Watch Out, Darwin...

Tim Burton's New Vision
plus Original Series Retrospect

Summer Blockbusters!
FINAL FANTASY, CATS & DOGS
EVOLUTION, SPACEMAN
PLANET OF THE APES
The Original Series

How a One-Shot Science Fiction Film Turned Into a Decade of Adventure

By Mark Phillips and Frank Garcia

Producer Arthur P. Jacobs spent almost three years trying to pitch PLANET OF THE APES to studios, to no avail. Talking apes were potentially laughable. When Jacobs got Charlton Heston and director Franklin Schaffner interested, 20th Century Fox reconsidered. Rod Serling's outline, based on Pierre Boulle's 1963 novel Monkey Planet, introduced an astronaut who crash-lands on an alien world ruled by talking apes. The cosmopolitan simians drove cars, piloted helicopters, wore suits and ties, and hunted down humans for sport. Studio executive Richard Zanuck liked the idea but he had one concern: plausible ape makeup. The apes had to look believable for the film to work. Jacobs filmed a five-minute test reel with Edward G. Robinson as an orangutan scientist conversing with astronaut Charlton Heston. Robinson's makeup was primitive but effective (curiously, James Brolin and Linda Harrison also appeared as chimpanzees, but sans makeup. They were humanoid, with ghoulish, corpse-white faces). The 1966 test film convinced the studio to give make-up artist John Chambers one million dollars to develop an experimental, porous latex ape makeup.

For budget purposes, Michael Wilson rewrote Serling's script, removing the apes' technology and transforming their society. "It was a unique script with a moral viewpoint," noted actor Lou Wagner, who played Zira's outspoken nephew, Lucius. "This was in the 1960s, where people were very conscious of the war and the bomb. The script was mind-boggling to read because it attacked what we felt in our hearts. It was about taking a chance with total annihilation."

Making the Film

Wagner recalled that he, Roddy McDowall, and Kim Hunter sweltered under the makeup in Arizona's one hundred degree temperatures. The production crew realized there were no straws for the actors to drink through to avoid destroying their ape appliances. "Chuck Heston was into running," said Wagner. "He ran back to base camp, about a mile away, and got straws for us. He didn't give it a second thought. He probably doesn't remember that, but it burned in my mind how nice and generous that was."

A team of talented technicians and craftsmen handled every challenge. The Oscar-winning makeup by John Chambers and his crew was the most ambitious in cinematic history. The gorillas looked ferocious, the chimpanzees looked kind, the orangutans looked wise. The set calls began at 4:30 am and it took four hours to apply the ape makeup to the actors.

Buck Kartalian played Julius, the witty gorilla gatekeeper who dispensed warnings about humans. Kartalian had never worked with Heston before, but as he recalled, "To him, I was just a gorilla and that made our scenes better. When I was hitting him with a rubber club, he said, 'Don't hold back. Hit me harder.' So I hit him harder. He was a very serious and dedicated actor. At the wrap party, I walked up to him and he had no idea who I was. I said, 'It's me, Julius. Be nice to me or I'll club you!' and he laughed."

The impressive Ape City was created at 20th Century Fox's Malibu Ranch. Greg Jensen, who creates and supervises various special effects work for films such as SPEED and the upcoming THE SCORPION KING, got one of his first assignments building the stone-age Ape City. The city, built over a lake, had to support the weight of actors playing gorillas.

"We first welded a framework together, in the rough shape of the buildings," recalled Jensen. "Then we wrapped it with heavy paper and from inside the structures, we shot a rapid high-expansion foam all over the frame and paper. We pulled the paper off, leaving the hardened foam with the look the art director wanted. Sometimes we needed to carve the foam. It
was later painted to look like rock."

Today, Ape City exists only in memory. "That area is now Malibu Creek State Park," Jensen said. "The Ape City lake is overgrown with reeds and ninety percent of it is filled in with sand and rocks."

Jensen recalled that in nearby Hunter's Ranch, a field of corn was specifically grown for the hunt sequence. "Every day, two large dump trucks brought the ripened corn to our SFX department. We took as much as we wanted."

Unexploited, natural locations also added to the mystery of the film's initial scenes on the planet. When director of photography Leon Shamroy first glimpsed the spectacular landscape of Utah, he gasped, "God is a helluva set designer."

Soaring temperatures of 110 degrees caused the late Jeff Burton [Dodge] to faint, and a couple of gorilla extras to go crazy and desperately tear off their ape heads. For trivia buffs, Jonathan Harris (Dr. Smith of LOST IN SPACE) was offered the role of orangutan Dr. Maximos, but Harris's claustrophobic fear of the makeup made him pass. Woodrow Parfrey stepped in.

Lou Wagner recalled attending his first screening for a paying audience: "It's so exciting when you know you have the audience. When Taylor said the first words, 'Get your paws off me, you damn, dirty ape!' the audience cheered!"

Wilson's original ending had Taylor killed by a gorilla sniper moments after discovering the statue, and a pregnant Nova riding off alone, carrying Taylor's unborn who will lead the revolt of mankind. It was decided Taylor's breakdown on the beach was more cinematic. However, a scene with Zira diagnosing Nova with child was filmed and discarded.

Wagner recalled that 1968 audiences reacted with audible cries in the theater. "It showed our stupidity of playing with this giant nuclear threat. That's why the script was kept strictly confidential. There was red across the scripts stating that you were not to divulge the contents of the script to anyone for any reason, and the secret was kept! The reviewers helped too. If you read any of the early reviews, they never revealed the ending."

Kartalian recalled, "Every day after shooting they took our masks away and hid them. They wanted to keep the look of the aper secret."

The other major concern was if the film would work at all. "Schaaffner was a little afraid that the entire thing could turn out ludicrous," Kartalian said. "He certainly didn't want it to be funny. When I said my line, 'You know what they say—human see, human do,' he said to me, 'Stop it! Don't try to be funny when you say that line.' I said, 'I'm not trying to be funny. The line is funny. I'm saying it as flat as I can.'"

Schaaffner also rejected a very human suggestion from Kartalian. "I said, 'Mr. Schaffner, why not open a scene with me smoking a cigar?' He just looked at me and asked 'What the hell's wrong with you?' So we rehearsed it with me just sitting there. Then he said, 'OK, let's shoot it...and somebody get Julius a cigar!' He had decided my idea had merit."

**Going Beneath and Escaping from the PLANET OF THE APES**

A sequel wasn't intended for PLANET, but when it grossed nearly $25 million, Rod Serling and Pierre Boulle separately worked on sequel scripts. Serling's effort was PLANET OF THE APES REVISITED, while Boulle drafted PLANET OF MEN. In both scripts, Taylor was central to the story.

These were deemed unsatisfactory, and it was British writer Paul Dehn who wrote the first successful draft in September 1968. Director Ted Post felt success depended on rounding up the original cast, particularly Heston. A reluctant Heston was convinced to return for a cameo, but only if he were killed off. Roddy McDowell was in England filming a movie, and was replaced by David Watson, who gallantly "aped" McDowell's mannerisms as Cornelius.

Kim Hunter and Maurice Evans reprised their roles of Zira and Zaius. Burt Reynolds was offered the role of Brent, a stranded astronaut but he turned it down, and James Franciscus took the role. Orson Welles declined the role of the burly gorilla general, Ursus (later played by James Gregory).

**BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES (1970)** contains Taylor kidnapped by human mutants who are living in the underground ruins of New York City. Meanwhile, General Ursus and Dr. Zaius lead thousands of gorillas in an attack against the mutants' city. In the climax, apes shoot down Nova and Brent, and a dying Taylor detonates the mutants' doomsday bomb to destroy the Earth.

Many critics charged that the film's script was derivative and overwritten. Even special effects man Greg Jensen wasn't enamored with the film. "I only saw it once but I thought it was a complete waste of time," he said. Indeed, Brent's adventures included familiar capture and escape sequences. However, when BENEATH made over $14 million at the box office, Paul Dehn was recruited to somehow devise another sequel.

The storyline of ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES (1970) was regarded by Dehn and director Don Taylor as a "tragic love story." Cornelius (Roddy McDowell), Zira (Kim Hunter) and simian Dr. Milo (Sal Mineo) escape the Earth's destruction in Taylor's salvaged spacecraft. The force of the Earth's destruction propels the ship back to Earth, 1973—one year after Taylor had blasted off.

Milo is accidentally killed before human authorities realize the apes can speak. Befriended by a young couple (Bradford Dillman and Natalie Trundy), the apes are treated as celebrities, but Dr. Hasslein (Eric Braeden) is fearful the duo could spawn a dismal future for mankind. When Zira expects a baby, the apes try to escape from Hasslein, but are shot down. Zira's baby is left behind in the circus of compassionante Armando (Ricardo Montalban), setting the stage for another film.

**Conquest of the PLANET OF THE APES**

ESCAPE grossed $10 million, and considering its modest budget, was a success. But the pattern of diminishing returns was
clear, and 20th Century Fox slashed costs with the next film, budgeting it at just under two million dollars. CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (scripted by Paul Dehn) was lensed at the newly made Century City in Los Angeles in 1972. The film was set in a futuristic city of 1991, where bored and callous humans have domesticated apes to be menial servants. Armando (Ricardo Montalban) and the young chimp Caesar (the grown offspring of Cornelius and Zira, played by Roddy McDowall) arrive to put on a circus act. When security police discovers the ape's true identity and Armando is accidentally killed while in police custody, Caesar angrily mobilizes the gorillas to overthrow the city's military forces. The last half of the film is an aggressive battle between ape and man, with ape triumphant.

Don Murray played Governor Breck, an obsessed, racially-driven man whose hatred of the apes slowly turns to hysterical astonishment as he sees the apes brewing for revolution. “Most of my career has been devoted to playing ‘nice guys,’” explained Murray, “Breck was an opportunity to show versatility, one of the most interesting attributes of a good actor.”

The actor prepared for his performance in an unusual way: “I studied for the role by playing every scene I had in German—a language with which I am fluent—because the Nazi period was the epitome of dictatorial rule. I was gratified to read one critic’s description of Breck as a ‘chilling heavy.’”

For the film’s battle scenes, Paul Dehn and director J. Lee Thompson later confirmed that old TV footage of the Watts riots in Los Angeles during August, 1965 served as allegorical inspiration for the violent clashes between ape and humans.

For some of the actors in CONQUEST, the biggest battle was finding their roles. Lou Wagner was slated for an extensive supporting role as Caesar’s henchman, but a production meeting slashed the budget and his part along with it. “I only did two things: I stole some knives and started the restaurant on fire,” he said.

Buck Kartalian’s character met a similar fate. “The director, J. Lee Thompson, called me and said he wanted me in the film. So I got the script and I couldn’t find the part. I’m looking through the pages, going, ‘Where the hell am I? I eventually played a gorilla named Frank. Thompson told me to light the cigarettes of two women in a restaurant. I did that and was never called back. That was my part.”

The low budget also couldn’t afford composers Jerry Goldsmith or Leonard Rosenman, so a young and promising 24-year-old jazz saxophonist, who was also a television composer, snatched the job. Arriving on the project, Tom Scott discovered that the film had already been completed and edited. “I wish I had been given the time, budget, and orchestra size to experiment on a grander scale,” he noted. “But of course, I got the job because they didn’t have the time, budget, or orchestra.”

Scott confirmed that CONQUEST originally had a more violent climax. Along the way, he lost a seven-minute cut, Revolution, which has been restored to the new CONQUEST/BATTLE CD soundtrack release. “The Don Murray character [Governor Breck] was brutally beaten to death by the ape mob at the end,” recalled Scott. “The movie previewed in this form and the studio had second thoughts about the ending. They filmed a ‘softer’ ending, cut it into the picture, and added Jerry Goldsmith’s music [from PLANET] because I had not written music appropriate for such an ending. I’m sure they didn’t want any additional expense by bringing the orchestra back.

“I thought the original ending was much truer to the story. The apes were totally justified in killing this brutal bastard. The ending really seems tacked on. Overall, I like the film. Some of it looks a little cheesy. I wish I would have been given the time to mix the music a little more carefully. I am surprised that there is interest in this third sequel to the original, but I am pleased to be associated with a small slice of film music history.”

Don Murray also has fond memories of the film. “Roddy and I were old friends. We met during his ‘days of struggle,’ when he was attempting to make the transition from child star to mature actor. If you watch closely, you can see the sly interplay between us—two old friends matching wits—especially in the dictionary scene, where Caesar chooses his name.”

During lunch breaks, Murray recalled, “I had great fun chow- ing down thick sandwiches in front of Roddy while his ape makeup confined him to sipping liquid food through a straw.”

CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES benefited from a strong TV advertising campaign, and was successful enough (eight million dollars). BATTLE, the last of the APES saga, went into production in early 1973.

**Battle for the PLANET OF THE APES**

The early publicity for the final sequel announced it would be called COLONIZATION OF THE PLANET OF THE APES. Paul Dehn wrote a first draft but studio executives found it too similar to BENEATH. Arthur Jacobs wanted it more family oriented, and William and Joyce Corrington (fresh from their success with Charlton Heston’s THE OMEGA MAN) were brought in. “Arthur Jacobs hated the on-going sequels,” Joyce Corrington recalled. “He had blown up the planet at the end of the second film to avoid that, but it did so well the studio told him to figure a way around it—thus the time travel in the third film. When we came aboard, it had already been decided that BATTLE would be the last movie since there was already a television series in the works.”

The Corringtons kept Dehn’s timeline (a few years after Earth
has been taken over by apes). The simians now preside over the demoralized humans and live in treehouses. The benevolent Caesar has a wife and a young son, Cornelius. Corrington recalled Dehn's script had Caesar acting as a Roman emperor; "It didn't work because the apes go immediately into decadence, so we used none of his material," she said. "Neither Bill nor I had seen any of the earlier films, so when we were to fly out to Hollywood to talk to Jacobs, I asked people about them. I gathered that what was most likable about the apes was their innocence (kids seemed to identify with them as opposed to the bad, grown-up humans). Jacobs later told us that when they previewed CONQUEST it had the apes smashing their rifle butts on the humans and killing them. The preview audience hated this so they created a new ending, with a voice-over explaining how the apes will forgive their former masters. This suggested to me that the apes should be in a 'Garden of Eden,' thus the treehouses. The theme should be the loss of innocence, an Abel/Cain story of the first ape killing ape.

"The difference in style between BATTLE and the others is due to the difference in writers. Bill and I were more interested in character and relationships. One of the best characters, in my opinion, was the orangutan (Lew Ayres), who kept the key to the weapons storage building. He personified wisdom, keeping the weapons of mass destruction under control, but Aldo (our Cain), who was barely literate and not in control of his emotions, subverted him."

BATTLE starred Roddy McDowall, Natalie Trundy, and Claude Akins, and included some offbeat casting choices (singer Paul Williams as the wise orangutan Virgil; John Huston as the orangutan Law-giver). There was also some downright weird casting, with director John Landis as a villager and writer David Gerrold—who had novelized Battle children sitting together. The Lawgiver speaks of Caesar's hope that humans and apes will someday coexist. But a closeup of Caesar's statue reveals a tear streaming down its face. It's an ending not in the Corrington's script. "We hated that ending. It belongs to Gothic fiction. You have to ask whoever decided to do that what they meant, but it does seem to say that the mistakes made in the second film will be made again."

BATTLE's budget was scaled to under two million dollars, and it made a modest profit at the box office. Looking back on the sustained success of the films, Corrington said, "I am astonished that the five ape films have sustained so much interest. Eric Greene, who was doing a Ph.D. dissertation on the series, contacted me a few years ago, and later published his dissertation as a book. His thesis was that the films portrayed racism in America. Maybe, but I never really thought so. If anything, I would say the three types of apes represented the id, ego, and superego of the human personality."

The Television Series
As filming wrapped on BATTLE, Jacobs turned his atten-

tion to outlining a TV series. His sudden death in 1973 seemingly ended any series. However, when the first PLANET movie racked up a 60 share on CBS in September, 1973, executives cried for an APES series. Anthony Wilson, who had developed THE INVADERS and LAND OF THE GIANTS, was commissioned to devise an APES TV format. Art Wallace, co-creator of DARK SHADOWS, scripted the first two episodes.

Ron Harper and James Naughton were cast, respectively, as astronauts Virdon and Burke. Roddy McDowall played the curious chimpanzee Galen, who is branded a fugitive by ape culture after he saves the astronauts' lives. In pursuit of the trio each week was the gorilla, Urko (Mark Lenard).

The stories were well-worn variations. "The show would have been better if we had had more interesting stories like 'The Legacy [where Burke and Galen accessed a recorded message from long-dead scientists],' said Ron Harper. "For instance, say there is a storyline where a rescue expedition from Earth tries to find us. That would have been different. The writing wasn't very imaginative. I recall one episode called 'The Good Seeds,' where I taught ape farmers how to grow corn. It was very warm and humanistic but it wasn't what our viewers wanted to see."

The first episode placed in the top thirty Nielsen ratings, with a 18.5 rating. Ordinarily, it would have been a good debut but disappointed executives saw it as a far cry from the 35 rating numbers scored by the feature films. For the second week, Apes placed number 43, with a weak 16.7 rating. The drop continued, and the last four episodes scraped the Nielsen charts with an abysmal 12.0 rating. The show was a favorite of children aged two to twelve, but CBS research showed it died with older audiences. CBS wasted no time in announcing PLANET's cancellation.

APES' final incarnation was aimed at its strongest demographic group: the six- to twelve-year-olds. NBC had had success turning live-action shows (STAR TREK, EMERGENCY) into cartoon series for its Saturday morning line-up. RETURN TO THE PLANET OF THE APES was aired from September 1975 to September 1976, produced by David H. DePatie and Friz Freleng. There were 13 episodes of the show, but when STAR WARS took the country by storm in 1977, the rolling wheels of the APES franchise came to a complete stop.