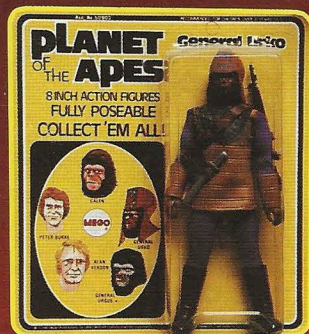


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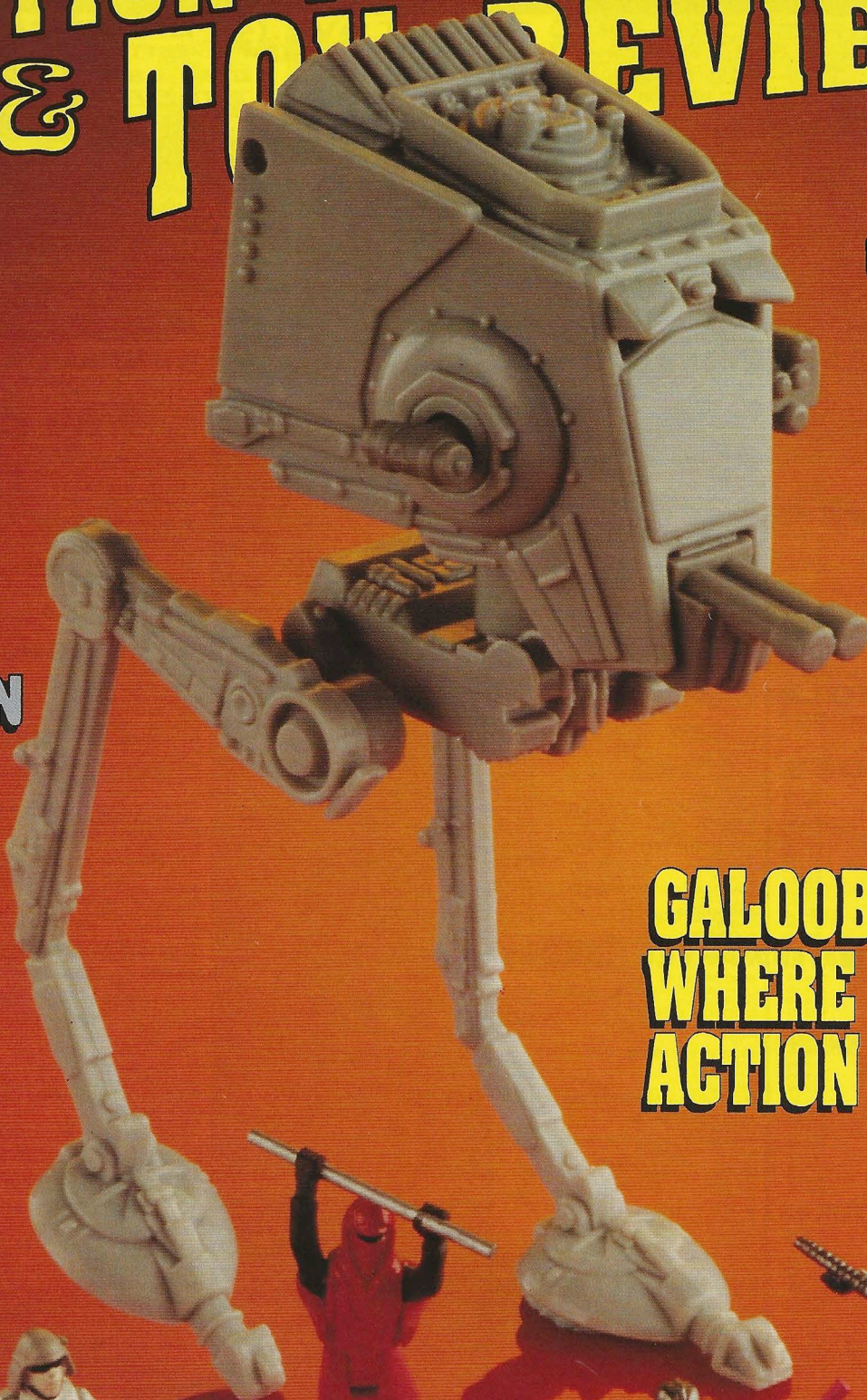
**MEGO'S
PLANET OF
THE APES**

**MATTEL
MALE ACTION
1996**

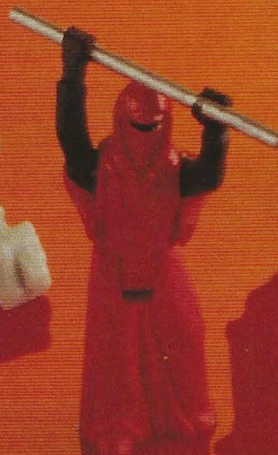
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MEGO'S PLANET OF THE APES

By Chris Sutton

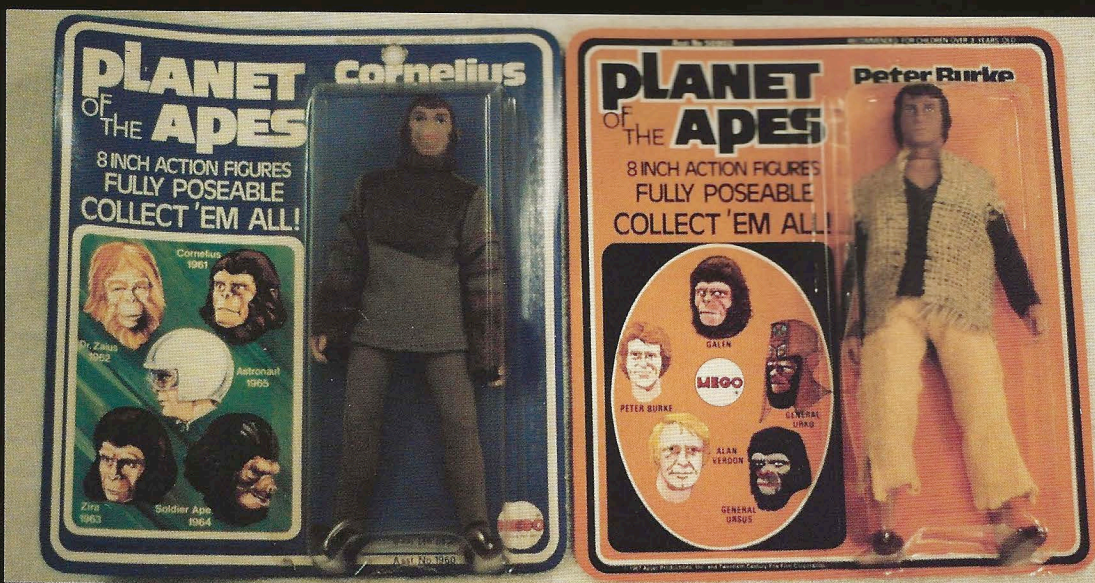
In 1968, Charlton Heston starred in a movie about three astronauts landing in a world controlled by a simian government. The year was 3975, and on this planet, humans were the lower, unintelligent species and apes were the educated, civilized beings. This first picture, *Planet of the Apes*, would soon lead to four sequels based around the same concept. Altogether, the five films -- *Planet Of The Apes*, *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes* (originally *Planet Of The Men*), *Escape From The Planet Of The Apes*, *Conquest Of The Planet Of The Apes*, and *Battle For The Planet Of The Apes*, achieved moderate box office successes, but with time engendered a large and devoted cult following. The producer of the "Ape" films, Arthur P. Jacobs, died in 1973 and never got to witness the popularity of the other Planet Of The Apes projects. His film company, APJAC was left to his wife, actress Natalie Trundy, who can be recognized in four of the five Ape films, portraying a mutant, a human and a chimpanzee.

The last film was made in 1973, and a television series was slated to air in the fall of 1974. Before the T.V. series was to begin, the five original films were run on the air in order to gauge the appeal of the films, which the impending series would closely resemble. The response was a very positive one, giving programming executives the idea that the public wanted to see more Planet Of The Apes.

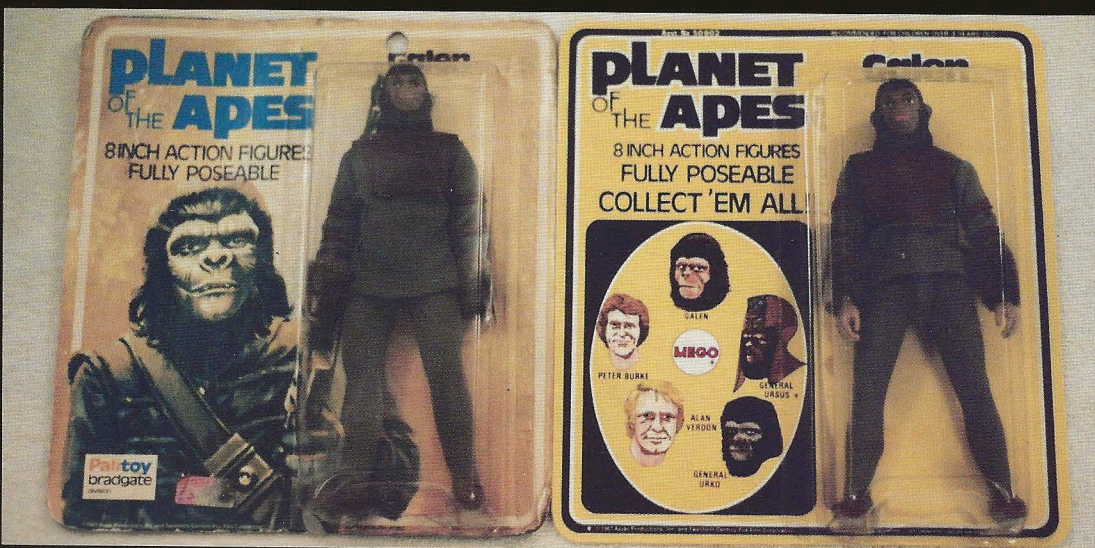
When it came time to cast for the series, it never crossed the mind of casting director Marvin Paige to ask actor Roddy McDowell to audition for the role Galen. Paige thought that McDowell would be a



Above (l-r): Zira, Alan Verdon.



Above (l-r): Cornelius, Peter Burke.



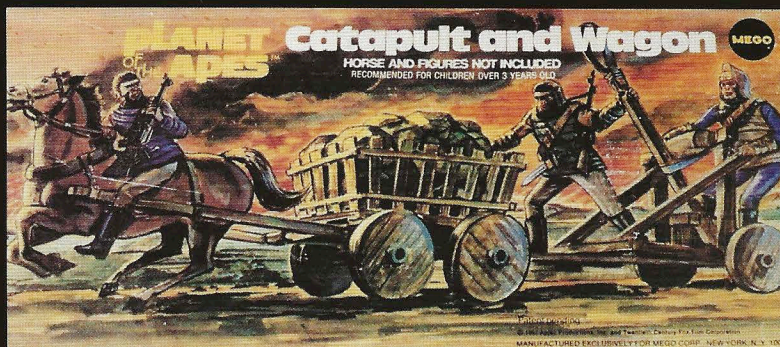
Above (l-r): Palitoy's Galen, and domestic Galen.

marvelous choice for the part, but was unsure if the actor had other commitments. When the director was informed by McDowell's agent that he was very interested in doing the show, negotiations were made, the actor was signed, and Paige was overjoyed. Actor Ron Harper, who played Colonel Alan Virdon in the series, was on honeymoon in Ireland, with actress Sally Stark, when he was called to audition for the part. With Harper in mind for the lead astronaut, Paige wanted to see how actor James Naughton would work with him. Naughton had just won three major awards for acting in "Long Day's Journey into Night", and after the director tested the two actors on screen together, the combination of Harper and Naughton worked well.

Casting for the majority of gorillas, chimpanzees, and orangutans was subject to a set of very demanding criteria, so that a certain look could be captured on film. All three orders of primates had to have brown eyes, and the actors portraying orangutan and chimpanzee characters could be no taller than 5'9". Actors portraying "gorillas" had to range in height from 5'10" to 6'1", with a medium to large build. Make-up accounted for about 13 percent of the overall budget, an expense which ultimately translated as a cinematic look which remains unsurpassed to this day.

In the futuristic world that the "Apes" T.V. series depicted, orangutans were the political leaders, chimpanzees were the scientists and the gorillas acted as the police and/or military forces of the dominant simian society. The year was 3085, and the setting was southern California, a setting vastly different from those seen in the original films', where a post-nuclear 3975 New York City provided the scenery. In the series, astronauts Peter Burke and Alan Virdon were befriended by a young "chimpanzee" named Galen. The series various plots always revolved around the trio's adventures, which generally occurred as a result of their attempts to avoid capture by the relentless Chief Urko (played by Mark Lenard, also Spock's father on Star Trek) and Dr. Zaius (played by Booth Coleman), and the astronauts' determined attempts to get home.

During the show's fourteen week run, it proved to be more than a showcase for the talents of the core cast members. Much like other T.V. shows such as the earlier Twilight Zone, "Apes" featured cameo appearances by some of the day's up-and-coming actors and actresses, and served for many as their break into the business, and future stardom. In "Apes" cameo appearances were made by the likes of Marc Singer, Sandra Locke and John Hoyt. Unfortunately, because the



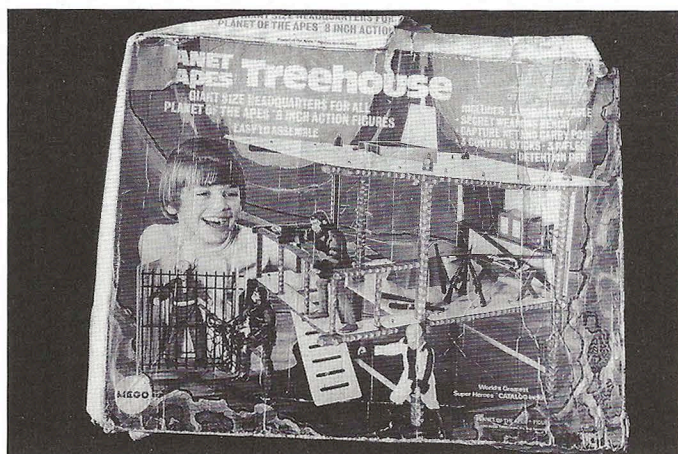
Above: POTA Catapult and Wagon (horse & figures not included).



Above: Forbidden Zone Trap playset (figures were sold separately).



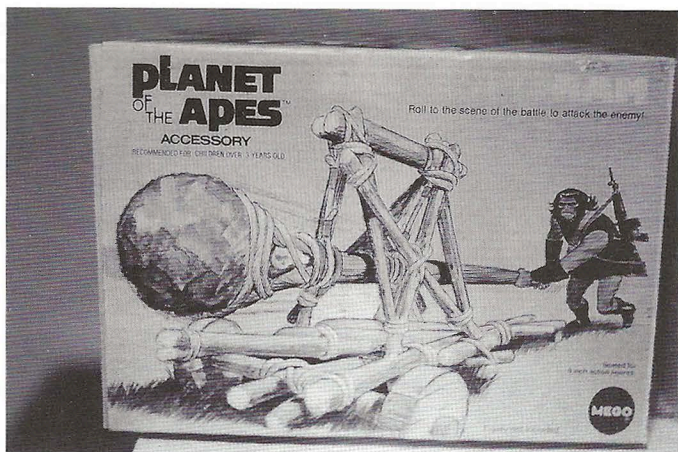
Above: Planet Of The Apes Fortress playset.



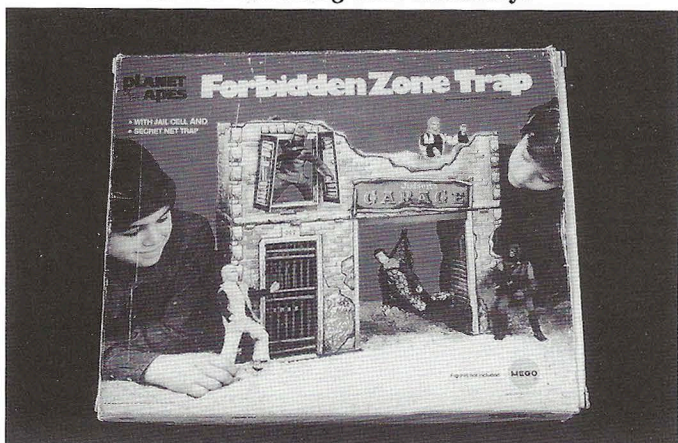
Above: Planet Of The Apes Treehouse playset box.



Above: Fortress box.



Above: Battering Ram accessory.



Above: Forbidden Zone Trap box.

show was cancelled mid-season, several scripts were left entirely unfilmed, and we missed out on a lot of potentially historic cameos. "The Hostage" and "A Fallen God" were just two of the many projects ready to be included in the Planet Of The Apes T.V. lineup. Speaking of the Twilight Zone series, Rod Serling, the writer and presenter for that series, had a hand in writing an early draft for the Planet Of The Apes T.V. series that was never used in its entirety.

One of the many good things that did surface because of the show, was a line of toys from the Mego Corporation. When Mego introduced the Planet Of The Apes toy line in 1973, they began with the release of five figures from the original movies - **Dr. Zaius**, **Astronaut**, **Dr. Zira**, **Soldier Ape**, and **Cornelius**. The **Action Stallion**, the **Treehouse** and **Village Playset**, were also released with this first set of action figures.

When the television series debuted, five new figures were released based on the T.V. characters. **Peter Burke**, **Alan Virdon**, **General Ursus**, **General Urko** and **Galen** comprised the second series of figures, and were in production before the fall of 1974. With this second series figure release came two playsets, which are the most difficult to find -- the **Forbidden Zone Trap** and **Fortress Playset**. These last two items are the most sought after playsets in the Planet Of The Apes collection. The reason for this is that these were the last two items made before both the T.V. series and the toy line were cancelled, and were produced in very conservative "end of the line" numbers.

The last production year for the Planet of the Apes line was 1975, and the last four toys made were small playset accessories. These four accessories featured packaging with artistic depictions of the characters from the five films, as well as the television series, on the outside of the boxes. **The Jail**, **Zaius Throne**, **Battering Ram**, **Catapult** and **Wagon** ranged in price from \$1.99 to \$5.99 at the time of their release, but are now worth anywhere from \$40.00 to \$95.00.

As is the case with many toy lines, the Planet Of The Apes line had within it several variations of the standard figure decorations. Although this may have been overlooked at the time, a more recent collector interest in figure/decoration variations, has made them more "collectable". For instance, on the reverse of the first five figures' backer cards, the photograph shows several of the characters dressed in slightly more detailed uniforms, as they're positioned in and around the Treehouse. The costumes that appear on the reverse of these backer cards were actually "test shots" for the displays, and were never released to the public. The **Soldier Ape** came with a gun, bandolier, gloves, laced boots and (usually) a navy blue tunic over brown one-piece bodysuit. Variations on this figure include a brown tunic over a brown one-piece bodysuit and, in very rare cases, a blue, faux lizard skin tunic over the brown bodysuit. The last two variations increase a figure's value in the collector market, with the "lizard skin" tunic perhaps even doubling the value of the otherwise standard **Soldier Ape**.

General Urko and **General Ursus** were each released on two different backer cards; one Canadian and one American. The Canadian figures were additionally released on U.K. cards, and distributed by a toy company there called Palitoy. These figures are worth about the same as those on American card backs, but tend to fluctuate in price when sold overseas. One package does duty for all of the figures, each package depicting a **Soldier Ape** on the front, and drawings of each television character on the back.

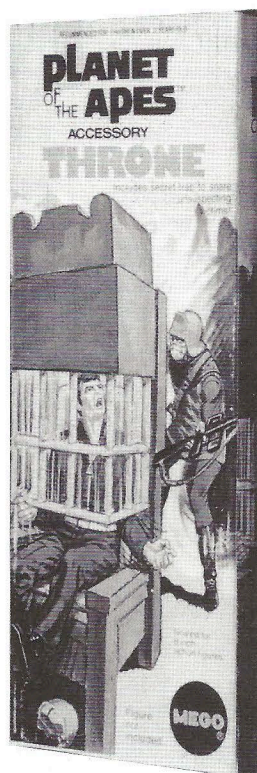
If you're wondering why there was a **General Ursus** on the "T.V. show" backer cards, but there was no **General Ursus** on the show itself, it was because the "Ursus" figures and backer cards were produced and packaged before Mego got the word that the character's name would be changed to **Urko** for the series. Hence you have both an **General Ursus** and a **General Urko**. Both the **Urko** and the **Ursus** figures came with a bandolier that was exclusive to these two figures; noticeably different from the **Soldier Ape's** bandolier. The **Generals'** bandoliers had a sheath attached to the underside which held a small knife in place. **Ursus** came

with an outfit similar to the Soldier Ape's, but with cuffs on the end of the sleeves. The boots for both Ursus and Urko were very detailed, featuring a molded split toe design, just like the boots on the television show. While both of the Generals came with guns, Urko's distinct purple and tan uniform was different from the darker clothes of the other gorilla figures. Urko also had tan cuffs, to match his tunic, and a very detailed helmet molded onto his head.

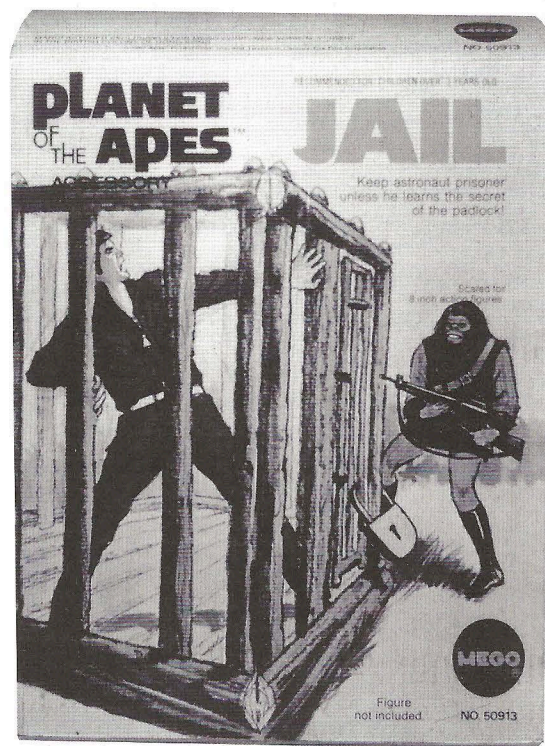
Dr. Zira was the only female figure made, and came with a green two-piece dress and light brown boots. The only orangutan figure made was Dr. Zaius, who came with a tan bodysuit and long black boots. The hieroglyphic images on the sides of his boots were exclusive to this figure. The tree humans, the Astronaut, Peter Burke and Alan Virdon are the least common of the ten figures made. The Astronaut came with a blue jumpsuit, black boots, white belt and silver helmet with a blue visor. This figure was actually a generic composite of all the astronauts seen in the five movies, and was not designed to emulate the features of any one character/actor. However, good likenesses of both Ron Harper and James Naughton were sculpted for their respective characters' action figures. Virdon was dressed in a light-tan terry cloth shirt and pants, with a brown vest and sandals. Burke was packaged with the same pants and sandals but came with a burlap vest and a brown pull-over shirt. Burke, Virdon, Cornelius, and Galen all came with the same type of brown sandals. Since Cornelius and Galen had similar costumes and were also played by the same actor, the figures were extremely similar. The defining aspects of each, which set the two apart, were to be found in the mold of the bodies.

When Mego first started making action figures, the bodies were made with a more highly plasticized and softer plastic, which made the figures more bendable. The problem was that the joints were connected with metal rivets. The combination of unyielding, unforgiving metal rivets and soft plastic resulted in joints that weren't very durable, and so the company was forced to improve the joint design. In 1974, when the metal rivets were exchanged for plastic, it resulted in a more articulated, and durable toy. Here is where Cornelius and Galen can be easily differentiated if they've been removed from their original backer cards. Cornelius was made before the rivet design was changed and Galen afterwards. Even through a plastic blister, a metal "knob", or rivet head, can be seen on Cornelius' wrists, evidence of that earlier rivet design. A plastic knob on the wrists denotes the later rivet design, not seen on Cornelius, identifying the figure itself as Galen.

In addition to a change in joint/rivet design



Above: POTA Throne, boxed.



Above: POTA Jail, boxed.

on second series Ape figures, there was also a minor increase in the size of each figure. It is important to keep in mind that this changed with respect to all Mego figures made during and after this point, and not just the Planet Of The Apes line.

For the majority of collectors, "second generation" Mego figures of the above-mentioned type, are a great deal more popular, simply because of the increased mobility and detailing. While the first series of figures are less common, those figures simply don't live up to the legendary quality of the second generation figures. Because the television series was so short-lived, Mego was unable to expand further on the Planet Of The Apes line. Rumor still has it that a mold of the astronauts' ship was in the making during the final episodes of the show, and that several prototype versions of these ships may have actually been produced using this mold.

It is possible that a new line of Planet Of The Apes figures might surface at the February

1996 Toy Fair, because of the upcoming movie project. Word has it, that a new Planet Of the Apes picture, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger is to be produced late this year. Because none of this has been confirmed at this writing, we'll just have to be patient until more information about either of these "projects" becomes available.

[AFN & TR note: The Planet Of The Apes movie mentioned at the end of this article is currently "in development", as we understand it. We have no confirmable production or release dates for it at this time. No toy line was shown at the 1996 American International Toy Fair in February, and we have no official word to date with respect to anyone claiming license to produce such a line.]

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