

APE



The Kingdom of Kong

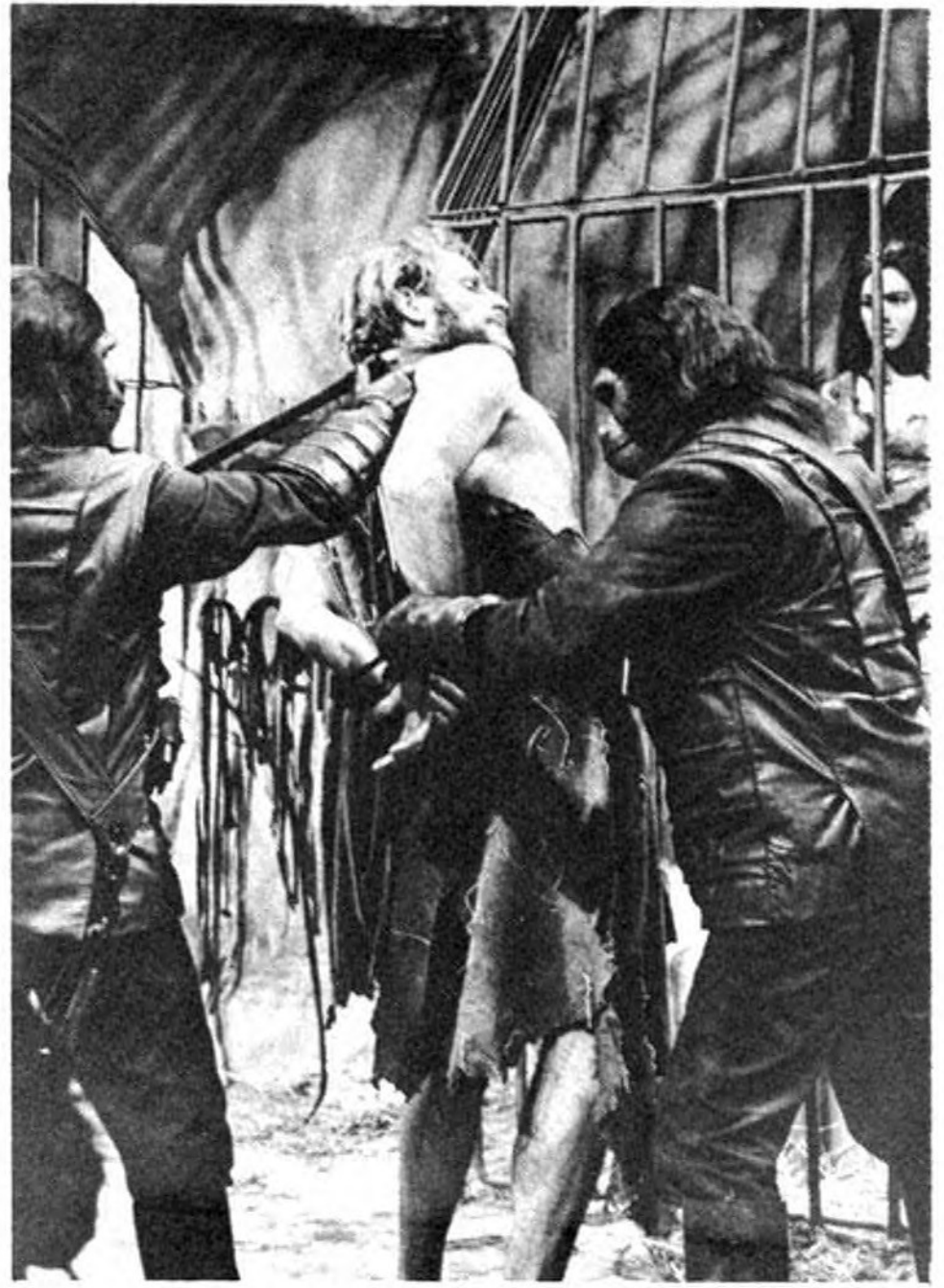


By David Annan

The wise ape in *Planet of the Apes*, showing a remarkable resemblance to Darwin. This modern cycle of films relies on the popular belief that Darwin found a common ground between men and monkeys, and that literate apes might evolve out of men in the future.







When Pierre Boulle wrote *Planet of the Apes* in 1963, he took up the theme of Gulliver and the monkey in order to satirise our society, but in terms of science-fiction. In his version,

The apes prepare to round up their human victims . . . and carry off Charlton Heston to the cage. From *Planet of the Apes*, the first of five successful films on this theme.



space travellers from Earth land on an unknown planet, where humans are no more developed than chimpanzees, while simians are as developed as humans. In a fearsome game drive, the humans are killed and netted by the apes for their scientific experiments. In Boulle's book, the human hero rapidly becomes adjusted to being treated as an interesting chimpanzee and to the sight of simians in clothes, doing Pavlovian tests. 'These monkeys, male and female, gorillas and chimpanzees, were not in any way *ridiculous*.' They never strike the hero 'as being animals in disguise, like the tame monkeys that are exhibited in our circuses'. They are the natural rulers of humans on their planet.

After a time, a female ape-scientist, Zira, manages to communicate with the hero, and delivers the logic of their thinking: 'Monkey is of course the only rational creature', she says, 'the only one possessing a mind at the same time as a body'. Man is a mere animal, only capable of mimicry. *Simius sapiens* evolved, while *homo* remained brutal. The reason was the use of four hands. It helped monkeys climb trees and understand the three dimensions of space, while men had to stay on their flat feet. Monkeys could use tools with far more dexterity than man. The ape is the mechanic, the human the pet.

The human hero, however, convinces Zira that he has come from Earth, and she is allowed to take him



Charlton Heston on his leash with his ape guards . . . and getting his own back. He wears a loin cloth instead of being naked as in the original story.

out naked on a lead. He convinces the simian academy of sciences that he is as rational as they are, and he becomes the pet of monkey society. But he has his enemies among the old guard of ape biologists, and he has to flee for his life in his spacecraft with a wife and child picked up from the regressed humans on the planet of the apes. But on his return to Earth, he is met by gorillas, who have taken over his own planet in his absence.

Such is Boulle's novel. The brilliance of the first of the five films on the theme of the *Planet of the Apes* is to add a time warp. At the beginning, Charlton Heston, as the astronaut, discovers that his female companion in her time capsule has aged away recessively to a withered monkey. Man's simian origins

are hinted at, and when Charlton Heston is netted by the wise apes, he realises how their evolutionary process has outstripped man's on their planet. In Boulle's book, Zira and her lover, Cornelius, discover a ruined human city, which proves that human society originally ruled the planet before the apes took over and that the humans regressed to brutes. In the film, however, Charlton Heston, trying to escape across a desert, comes to the sea where a great ruined Statue of Liberty stands as lonely as the statue of Ozymandias. Heston looks at it and despairs. For he realises that his space-ship has gone in a circle through its time warp and he has landed on Earth again, *after* it has been taken over by the apes. He cannot escape. That is the end for man.



Something has gone wrong in the time capsule and the female astronaut has receded to a mummified ape.

Yet it was not. The huge success of *Planet of the Apes* made 20th Century-Fox demand four sequels from screenwriter Paul Dehn. Dehn was ordered by the studio to destroy the whole planet and the cast at the end of the first sequel, and he dutifully did so, only to receive a cable six months later: 'Film great success. Further sequel required'. Dehn had to invent a son and a grandson for Zira and Cornelius, Caesar and Cornelius II. Dehn has always given credit to the inspiration of Boulle's original novel, writing that the fall of man and the rise of the primates becomes more and more true. 'The human race is declining. Apes are being taught to solve complex physical problems, to make reasoned choices, and to

communicate with human beings.' The questions to Dehn are these: when will an ape's last grunt turn into his first word, or when will man's last word turn into his first grunt?

The four sequels carried the war between the wise apes and men to many reversals and conclusions. In *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, the destruction of New York by atomic blast is seen. An astronaut sent off after Heston comes back to an underground civilisation of human mutants, who live in the cellars and subways of devastated Manhattan. They worship the cobalt bomb and have terrible powers in psychological warfare. Invaded by armed gorillas, they blow up the whole world in a solution worthy of Dr. Strangelove, and of a society that has learned to love the bomb.





In *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, Cornelius and Zira and a third ape have rediscovered and repaired the original spacecraft, which first brought the astronauts to the ape-ruled planet. Thus they manage to get away just before the doomsday explosion, and they arrive back at the earlier human period in the history of the planet Earth. In their turn, they become curiosities in Hollywood, ape freaks in a freakish society. The pregnancy of Zira poses the dilemma that the rational apes may breed a race which will overcome men – and the apes are tried and condemned for it.





The final two sequels of the film series, *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*, were both directed by J. Lee Thompson and resulted in fine fantasy films, although the budgets and the qualities of the scripts diminished. In the first of the two, the apes are enslaved by human society. Then they revolt and destroy the world in the atomic holocaust already described. In the final film, the few living beings left on the planet

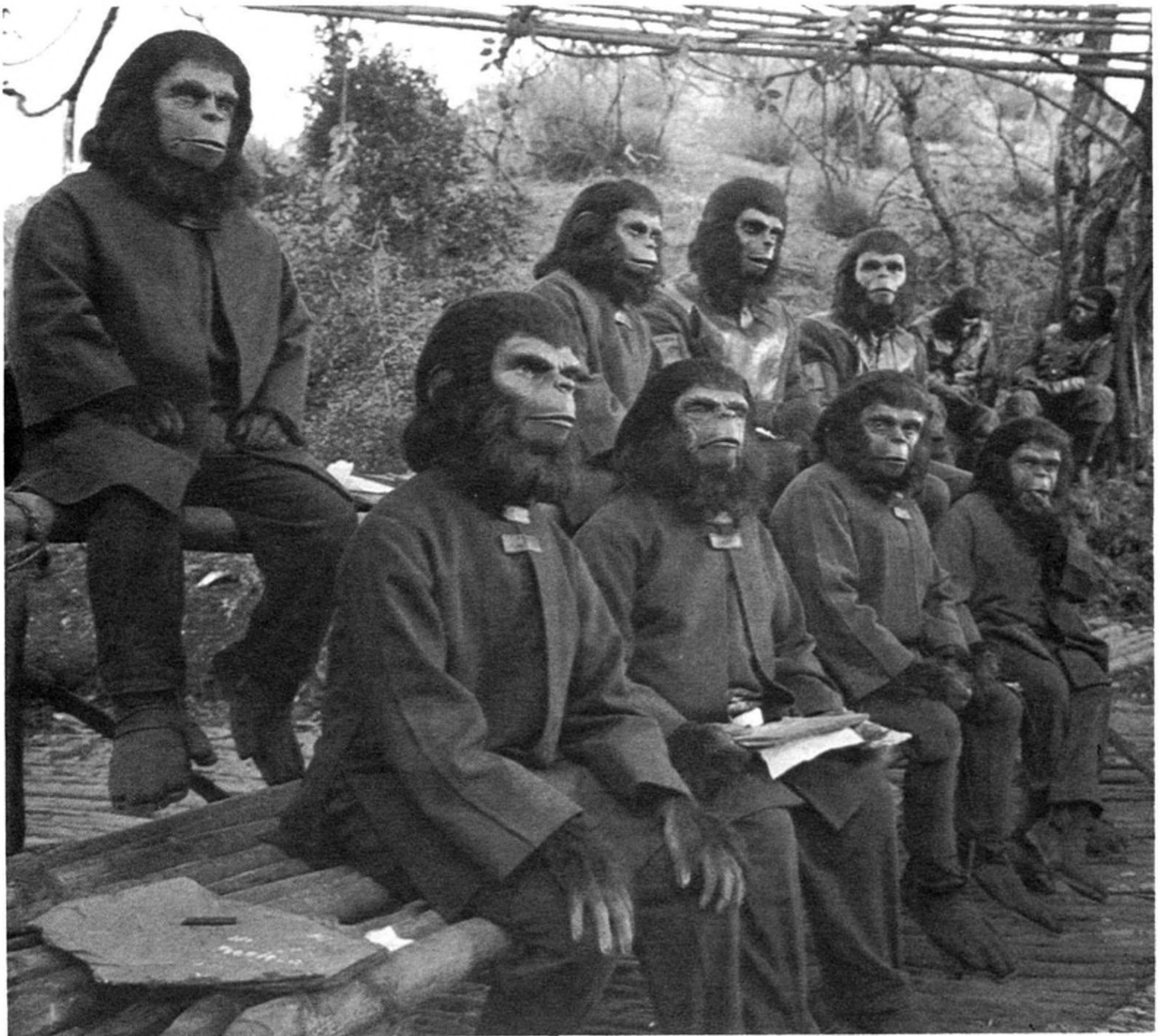
Earth are dominated again by the simians, wisely led by Caesar, the son of Zira and Cornelius. They exist in a tranquil Eden, but they journey to an atom-wasted city, where they find the race of human mutants. These mutants attack the apes, who are also threatened by a gorilla revolt within their own ranks. The apes, however, prevail and restore peace on earth and goodwill to all simians.



Paul Dehn gave three reasons for the success of the five films about the apes. They were top-notch science-fiction and attracted the children. They attacked what adolescents thought wrong about adult human society, and thus they drew in the students. And most curiously, black people went to see the films in large numbers, equating Ape Power with Black Power. Although any correspondence between apes and Africans might seem unfortunate, the victory of wise apes over degenerate white humans was seen as a triumph. *King Kong*,

indeed, was taken as the title of the first black musical out of South Africa, which was successful there and in London. The theme of its mighty, triumphant, doomed gorilla (here played out in terms of a boxer) seemed apt to the black society of *apartheid*, questing and lunging after its rights.

Another mass appeal of the Apes films, particularly the last one, and of *King Kong*, lay in the concept of an escape to a simpler, more primitive Eden or garden, where might was not confused by right, where man could



The final battle at last, resulting in an ape victory.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

in the incredible Apes saga. The most unbelievable showdown ever filmed as two civilizations battle for the right to inherit what's left of the earth!



THE BIZARRE WORLD OF "PLANET OF THE APES" WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING...

Now civilization's final
battle between man and
ape is about to begin!

An ARTHUR P. JACOBS Production

BENEATH ↓ THE PLANET OF THE APES



The split between wise ape
and human mutant.

express himself and be free. Once in the Lido in Paris, Zizi Jean-Maire made a spectacular comeback in a singing number, where she was raised from the stage floor in the mighty palm of a Kong-like paw. Behind her was a Douanier Rousseau set, all *naïf* and seductive. In that image of force and innocence, where the ape lived in his enchanted Eden, the nostalgic dream of Kong came true.

Yet the original *King Kong* still towers over all its imitators because of the power of its erotic nightmares. The series of films based on *The Planet of the Apes* have little strength in that respect – Pierre Boulle's account of the relationship between the astronaut and the bestial girl is far more sensual and Kong-like than the film version. For one thing, she is bare and unashamed throughout the novel; and secondly, she has the most perfect body that could be

conceived on Earth. Her first appearance is spectacular, 'completely naked and without any ornament other than her hair which hung down to her shoulders'. Moreover, she is in the cascade of a waterfall, 'standing upright, leaning forwards, her breasts thrust out towards us, her arms raised slightly backwards in the attitude of a diver taking off'. It is an entrance in literature worthy of Fay Wray's stripping in *King Kong*.

What Kong did was to establish an archetype of the abduction of the maiden in white. The hypnotised being in *Dr. Caligari* had set the style for the abduction of the sacrificial girl. But *King Kong* made the pose gargantuan and the eroticism both violent and horrific. The style of the Kong posters and of O'Brien's drawings became clichés in the work of his imitators.