Twentieth Century Fox and CBS teamed up to create the television series *Planet of the Apes*. Set in a different time (3085), earlier than the first film but later than *Battle*, the series followed the exploits of two human astronauts, Alan Virdon (Ron Harper) and Pete Burke (James Naughton), who enlist the companionship of a chimpanzee, Galen (Roddy McDowall) as they avoid capture by the ape authorities.

As with most dramas of the time, Virdon, Burke and Galen spent their time fighting social injustices (It was, after all, the '70s). The condition of humans in this period is substantially

One of Tom Sutton's vast city ships from "The Future History Chronicles" in Marvel's POTA magazine.

See our exclusive Doug Moench interview beginning on page 31.

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below what it was in *Battle*, but still above what is was in the first film.

The Dr. Zaius of this period (Booth Colman) definitely knows that man once ruled the planet and fears Virton and Burke for that reason. His military counterpart, General Urko (*Star Trek's* Mark Lenard) just knows they represent a threat to their way of life.

The show was up against ABC's *The Night Stalker* and didn't do well at all in the ratings. It was canceled after just 14 episodes were filmed. For reasons lost to the murkiness of time, one episode did not air in the U.S. while the show was on network television (it did air overseas with the original broadcasts). The thirteenth episode, "The Liberator," got its first U.S. broadcast during the Sci-Fi Channel's *Planet of the Apes* re-runs.

Even that, though, wasn't enough to kill the apes off. The next year, NBC unveiled *Return to the Planet of the Apes*.

*Return* was yet another take on the same song. Three astronauts (Bill Hudson, Judy Franklin and Jeff Carter), crash land on the planet, meet the humans, meet the apes, find out it's Earth and so on. This time it's 3979.

The interesting twist was the Underworlders, who were somewhat like the mutants in *Beneath*, but who worshipped a statue of Judy which read "Lost USA," so they called her "Usa." It was clearly in contradiction to some elements of the films, but by and large the stories were very inventive.

The series was produced by David DePatie and the legendary Friz



Freleng (without digressing too far into the realm of editorializing, it is safe to say that Freleng didn't get "legendary" with this show). As with many animated programs of its era, the most discernible feature of the program was the obvious cost-cutting approach taken in the re-use of standard scenes, action and backgrounds.

The above complaints notwithstanding, it is definitely possible to detect the influence of director-associate producer Doug Wildey in the production. *Return to the Planet of the Apes* was canceled after one season, though, and the Marvel magazine soon followed it. For many years, there were no new Apes stories.

The 30th Anniversary re-release late last year and the untimely death of Roddy McDowall soon after called attention to the films again, and critics seemed willing to take another look at the series.

Revivals have already happened in comics. Adventure Comics, then an imprint of Malibu Comics, published a series in the early '90s that was initially well received before getting buried by the marketplace. On the internet, ape websites abound. There are brand new trading cards and action figures. The boxed set of the videos is a top seller and the 30th Anniversary documentary *Behind the Planet of the Apes* has filled in the missing pieces for many collectors.

It is film, though, where the uncertainty lies. There have been many rumors of remakes or new *Planet of the Apes* films for several years now, but there has yet to be any concrete progress. A call to the right people at Fox will earn one the answer, "It's in development."

The phrase "in development," however, can mean anything from "we start shooting tomorrow" to a discussion where one executive looks at the other and asks, "Do you think we ought to remake *Planet of the Apes*?"

Thanks to Mark Haynes, Mike Wilbur, Arnold T. Blumberg, Terry Holknes, & the rest of the guys at Ape Management.

Doug Moench and Mike Ploog built on the movies' legacy in the Marvel magazine.

## MARVEL PLANET OF THE APES CHECKLIST

### Here's the Story

#### Adaptations

Planet of the Apes #1-6

Beneath the Planet of the Apes #7-11

Escape from the Planet of the Apes #12-16

Conquest of the Planet of the Apes #17-21

Battle for the Planet of the Apes #23-28

#### Original Stories

Terror on the Planet of the Apes

#1-4, 6, 8, 11, 13-14, 19-20, 23, 26-28

Evolution's Nightmare #5

Kingdom on an Island of the Apes #9-10, 21

Future History Chronicles #12, 15, 17, 24, 29

Quest for the Planet of the Apes #22 (two parts)