

IT'S GORILLA WARFARE!

BEHIND THE SCENES OF
PLANET OF THE APES
THE TV SERIES

FREE
DOUBLE-SIDED
POSTER INSIDE!



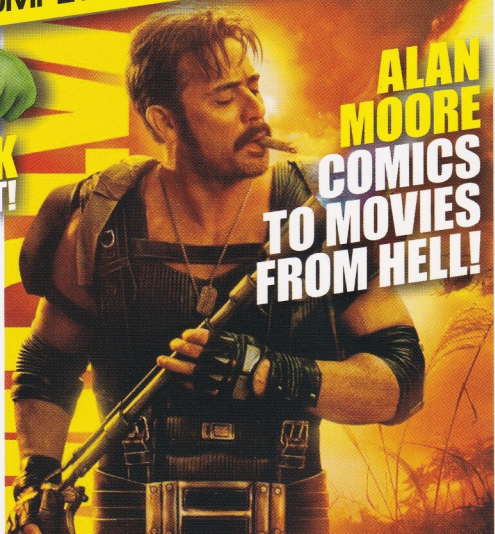
PLUS:

SAPPHIRE AND STEEL • VWORP, VWORP!
DOCTOR WHO & THE VINTAGE COMIC UNIVERSE
RIP HUNTER - TIME MASTER • THE INVADERS
NEWS, COMPETITIONS & MUCH MORE...

**CAPTAIN
SCARLET
IS 50!**
JOIN THE
PARTY
INSIDE



THE INCREDIBLE HULK
THE NOT-SO-JOLLY GREEN GIANT!



**ALAN
MOORE
COMICS
TO MOVIES
FROM HELL!**



INFINITY ISSUE 5 - £3.99
ISSN 2514-3654



This image:
Apes always look great on horseback.
Mark Lenard is the hostile gorilla Urko
Opposite: The stars of the 1974 CBS TV series:
Ron Harper, Roddy McDowall and James Naughton

Images supplied by Mark Rogers

If you thought the recent
*War for the Planet of the
Apes* was rough, check
out the monkey business
behind the *Planet of the
Apes* TV series, as Mark
Phillips reports...

SMALL SCREEN SIMIAN STARS

GORILLA WARFARE

Few people, network executives or otherwise, felt that *Planet of the Apes* needed much publicity before it premiered on CBS in 1974. As a reporter told its star, Ron Harper, "You finally have a TV series that will be a winner – this one can't miss!"

Despite that prevailing optimism, one gimmick backfired. A popular TV host agreed to be made up as a *Planet of the Apes* chimpanzee, but someone got the bright idea of bringing in a real chimpanzee to meet its alter-ego and the fur flew. The small chimp took one look at the host's ape makeup and screamed in horror. The terrified animal ran off the set, threw several books at reporters, slammed its fist into a wall and then burst into the studio's control room, where it began ripping telephones from the wall and smashing electrical wires. A local vet, two trainers and several police officers converged on the agitated primate and managed to subdue it, placing it in handcuffs and escorting it from the studio.

Veteran stuntman George Robotham was grateful the apes on the TV series were portrayed by mere humans. "The guys playing gorillas were all great stuntmen and real gentlemen," recalls Robotham, a first-class stuntman himself who started his career in *Batman* serials of the 1940s. "Real chimpanzees are unpredictable, they can go wild on you," he said of his own experiences. "I could tell you stories that you probably couldn't print. For instance, there was one time where..." No, on second thought – never mind.

Planet of the Apes (the TV series) ran for an embarrassingly short time, September to December 1974 (14 episodes). Robotham's time on the show was even briefer. "Two bloody hours," he says, "That's how long it took me to realise I couldn't stand being stuck in that miserable gorilla makeup. It was the only time I've ever quit a job." He ripped off his gorilla face and handed it to his shocked friend, stunt coordinator Paul Stader. "I said, 'Paul, I'm done. I don't need this crap. See you later. Good luck.'"

The apes needed more than luck. Lavishly budgeted and strategically placed in what seemed to be a good time slot, *Apes* became the subject of media ridicule as it died a humiliating death. Network executives struggled to understand how their prized show had ended so disastrously. It never cracked the top 35, could not attract sizeable audiences over the age of 14 and finished the 1974-75 season at an average of 67th place out of 84 shows, becoming the lowest rated CBS show of the year, aside from Khay Dhiagh's dismal detective show *Khan*, which had replaced *Apes* and ended up doing worse, at 80th place. Fantasy-wise that year, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (74th) and *Six Million Dollar Man* (51st) hadn't done so well either.

EXPENSIVE RISK

The original 1968 movie was an expensive risk for 20th Century Fox but it made a fortune and was a critical success. Charlton Heston played the astronaut who landed on a post-nuclear war Earth of the future and found it ruled by apes. James Franciscus took over as another astronaut in *Beneath* (1970), where the world was finally blown up. Friendly chimps Cornelius (Roddy McDowall) and Zira (Kim Hunter) travelled back in time in *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, landing on present-day Earth where they are eventually killed by hostile humans. But their son, Caesar, (Roddy again) survives to lead a revolt of apes in *Conquest*. The movie series ended with *Battle* (1973), more apes vs mutants, and very modest box-office receipts.

Producer Arthur P. Jacobs decided the features had run their course, but he wanted to produce a TV series. He asked Rod Serling (creator of *Twilight Zone* and co-writer of the first movie) to devise an outline

in 1973. Serling created the storyline of two 20th century astronauts Virдон and Kovack, accompanied by the friendly chimp Galen, as they explored this strange world of the future, finding new civilisations every week. They were pursued by gorillas, who wanted to kill the astronauts before they could contaminate other humans with their thoughts of freedom and technology.

Serling specifically noted, "Galen will have the precise logical mind of *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock." Jacobs died suddenly in June 1973 but executive Fred Silverman continued to press CBS network President William Paley to do an *Apes* series. Paley refused, still upset over an awful "monkey" show from 1972, *Me and the Chimp*, a debacle about a fugitive NASA chimp who lives with a suburban family. Paley was against "any more ape shows on my network." But when CBS aired the first three *Apes* motion pictures to huge ratings, Paley changed his mind: could a weekly series, based loosely on the first film, really work?

Anthony Wilson, who had written the pilots for *The Invaders*, *Land of the Giants* and had one of the best creative minds in Hollywood, re-worked Serling's outline, making it less science fiction and more like *The Waltons*, the successful 1930s Depression family saga because Paley wanted a programme that reflected warm human values.

The expensive ape makeup would be its biggest challenge (the ingenious prosthetics were originally devised by John Chambers, who won an Oscar for the first film). Dan Striepeke and Frank Westmore took over for the TV show, armed with a big budget and a team of makeup men. A tragic setback occurred when famed monster maker Janos Prohaska and his son Robert, who were looking forward to participating in the TV series, were killed in a plane crash in March 1974. Top stuntmen such as Tom McDonough, Ron Stein and Eldon Burke were hired, and they also played many of the gorillas.

One near-casualty of the TV series was the spaceship, seen only in the first episode. Built in 1966 for almost 30,000 dollars, the ship was used in the first three films. Arthur Jacobs kept the spaceship sitting outside in the 20th Century parking lot for years, with seemingly no future (*Conquest* and *Battle* were spaceship-less). Many people at the studio grew to hate the spaceship. One top Fox executive wrote a scathing memo urging that "this eyesore" be either trashed, traded or hauled away. But Jacobs kept his investment and even paid property taxes on the rotting vessel.

Jacobs didn't live to see the ship re-appear in the 1974 TV series, and it looked spectacular as it lay smoking in a mountain valley after a violent crash-landing. "To kids in our audience, I bet that spaceship looked really amazing," said Ron Harper, who played astronaut Virдон. "But it wasn't much of anything. It was just a wooden, hollow shell. There was nothing inside. But what did look great was the way they dug that deep burning burrow behind the ship, to make it look as if it had taken half a mile to land."

CASTING CALL

Casting came next. A columnist asked Charlton Heston if he had any regrets about not being in the video show. "None at all," Heston replied, adding that he wasn't interested in playing the same role very week but he did wish the series luck. James Franciscus turned down the role of Virдон, so it went to Ron Harper, best known for his 1967-68 war



series *Garrison's Gorillas*. Virдон was determined to get back his own time of 1980, so that he could be reunited with his wife and son. James Naughton, as the other astronaut Pete Burke, played it more humorously. Naughton turned down the role three times, finally accepting it because of the money. Years later he would say, "The only wonderful thing about doing *Planet of the Apes* was that it led to a lifelong friendship with Roddy McDowall."


CBS was surprised when Roddy McDowall's agent told them the actor would be interested in starring as Galen, the friendly chimpanzee. A deal was made, rumoured to pay him 25,000 dollars per segment, with a 100,000 insurance policy taken out on his face, in case of damage done by 50 hours per week of wearing the makeup. Mark Lenard, best known as Mr. Spock's father, had narrowly lost getting the role of Captain Gregg in the *Ghost and Mrs. Muir* series in 1968, and was often overlooked as the villain on TVs *Here Come the Brides*, so he jumped at *Apes* "because I knew it would be a big hit." But when he learned they wanted him to play chief gorilla Urko, "My feelings were hurt," he said. "Why didn't they consider me to play one of the astronauts?" After much soul searching, he took the role.

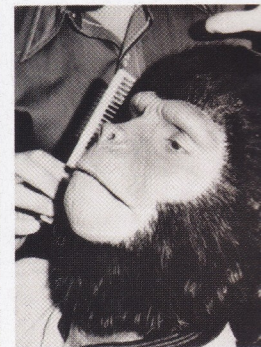
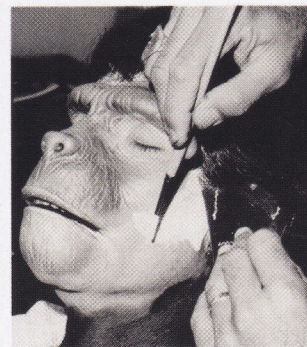
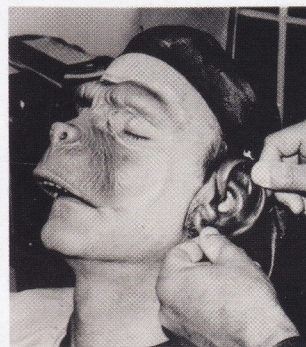
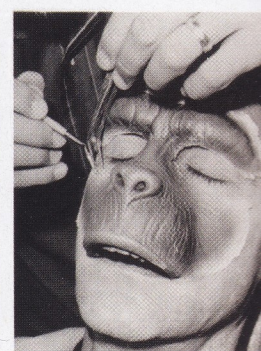
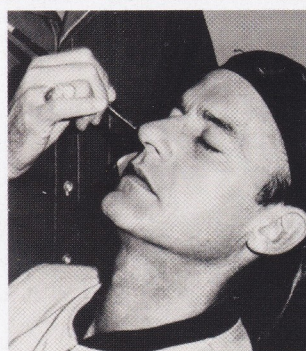
Herbert Hirschman, the show's executive producer (and previously a *Twilight Zone* producer) stated, "We're not aiming primarily at kids, we're appealing to the entire family. We're seeking honest stories that make comments on our times." He stressed it was not going to be a fantasy. "We're not writing exotic tales of science fiction. These will be real stories that make valid statement's on today's society." Stan Hough, the producer, also weighed in. "We understand our series will lack the sweep and pageantry of the motion pictures, so our thrust will be good stories."

Harper was embarrassed to say he had not seen any of the films until CBS screened the first movie for him, which impressed him. "I'm cautiously optimistic our show will run two years, maybe more," he said. This was his fifth TV series and all of his previous shows had failed. However, media reports in the summer of 1974 said that *Apes* was going to be a winner. As UPI predicted, "This fall, *Planet of the Apes* will wipe out all of its opposition. What kid in his right mind could pass up such a show?"

Two other sci-fi pilots, Gene Roddenberry's *Genesis 2*, about a scientist (Alex Cord) who awakens in the far future, and *Space: 1999*, a British series with Martin Landau and Barbara Bain, were rejected by CBS in favor of *Apes*. President Robert Wood liked both pilots but said, "We only want one science fiction series on our network at a time."

PRODUCTION CHALLENGES

The TV *Apes* endured many production challenges. Angry wasps spooked Roddy McDowall's horse, 



which reared up and dumped McDowall to the ground. It took him hours to recover.

Long-time western actor Ron Soble found that playing a gorilla, "was a miserable experience" and the long hours of makeup drove him back to a dreaded habit he once conquered, smoking. David Sheiner, a guest chimpanzee, tried to avoid the 110 degree heat by sitting under a tree and reading a book. Still, he admitted he could not wait for the experience to be over. Other ape actors lost up to ten pounds a day, some passing out and collapsing from the heat and others were constantly wheezing, scratching and swatting at hungry flies. Comedian Beatrice Arthur (*Maude*, *The Golden Girls*) brought her two sons to the set because they were such fans. Another fan was Alan Alda's wife, who arrived via a jeep from the nearby *M*A*S*H* set to watch filming.

Jacqueline Scott agreed to do two guest roles, as a mother chimp of a farm family in "*Good Seeds*" and as Galen's fiancée in "*The Surgeon*," where she performed life-saving surgery on Viridon. Scott, who had appeared in TV shows such as *Twilight Zone*, *Outer Limits* and *The Fugitive*, recalls, "They had at least seven full-time makeup artists on the show and they were the absolute best but it was all very expensive."

Even though it took three to four hours to apply the makeup, she adapted right away. "Just before they applied the bottom chin, they fed you breakfast because once it was attached, you could not eat. You had to sip nourishment

through a straw. You couldn't laugh either, that could crack your face. I never got used to looking like a chimpanzee. I would glance at myself in a mirror and it scared the daylights out of me. I remember my mother hated to see me as an ape on TV! But the casting director, Marvin Paige, said that Beverly Garland and I were the two actresses who dealt best with the makeup. After a few days, Roddy came up to me and said, 'I've noticed the makeup doesn't bother you as much as it bothers other people,' and it didn't.

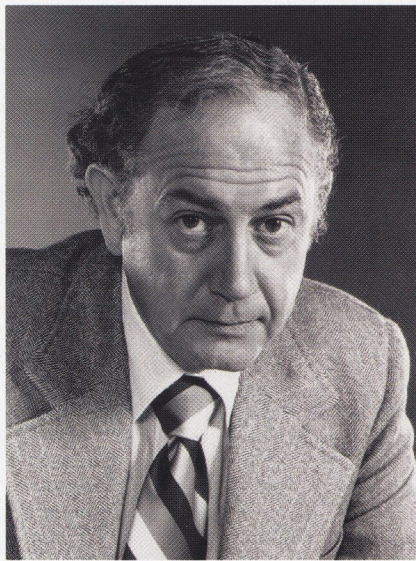
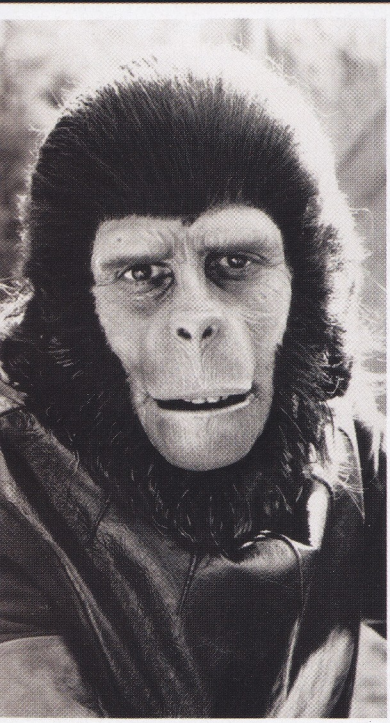
"Roddy was just marvellous. He and everyone else who played apes looked out for one another. We'd check each other's face for cracks or smudges and offered morale support."

McDowall, as the lead ape, had makeup that was painstakingly applied. "I wish I could tell you what it was, because I can't explain it, but there was something different about Roddy's makeup," Scott says. "It was not the same as anyone else's. Ours seemed glued onto our faces but his had much more flexibility."

For his own comfort, McDowall had an air-conditioned motor-home and a stipulation he would work only four days a week, to preserve his face. It didn't always work. "After four or five episodes, his face looked like raw hamburger because of the rubber appliance," recall Ron Harper. "He had to take a week off for his skin to heal."

One thing McDowall wanted to do but couldn't was to curl his lips back in a snarl, exposing his teeth (like Tarzan's Cheetah). But his mask didn't allow that. McDowall loved the Galen character, describing him as a bit of a conman with a great sense of humour. "As Galen, I am suppose to be both intellectual and sensitive. How do I convey that? Well, for one, I sound British."

During the production of *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971) in Beverly Hills, a woman had pushed past security guards and fiercely grabbed Kim Hunter (Zira). 'You're so cute,' the woman exclaimed and tried touching her face, nearly bringing Kim to tears. Roddy, who justifiably called the intruder "a dumb woman," angrily stepped in and stopped the woman's harassment of his co-star. "When we are in makeup, people will do the most annoying



Images on this spread: Behind-the-scenes shots from the show featuring the main stars, and Roddy McDowall being made up as Galen

Left: Booth Colman as Dr. Zaius and Mark Lenard as Urko before and after the application of their Ape make-up

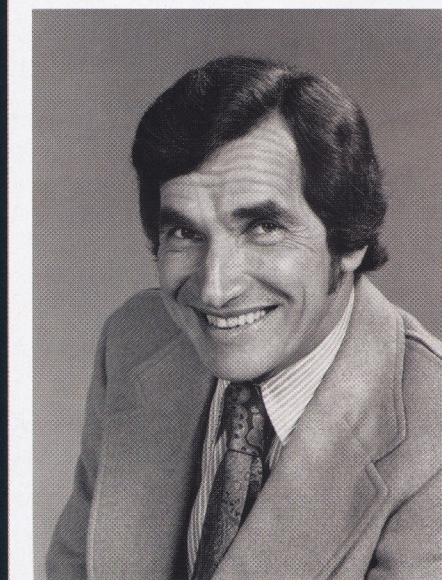
All images supplied by Mark Rogers

While dressed as a chimp, McDowall was prodded, poked, badgered and disrespected by some people. "There should be a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Actors," he said. When wise-ass reporters began making jokes about "going ape" or "monkeying around" McDowall rolled his eyes in frustration. "Truly, I've really grown soooooo tired of hearing those expressions..."

things. They can be very intrusive," McDowall snapped.

Ironically, while filming the first movie in 1967, McDowall's makeup often frightened bystanders, who staggered away in revulsion and fear. "People were put off when they would see me," McDowall claimed. That changed over the years. While dressed as a chimp, the actor was prodded, poked, badgered and disrespected by some people. "There should be a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Actors," he said. When wise-ass reporters began making jokes about "going ape" or "monkeying around" McDowall rolled his eyes in frustration. "Truly, I've really grown soooooo tired of hearing those expressions," he said.

"People really did treat us like animals," says Jacqueline Scott. "I was walking outside the studio with a fellow ape when a car suddenly screeched to a halt. People jumped out and grabbed us. 'Come here! Don't run away - we want a picture with you!' We had no say in the matter. They didn't speak to us kindly or with respect, they were very demanding, and kept



trying to touch our faces. Oh, it was very rude! It was not a fun experience but it was fascinating how these normal people became so impolite and pushy. Roddy McDowall told me that's how he learned to really hate people because they did the same thing to him all of the time."

The media reported that many actors were clamouring to play apes but she doubts that. "I personally knew many actors who refused to do the show, they didn't like the idea of all that latex and rubber on their faces and vanity was probably a part of that. But I loved the challenge of expressing myself as that character."

Guest stars who endured the makeup well, and were brought back, included John Hoyt, Martin E. Brooks and Pat Renella. Even James Naughton's younger brother David got a kick out of playing a chimpanzee for one segment. McDowall said there could be confusion over who was under the makeup. Director Don Weis once drew "Galen" aside to instruct him on how to play a scene until a muffled voice from within the ape identified himself as Davey Rodgers, Roddy's stand-in.

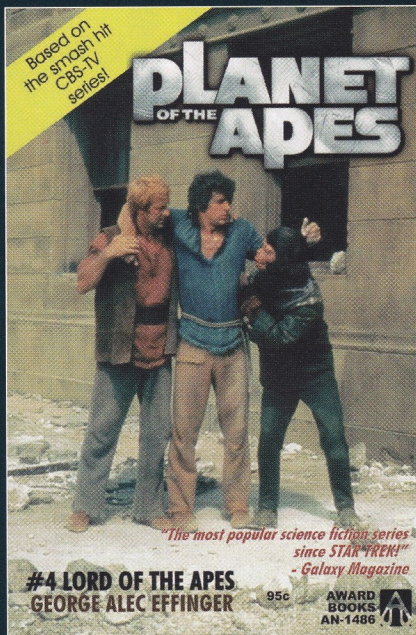
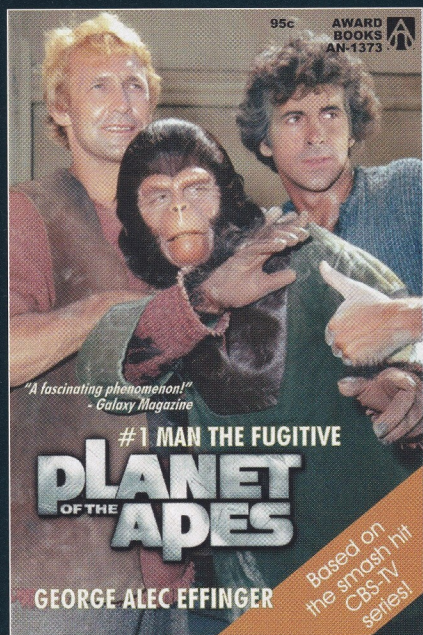
When accosted by annoying people while wearing his ape guise, McDowall would suddenly adopt an American accent and tell visitors he was actually Roddy's brother from Chicago, a

charade that often worked. Out on location, Ron Harper tried to demonstrate to a *TV Guide* writer how easy it was to identify the stuntmen playing gorillas. "Tom, hey Tom!" Ron yelled to a nearby ape. The gorilla ignored him and briskly walked away. "Sorry," a chastened Harper conceded, "so it wasn't Tom."

EATING PROBLEMS

After filming "*The Trap*" in the city backlot, an episode where Urko falls into a subway station, Mark Lenard was horrified to find his mask and suit infested with hundreds of blood-sucking fleas. On another occasion, Lenard ordered a hot plate of spare ribs, only to discover his heavy ape snout prevented any eating. "All I could do was sit there, as my plate got cold, and drool." He switched to munching carrots and celery but the *Planet of the Apes* sound-man found the crunching sounds unbearably loud, so Lenard was forced to go back to quietly sipping liquids through a straw.

"*The Good Seeds*," about an ape family who help the astronauts and Galen, was actually the first episode filmed, designed specifically to imitate the family-friendly ambiance of the CBS hit, *The Waltons*. "*Escape from Tomorrow*," the first episode telecast (which introduced the astronauts)



This page: Scenes from the show plus some original promotional advertising, and two of the four spin-off paperback novels written by American sci-fi author George Alec Effinger, published between 1974 and 1976

was actually the third episode filmed. The idea was to give Ron Harper and James Naughton more time to develop camaraderie and chemistry between themselves for the premiere show.

"Jim and I, for whatever reason, were never as close as we could have been," says Harper vaguely. "Maybe it was the old thing of two leading men trying to work together."

There was actually a third astronaut, Jones, who didn't survive the spaceship landing and was quickly buried by the gorillas. Everyone from Ron Harper to A.D. Bill Derwin has racked their memory in vain, trying to recall who played that bit part. Whoever he was, he deserves credit for maintaining an impressive dead-eye stare as he is seen slumped over in his chair with a broken neck.

Some of the program's other guest stars included Marc Singer, Sondra Locke, Royal Dano, Roscoe Lee Browne, Geoffrey Deuel, William Smith and Jackie Earle Haley. Eileen Dietz played the teenaged chimp in "Good Seeds" who develops a crush on the injured Galen. She had just completed the role of the green-faced devil (doubling Linda Blair) in *The Exorcist* and a week after moving to Los Angeles, heard about the *Planet of the Apes* TV show. She snuck into the 20th Century-Fox building and located casting director Marvin Paige. "I told him I had just done *The Exorcist* and was used to sitting for hours

in the make-up chair as my life-mask was made."

She got the role and Dietz performed well in the blistering heat of Malibu Canyon. "The only uncomfortable thing were our big ape feet had sneakers hidden inside them and that made our feet really sweat. But everyone was nice to me, especially Roddy."

But her feelings did get hurt.

"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."

She couldn't wait to see her show on TV. "I was really excited and I invited everybody I knew in California to my house to watch it. But as it played on my TV, everybody got really bored and began talking. I remember being very distraught and saying, 'Hey, wait a minute, people – stop talking. Please! My show is on.'"

After doing *Apes*, Eileen played a cavegirl in Hanna-Barbera's series *Korg 70,000*. "My Mom

said, 'Eileen, are you ever going to play a part where you can show your face?' Eileen is proud of "*The Good Seeds*" and has seen it several times. "It showed the kind of backward racism the apes had towards the humans. The story examined their fear and prejudice." It ends with the ape family and humans becoming friends.

PERSISTENT MYTH

As the series geared up for its CBS premiere on September 13, McDowall tried to correct the persistent myth that he was continuing his role from the original film. "No, that is not true - Cornelius is dead," McDowall said. "Galen is an entirely new character." The confusion was caused by a chimp in the first film named Galen, played by Wright King, but he had no relation to the TV character. "We are not borrowing anything from the motion pictures," McDowall



NEW SHOW

Now it's a series! Roddy McDowall stars in his original role. As the simian ally in a strange world where apes rule and men are the ruled. Also starring Ron Harper and James Naughton.

8:00 TONIGHT

PLANET OF THE APES



stressed. "They have run their course."

Apes was originally supposed to air Tuesdays, competing against *Adam-12* and *Happy Days*. But when comedian Redd Foxx walked off *Sanford and Son*, CBS knew a Foxx-less *Sanford* on Friday nights would be extremely vulnerable, so *Apes* was switched opposite *Sanford* and a new show, *Chico and the Man*. Unfortunately, Foxx returned to *Sanford* at the last minute, with a lot of publicity. Still, many people placed their bets on *Planet of the Apes*, including many advertising executives in New York.

An agency man named McHugh said, "Apes will trample its competition at first but if the show turns out to be poorly done, ratings will fall off immediately and CBS will be left with a real bomb." Another advertiser agreed that *Apes* had a good chance but he resented how CBS kept saying *Planet of the Apes* would get a huge 40% of the audience every week. "No one can say that for sure," the agency man warned. Sadly, *Apes* would end up averaging a pathetic 24% share.

The early reviews of the premiere episode were encouraging. Movie historian Steven H. Scheuer noted, "the wooden astronauts and apes riding on horseback are silly but it's a lively show and Roddy McDowall is delightful as Galen." Charles Benbow of *The St. Petersburg Times* said *Apes* was "excellent" television, betrayed only by one disappointing production short-cut: "The landing of the spaceship happens off-camera!"

The *Los Angeles Times* predicted *Apes* and *Born Free* (also destined to die by mid-season) would be big hits. *The Christian Science Monitor* called *Apes* "fascinating and superb" while Rex Polier of *The Philadelphia Bulletin* said, "It is well-produced, provocative and entertaining." Jay Sharbutt of *The Associated Press* was one of the few naysayers: "Apes will slip on its own banana peel by December." Columnist Ken Murphy was just plain mean: "The only people who will have use for this garbage are *Star Trek* fans."

But it was the ratings that would kill the beast. The first episode ranked 37th out of 56 shows. The second episode was 43rd, the third episode 47th and the fourth episode 53rd. The competition, *Sanford* and *Chico and the Man*, was always in the top five. The Chicago Tribune noted, "Apes has been getting creamed by NBC and it has turned into a sorry flop for CBS." The death watch had begun.

Yet the show must go on. Sandra Gimpel, who was Billy Mumy's stunt double on *Lost in Space* and performed hundreds of stunts in films like

Towering Inferno and *Escape from New York*, recalls thinking that doubling as a chimpanzee for Jane Actman in "The Deception" would be "no big deal. I just sat there as they applied the prosthetics for two and a half hours, breathed through a straw and fell asleep."

As a blind chimpanzee, she falls off a cliff into the Pacific Ocean. "I was in the water, screaming and splashing, and James Naughton's character swims out to save me." By the time work was over, "I had worn this makeup for over six hours. We wrapped for the day. I sat down for them to remove this stuff from my face and... they couldn't. The salt water had adhered the makeup to my face. The reaction by everyone around me was 'Oh no!' I will never forget sitting there, holding on tightly to the arms of the chair, with tears rolling down my eyes and they were trying and trying to get it off my face." They finally did, but Gimpel recalls that experience as "horrible, just horrible."

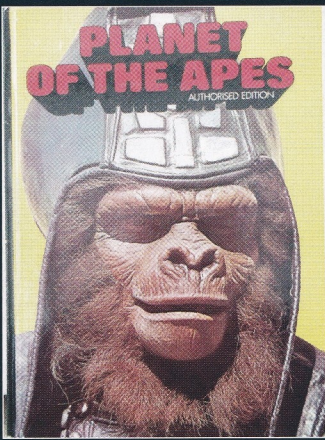
LONG, HOT DAYS

A very young Cheryl Downey was halfway through her Directors Guild of America apprenticeship to becoming an Assistant Director when, as a DGA trainee, she worked on *Apes* with second A.D. Ed Ledding "where we had to handle everything." She had to be at the Fox ranch (now called Malibu State Park) at 3:30am to check on the makeup and hair team. Her day finished around 9:30pm.

"Almost everything was shot at the Ranch, so five days a week I had a 45 minute commute, speeding each way! Those 18-hour days were brutal, especially in the summer heat. I had to sleep round the clock Saturdays to try and make up for my week of four hours of sleep per night."

It was an experience she has never forgotten. "The Prince of the cast was Roddy McDowall. The foam rubber appliance glued to the faces of the principal actors playing chimps and gorillas prevented eating anything until their removal. Only liquids could be consumed. Roddy faced this daily prospect with good cheer. He was always prepared, never complained, even though the skin on his face deteriorated from the glue and the glue removal."

She recalls only one landline telephone on the ranch, "no mobile phones" which added to the challenges of production coordination. "We tried to shoot all of Roddy's scenes as soon as possible," she recalls. "The heat and sweat caused the appliance to sort of melt, requiring



extensive repairs after lunch."

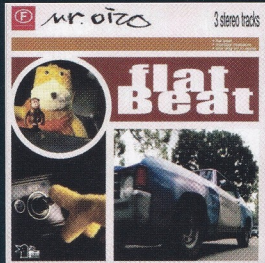
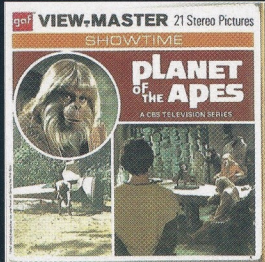
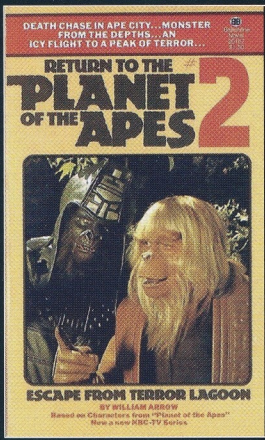
There was also a lot to move between filming – horses, goats, chickens trailers and lots of extras. "The directors learned to compromise their 'dream shots' in order not to fall behind schedule." She remained on the series for its entire six months of production. "Roddy was my favourite person on the whole show but I worked later with James Naughton who was also a real professional."

Story-wise, kids looking for fantasy instead got mundane scenarios about the astronauts curing malaria, teaching a human to fly a hang-glider, being subjected to brainwashing or participating in a horse race. Outdoor locales boiled down to either the Fox Ranch, the Pacific Ocean or the old ruined city sets. No matter how far the trio travelled, the same mountains kept popping up behind them. Virdon's goal was to find an advanced civilization with a computer that could interpret Virdon's flight disc, and then build them a spaceship. Had the astronauts decided on Houston or Florida as a specific walking destination, to locate old spaceships stored at NASA centres, it would have given them a geographical goal rather than aimless wandering.

As the show continued, critics became tougher. "If apes in zoos had TVs, this show would be number one," said columnist Michael Drew, "but humans over the age of 14 will be very bored." *The Monster Times* said, "The series rests primarily on the capable talents of Roddy McDowall and a fine supporting cast – and no, we're not talking about the third-raters imitating Charlton Heston and James Franciscus."

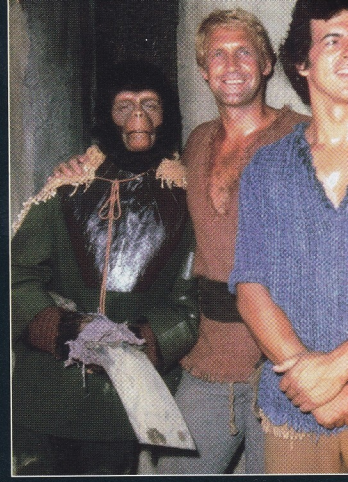
The *Calgary Herald* suggested viewers read Pierre Boulle's original *Planet of the Apes* novel instead, bitterly complaining that series could have been a winner, "if it had more thought and good writing." Even NBC got into the fray, with its vice-president calling *Apes*, "A Saturday morning cartoon show that is not working." However, when NBC's friendly lion series *Born Free* got cancelled, the NBC men shrugged and said, "Well, I guess this wasn't the year for apes or lions."

A California viewer named Bill pleaded with CBS to move the show to a different time period, Wednesdays at 8pm, where it would be up against Michael Landon's *Little House on the Prairie* and a comedy, *That's My Mama*. "Yes, if *Planet of the Apes* still remains a poorly rated show after that, then I would not fault CBS for taking it off," he said. But no one was listening, the network had determined that nothing could save the show.



This page: Stuntman Tom McDonough takes a break from filming with an umbrella as a sun shade - many thanks to Tom himself for this pic

Above: More merchandising spin-offs including a 1976 paperback and 3D Viewmaster images. Bottom image above is a single that designer Kev bought of a tune that was used in a Levi ad back in the 1990s, and he has included it to show how similar it looks in design to the *Apes* Viewmaster cover.



RACIST ACCUSATIONS

Besides ratings, there were other concerns. One angry viewer wrote to a newspaper to say she didn't like "the way this awful show is pushing evolution." A.D. Bill Derwin recalled that the series was also being unfairly accused of being racist. "As the show went on, the behaviour of the gorillas was toned down and it soon became *The Planet of the Benevolent Apes*."

An associate director of CBS research remained aghast at how poorly *Apes* was doing against *Sanford and Chico*. "I find it hard to believe NBC is doing so well on Friday nights against us," he lamented. Adding to the confusion was that *Apes* merchandise was selling like wildfire, everything from toys, action figures and puzzles. The department store Woolworth's reported that the merchandise was selling so well, "it's hard to keep it in stock."

Another network executive was so disbelieving of the reportedly bad ratings that he did his own stealth research by pointing his telescope out of his high-rise apartment on Friday nights and scanning all of the TV sets flickering across the New York City skyline. He discovered the bitter truth: almost every TV reflected the antics of *Sanford and Chico*. The Nielsen ratings were right, these two situation comedies were conquering the planet of the apes.

The Oakland Tribune's Robert MacKenzie loved literary science fiction but with the exception of praising *Land of the Giants*, he felt every other show in the genre - *Star Trek*, *UFO*, *Invaders*, *The Starlost* and now *Apes* - had blundered their potential and produced bad television. "*Planet of the Apes* is just men wearing plastic masks and it's one dull chase after another," he said. He also felt the franchise was being mercilessly exploited. "These poor apes will be worked by the studio until there is not another dollar left to be squeezed from their furry hides."

TV Guide made the first official pronouncement that the *Apes* saga was doomed in their October 26, 1974 issue. "The network and many other people were positive a new series based on the features would be a solid success," the magazine said. "Not so and *Planet of the Apes* is as good as gone by January."

"When we shut down in November, we did not know if the network was going to renew us and we were

cancelled shortly thereafter," says Cheryl Downey. "Although the show was very ambitious, it could not approach the standards set by the feature film."

Its surprising demise left a lot of questions. "We don't know what went wrong," said William Shatner's father-in-law, Perry Lafferty, an executive at CBS. "We are shocked that our judgment was so wrong. We figured *Planet of the Apes* would eliminate *Sanford and Son* in quick order. The first three *Planet* movies last year had amazing ratings on CBS. But when we ran the fourth movie this year (*Conquest*), it got a very poor rating." *The Washington Post* was annoyed too: "For months we heard how *Planet of the Apes* couldn't miss, that it would be in the top ten - and now, come January, its missing!"

Charlie Pike of High Point Enterprise offered false hope when he wrote, "There's still a very good possibility *Apes* will pop up on another network." That didn't happen, although NBC made a Saturday morning cartoon series, *Return to the Planet of the Apes*, in 1975. A fan asked columnist Dick Kleiner if astronauts Virton and Burke would ever get back home? "No," Kleiner said. "Never. The show has been cancelled. The astronauts will never get home. Those two guys are trapped there forever, with all of those apes." Cecil Smith of *The Los Angeles Times* liked the series but was surprised when his own children and their elementary schoolmates begged him to stop the cancellation. But there was nothing Daddy Cecil could do. Nevertheless, when the series' 14 episodes were later sold to countries such as England, Japan and Australia, the show proved to be a big hit.

UNIMAGINATIVE WRITING

Many of the show's actors felt the show could have been better. "The stories went progressively downhill and it got boring," says Harper. "If you analyse the episodes, we used one basic plot - one of us gets captured, the other two have to rescue him. Well, that is not very imaginative writing." Harper felt that, among other ideas, it would have been interesting for the trio to have encountered a rescue expedition from Earth. Booth Colman, who played Dr. Zaius, agreed. "The only episode done well was our premiere show, it had a good script. After that, we fell into the usual

claptrap of unimaginative, inferior stories. Still, with time, it could have gotten better."

Mark Lenard said, "It was a big mistake for the human villagers to talk - I liked it better in the first movie, where the humans were mute and kept in cages!" McDowall considered *Planet's* loss a tragedy. "It was a much better series than it was ever given credit for," he said years later and felt the apes merchandise could have carried the show in lieu of bad ratings but that wouldn't have compensated for sponsors' products of soap and automobiles not being purchased by *Apes*' biggest demographic, kids aged 2-11 years old.

"Maybe if Charlton Heston had starred in the TV version and Rod Serling had written all the scripts, it might have survived," opined *The Evening News* but that was unlikely too. *Apes* fever on television had simply waned.

In 1980, 20th Century-Fox syndicated 10 of the 14 episodes by combining them into a total of five TV movies, and gave them such outlandish titles as *Life*, *Liberty* and *Pursuit on the Planet of the Apes*. Some of these ersatz movies contained new footage of Roddy McDowall as an ancient Galen, sitting in a cottage with a 1970s Commodore PET computer flickering behind him. Galen provided brief commentary but his eccentrically coy dialogue was dull, except to reveal that, "Virton and Burke did find their computer and they disappeared back into space...." Galen turned down their offer to fly back with them.

As late as 1994, McDowall held out hope someone would ask him to do a TV reunion film. "After all," he said, "you could be 90 years old and yet, with the makeup on, you would still look the same!"

Planet of the Apes is still fondly remembered by a generation and in retrospect, much of its acting, humour, and many well-written (and often poignant) scenes still play well. Gerald Finnerman's cinematography was also excellent.

"I thought it was really stupid for the network to cancel *Planet of the Apes* in the first place," says Jacqueline Scott, who counts herself as a loyal fan. "Children just loved the show and even today, it has not dated. It's now on DVD and it will go on forever and ever." 🐵



THE TRAVELLING APE SHOW

Simon Pritchard heard through the ape vine that we were doing a *Planet of the Apes* special so he sent us this fun piece on his childhood memories of seeing General Urko and company on stage!

It was the scarecrows that triggered the first real sense that things didn't bode well, a sinister sting to the senses that something malevolent loomed just over the ridge. In a short time that feeling of unease erupted into full blown disorienting fear and one of the most iconic and nerve-shattering set pieces in fantasy cinema history - a shocking attack on a bunch of helpless humans in a field of corn. Some of the barely-seen attackers were on foot, slicing the corn with switches, others were on horseback, stampeding the fleeing people like cattle. The scene culminated in a stunning shot of one of the horse-mounted riders in a final mind-blowing reveal: a ferocious ape in black leather wielding a rifle.

This was my adrenaline-charged introduction to the original 1968 *Planet of the Apes* on UK television. I was aged about six and it was in the mid 1970's. I'm not sure of the exact year, but it must have been around 74 because the TV spin-off started that year and I promptly became an avid, excitable viewer of the show.

Planet of the Apes, in both its movie franchise and TV show formats was a phenomenon for pudding basin haircut sprogs like myself, and it quickly became an obsession. Me and my mates wanted the lot: Mego action figures, comics, jigsaw puzzles, masks etc. Weekly trips to the shops ensured that parents, nans granddads and monkey's uncles were parted from their pennies.

While all this monkey business was going on, to my great delight I discovered that The Circus Hoffman *Planet of the Apes* live touring show was coming to a town near me. Real-life apes on stage. I had to go, and used good behaviour as a bargaining chimp, er, chip. So it was, one chilly Wolverhampton Saturday evening in November of 1975, that I persuaded my parents to take me to see it. The journey there was exhilarating to the point of seizure for an impressionable kid like me, and I was beside myself with gleeful anticipation, swinging from the trees as we travelled from West Bromwich to Wolverhampton Racecourse in our blue Austin Maxi.

Upon arrival at the venue I was lured by the siren call of the merchandise stand, where Dad bought me a General Urko pin badge, a slightly bigger than 8 x 10 colour photo of the same Urko picture and a plastic ape mask with movable jaw. I was a very lucky boy indeed and knew it, so I treasured these.

Besides Urko they had pics and badges of Galen, Zaius and astronauts Burk and Virdon from the TV show, but it was obviously too expensive to buy them all. General Urko was the coolest character though, every kid in the playground wanted to be him, if only for an excuse to duff up his human mates. Only the wussier kids wanted to be Galen, or maybe the elderly Dr Zaius.

Taking our places in the bleacher-style seats, the show finally kicked off, and although the passing of time has distorted the exact plotline I vividly recall the two astronaut characters being chased around the circus-like arena by a squad of soldier apes led by the mighty General Urko, gorilla leader of the ape army. Some were astride horses, with a band of soldiers on foot firing rifles. The humans were captured, then escaped again, were chased into the audience and weaved their

way in and out of the rows of seats before going back into the arena.

The show was packed with impressive stunts and well-choreographed fights and shoot outs. All the time the characters drew whoops, cheers and delighted squeals from the kids in the audience. And there were gasps and jeers as the villainous Urko and his henchmen baited the fans, drawing the odd frightened grizzle from the more 'delicate' kids, the ones who rooted for Walter the softie from the *Beano's* Dennis

The Menace. Of course credibility is key to being suckered into the fantasy, and the costumes and ape masks were very convincing to my six-year-old eyes. Looking at photographs from the touring shows online I'd say they stand up incredibly well after all these years, so no expense appears to have been spared in the show's production design.

When the show reached its rousing climax, swarms of babbling children got to meet, and get their photos taken with, their favourite characters. General Urko was the most popular and the queue to meet him was too long so I got my pic taken with Dr Zaius instead. At least my Urko badge was proudly displayed on my green 70s coat that my Nan always said I looked a right Bobby Dazzler in (and I really did folks). It was one of the most delightful experiences of my childhood and has remained a cherished memory.

APES ON STAGE

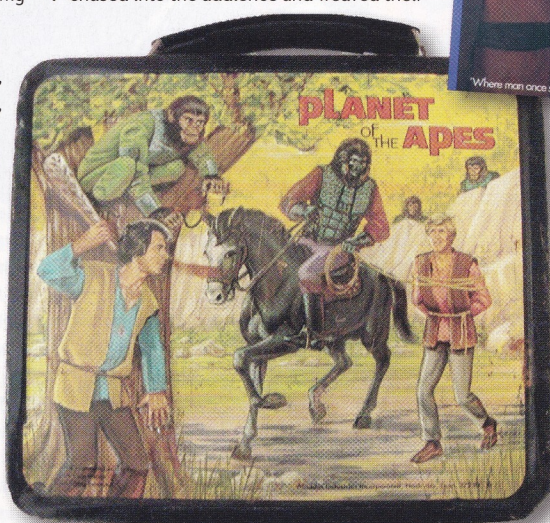
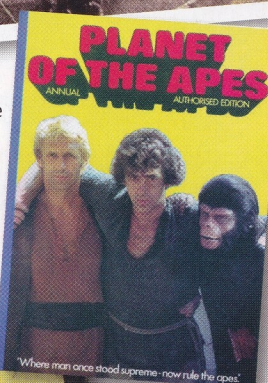
Of course being just a kid I knew nothing of the origin of the *Planet of the Apes* shows, but here

we are in the age of the internet and so I decided to check into their background for this article. Better late than never, eh?

The transition of *Apes* from film and TV to live touring shows was apparently the brainchild of Big Mike Caulfield, who in 1975, as head of



This image: Young Simon with one of his Apes heroes. He hasn't changed a bit since then (see right)



Galen v. Urko — live on stage!

A GORILLA was rushed to hospital with a suspected broken nose after a fight at the Pier Pavilion, Cleethorpes. However, after a check-up it was established that the hairy heavy had not suffered any permanent damage, but was simply feeling the effects of a nasty bang.

But no charges will be brought against the brawlers - because the incident arose out of one of many battles which thrilled a family audience during a performance of *The Planet of the Apes* Show.

It is the first time that the *Planet of the Apes* has been enacted on stage and, judging from the gleeful faces of youngsters with their mums and dads, the performances this week and next, exciting Sundays, will be well attended.

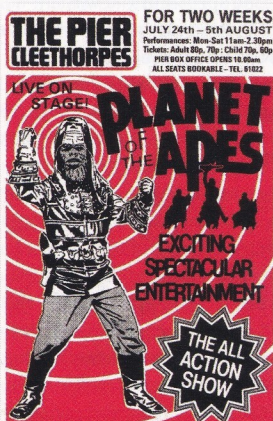
The director and scriptwriter, Mr. Mike McCarthy, said: "The *Planet of the Apes* events went down really well in Cleethorpes in the last two years, so it was a natural progression that we should come here to stage our first-ever show. We are hoping to tour the country with it."

Watched by an audience of about 80, the show had an enjoyable plot liberally sprinkled with ear-piercing gun blasts, kicks and punches - much to the delight of the children. The heroes of the day were time-travellers Greff and Reb, who found themselves on an earth of the future run by apes. And they landed right in the clutches of the tyrant gorilla Urko, the leader of the apes.

Pretty Pele, one of the few humans left on earth, eventually befriended the two travellers, as did the trusty chimp, Galen.

In one of the best scenes, there was a battle between power-seeking Urko and little Galen, and enthusiastic screams and shouts of "Squash him, Galen!" rang out from the young spectators.

The knowledgeable orange-utan, Doctor Zaius was more of a 'good bad-die' but the gorilla guards Zako and Orak were booby by the children. Unfortunately, some fighting had to be cut out of the final scene due to the earlier accident but this did not detract from the outcome of the story. T.S.



Television Character Promotions, hit upon the genius idea of taking the basic character and plot elements from the *Planet of the Apes* TV series which had aired its one and only season the year before. Ironically for something so beloved of kids everywhere and backed by a wealth of popular merchandising, the TV show was cancelled after only one series due to low ratings. Talk about slipping on a banana peel.

Back at Television Character Promotions, Big Mike landed the rights from Twentieth Century Fox studios to create a touring show that would visit venues across the UK between 1975 and 1978. To further secure the show's success another deal was cut with the UK arm of Marvel Comics, who published the *Planet of the Apes* comic book here in Blighty. The deal was that Marvel would endorse a *Planet of the Apes* fan club through the comic.

The *Apes* comic proved a success and was inundated with fan mail, so eventually TCP took the strain off Marvel by joining forces with an official *Apes* fan club through which it could promote the live touring shows. This new club was launched in 1975 and Big Mike and his team of five TCP employees (which included his wife June) set about creating a spectacular *Planet of the Apes* production utilising the most inventive costumes, masks and make-ups they could muster on the budget they had. Mike himself wrote the scripts for the shows and also cast himself in the role of ape leader General Urko in a number of the performances.

With Marvel running the ads for the club it was quite a winner, gathering memberships from all around the globe. Fans received combo packs of badges and colour photos featuring characters from the TV show plus other sundry goodies like stickers and of course a regular newsletter.

Then the live shows hit the road, travelling the country like an army of marauding chimps and invading circuses, festivals, fairs, showgrounds and racecourses like the one in Wolverhampton where I saw it in 75. Meanwhile, various offshoot groups from TCP made appearances at shopping centres, supermarkets and department stores to promote the full blown performances, drawing crowds everywhere they went.



Left: Simon's superb rendition of the *Planet of the Apes* TV show characters

downsized its office in Piccadilly to a smaller one in Ilford and Marvel Comics had dropped its advertising for the fan club when their *Planet of the Apes* comic was cancelled.

A few minor *Apes* shows were performed during 1978 and the same year Mike Caulfield was invited to direct a revived *Planet of the Apes* stage show at the Pier Pavilion Theatre in Cleethorpes. It seems to have been a great success. Caulfield expressed his delight with the show and added that he hoped to take it on tour, but nothing came to fruition.

That's where my research hits a brick wall as it appears Television Character Promotions disappeared off the radar after August 1978, taking the UK's

A DIFFERENT DIRECTION

By the end of the summer of 1976 the company decided to cut back on the live arena shows and take their apes in a slightly different direction, creating a *Planet of the Apes* stage show with newly written scripts. Pre-recorded dialogue was utilised for the ape characters so that audiences could hear lines that were muffled behind the masks. These characters mimed to the dialogue while the humans recited theirs live. Two groups of players were formed so two stage shows could be running in two separate theatres for the 1976 summer season. One was booked into Stratford's Theatre Royal in East London and the other one into the Windmill Theatre in Great Yarmouth in Norfolk.

Both runs were sellouts, proving incredibly popular with general audiences and fan club members alike. It was hoped that they could be expanded into a full-on countrywide theatre tour, but by the end of 76 it became apparent that this was not to be. By then Mike Caulfield was working on other projects for the company and the *Apes* shows were beginning to wind down. They still appeared at Tesco supermarkets across the country during 1977, but probably just to buy bananas.

Meanwhile, Television Character Promotions had

only official *Planet of the Apes* Fan Club with it. What happened to Big Mike, his family and other team and show members I don't know, so if anybody knows any further details I'd be interested to hear them.

This feature has been a simplified overview of the live *Planet of the Apes* shows from the 1970s. I just wanted to express my own memories of that special day back in 75 when I saw the touring show in Wolverhampton, experiencing an exciting spectacle that was an amazing extension of that wonderful TV show and the films that spawned it. Judged by modern high tech standards that same show would probably come across today as basic, threadbare and I guess simple. Yet I recall it being full of action and intensity with decent stunts and special effects. More important at the end of the day was its sheer entertainment value, all in the best vaudeville and pantomime tradition. All it needed was for someone to say, "Look out, Urko's behind you!" and everyone went apeshit. Happy days. 🐒

You can see more of Simon's glorious artwork at: www.artbeat64.com/