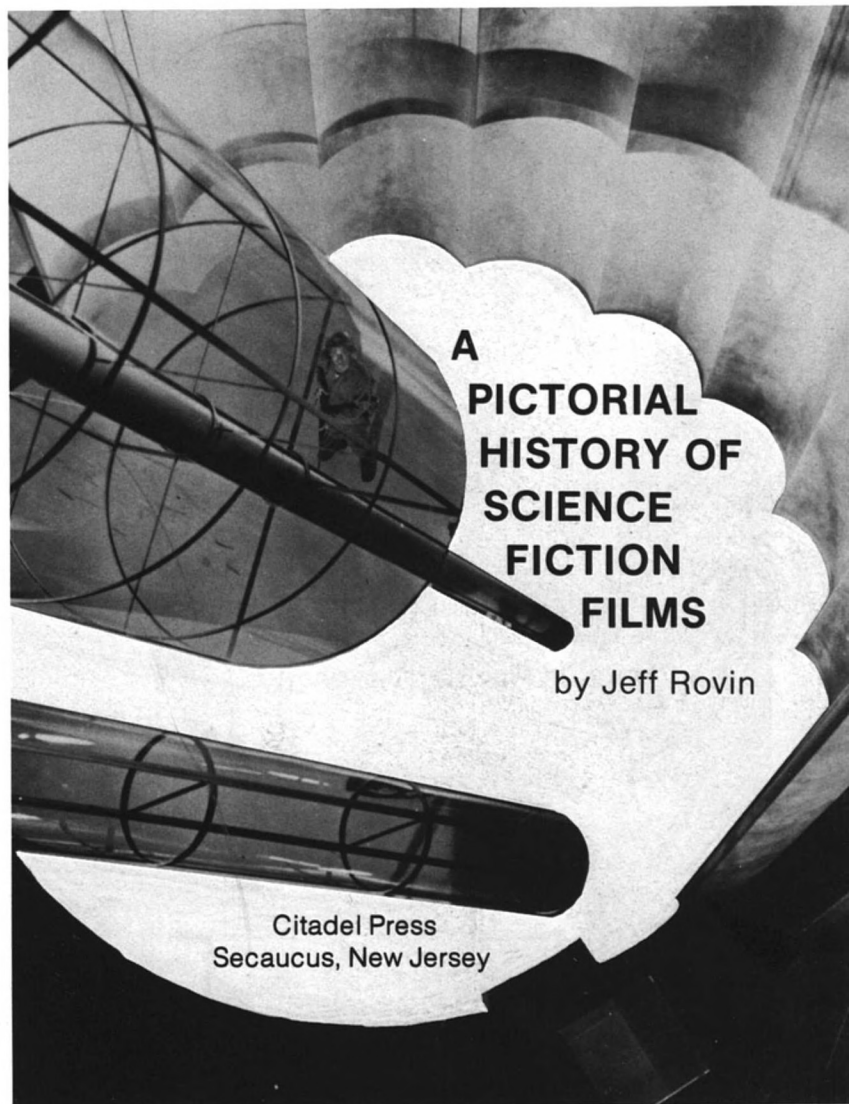
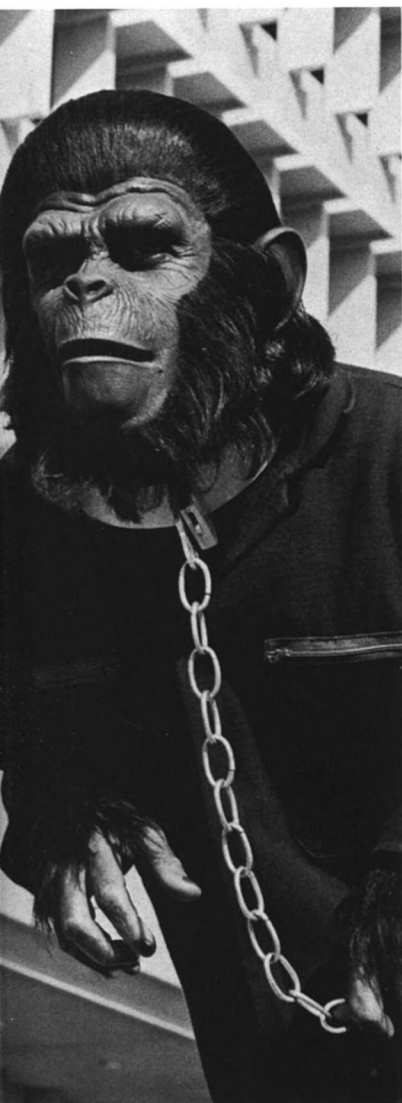


A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

BY JEFF ROVIN





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One film that is a classic is the 1968 Franklin Schaffner epic *Planet of the Apes*. Mr. Schaffner had worked with *Apes* star Charlton Heston previously on *The Warlord* (1965), and after *Apes* he went on to direct such superb films as *Patton* (1970) and *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1972). Schaffner's ability to focus on the human element in the face of awesome spectacle is one of his greatest assets. Despite the fantastic setting of the Grand Canyon, the ape city, and panoramas of long, sprawling terrain, the camera never loses sight of its main character, Heston, who portrays Taylor, commander of a flight of two other men and one woman into space. The woman is killed during the flight—they are all in suspended animation, and her hibernatory mechanism fails.

The three surviving astronauts leave their stricken ship when it crashes on an alien world, and they soon discover that it is a planet in which the apes, capable of speech and



Charlton Heston descends from a mountain peak in Planet of the Apes.

thought, are the masters and man the hunted animal. Of Heston's two companions, one is stuffed and placed in a museum, and the other is lobotomized. Heston is caged, but he escapes with the help of two friendly chimpanzees named Zira and Cornelius (Kim Hunter and Roddy McDowall). After a series of literate and beautifully allegorical sequences, astronaut Heston discovers that this is not some alien world, but Earth in the year 3978. The scene in which Heston stumbles upon the remains of the Statue of Liberty, her upraised torch stabbing through the vast expanse of beach on which he is traveling, is not easily forgotten.

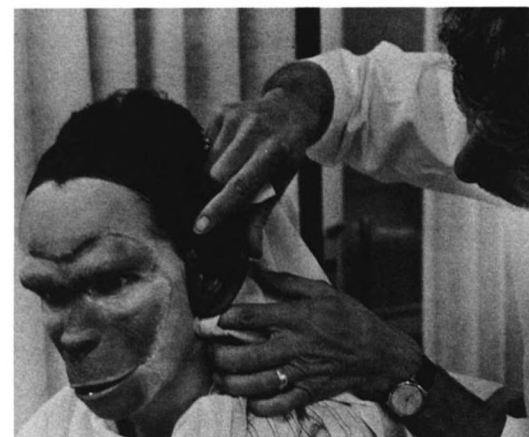
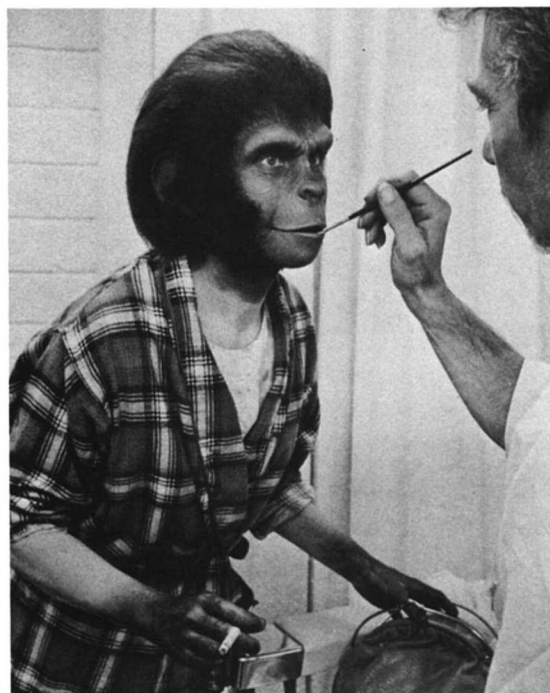
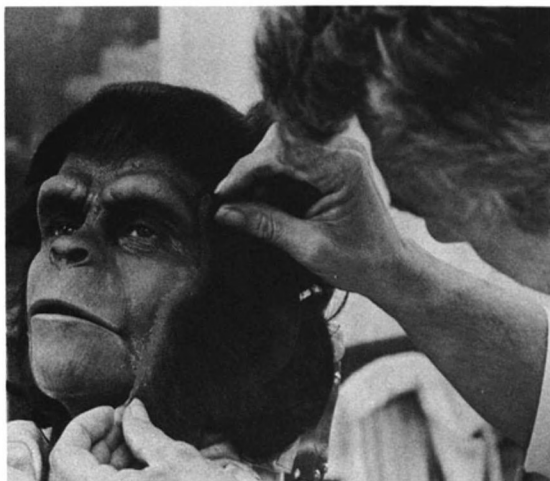
The film makes a shambles of the book by Pierre Boulle, playing down the plot and emphasizing, often to an uncomfortable degree, the philosophy and symbolism. The sequence wherein Heston, on trial, is greeted by a jury of three apes in a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil pose is a bit much. But Heston turns in a magnificent performance, and as apes, Hunter, McDowall, and Maurice Evans—all of whom repeat in later sequels—are wholly convincing.

The much-lauded makeup of John Chambers is not especially impressive. It lacks the texture, quality, and character of, for example, earlier Jack Pierce work for the Universal



After a hard day's shooting, Maurice Evans is only too happy to doff his Planet of the Apes Dr. Zaius make-up.

Kim Hunter being prepared for her role as Zira in Planet of the Apes.



films of the thirties and forties. Pierce, lacking the advanced tools and techniques of today, painted a more articulate tapestry with his grainy, sweltering faces, such as Karloff's *Frankenstein* and *Mummy* and Chaney's *Wolf Man*. The Chambers work, though convincing, is mass produced, prepackaged, and lacking in warmth.

On the other hand, the set direction—of spaceship and ape city—is marvelous, the photography generally superb, and the second-unit stunt work exceptional. The scenes of Heston racing through the cavellike ape city pursued by apes on horseback are breathtaking.

The Seventies

Kim Hunter, as Zira, holds up a protest banner in Beneath the Planet of the Apes.



A gathering of gorillas voice their support for militaristic action proposed by General Ursus. From Beneath the Planet of the Apes.



Science fiction in the seventies has been all but dominated by apes. Four sequels to *Planet of the Apes* have been released, and despite declarations to the contrary, there is no end in sight.

A strength of the original *Planet of the Apes* was the novelty of it all—the concept, the sets, and the apes were unique, and this uniqueness was responsible for much of the original film's appeal. The sequels were without this newness of premise. They had to rely more on characterization, action, and plot. And in every film—although the actual quality of the productions dropped radically—the plots became more clever and more intriguing.

Let us look at the series as a whole. Two different spaceflights break the time barrier and land on Earth in the fortieth century. It is a world dominated by apes, who lord it over the humans, who cannot speak or communicate. The apes, on the other hand, can read, write . . . and perform brain surgery (*Planet of the Apes*, 1968).

After a severe famine, the apes launch an expedition into the Forbidden Zone to secure land and discover what legendary evil lurks therein. Meanwhile, the two survivors of each spaceflight—independently of one another—have gone to the Forbidden Zone and been taken prisoner by mutants, living in the underground remains of New York City, who worship the alpha-omega bomb, the most deadly of all atomic weapons. The apes invade the mutant catacombs and kill the occupants, and one of the astronauts detonates the bomb (*Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, 1970).

All life on Earth has been destroyed. Just before the explosion, however, three apes—two male and one female—escaped to 1973 in one of the two abandoned spaceships. They land in Southern California and are eventually shot to death (*Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, 1971).

However, the female ape has given birth, and the baby is found and raised by the owner of a circus. In the 1990s, a space plague kills all Earth's cats and dogs, and apes are domesticated and are kept as pets. When it is discovered that they make good waiters, janitors, and workers, they are trained. Meanwhile, matured to "manhood," the ape from the future—who can speak and think, having inherited his parents' abilities—leads the enslaved apes in revolt and subjugates the humans (*Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, 1972). War for possession of the Earth is waged among the various kinds of apes—gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees—the humans, and the mutants (scarred by atomic warfare resulting from the ape revolt). After all of the wars, everyone vows to try to live in peace (*Battle for the Planet of the Apes*, 1973).

Running full circle, it is obvious that by the fortieth century, the humans have fallen to utter ruin. The use of the classic vicious circle in the Apes series is fantastic. The idea that had the astronauts not gone to the future, the apes could not have escaped into the past, their son would not have fostered a revolt of the apes, and there would have been no *Planet of the Apes* to which the astronauts could go, is tantalizing food for thought.



James Franciscus and Linda Harrison (as Nova) plan a course of action in Beneath the Planet of the Apes.

Brent and Cornelius (David Watson) dispute a point in Beneath the Planet of the Apes.





James Gregory (left) and Maurice Evans (right) heed the words of a wise man regarding their proposed expedition into the Forbidden Zone.

James Franciscus is lead by mutants into what used to be Grand Central Station. From Beneath the Planet of the Apes.



The series could conceivably go on forever, since the fate of the other of the two rockets is unknown. Apes could have utilized the ship to visit another planet and may return to repopulate the earth after the alpha-omega radiation has dissipated. It might then work out that the apes evolve into human beings and that Heston, in *Planet of the Apes*, actually came from the far future and landed in the past. . . .

In any event, with the exception of *Planet of the Apes*, the films are simple, digestible science fiction. They do not ram any grandiose philosophies down the viewers' throats; rather, they present smatterings of moral thought undisguised by allegory.

Satire plays an important part in the films. The following from the Mass of the Holy Bomb, practiced by the mutants in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, is a clever piece of writing and a frightening bit of satire.

The heavens declare the glory of the Bomb, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. He descendeth from the outermost part of Heaven, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. There is neither speech nor language; yet His voice is heard among them. Glory be to the Bomb and to the Holy Fallout, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. O Mighty and everlasting Bomb, who came down among us to make Heaven into Earth, lighten our darkness, O instrument of God . . . grant us thy peace. Amen.

Beneath the Planet of the Apes also contains two interesting discourses on man and human nature. The first is read from the apes' Sacred Scrolls to Heston as he is about to embark on a journey into the Forbidden Zone to discover the riddle of the Planet of the Apes.

Beware the beast man, for he is the devil's pawn. Alone among God's primates, he kills for sport . . . or lust . . . or greed. Yea, he will murder his brother to possess his brother's land. Let him not breed in great numbers, for he will make a desert of his home . . . and yours. Shun him . . . for he is the harbinger of death.

And General Ursus, commander of the gorilla army, delivers the following morale booster to his men:

Members of the citizens' council, I am a simple soldier, and as a soldier, I see things simply. I don't say all humans are evil simply because their skin is white; no! But our Great Lawgiver tells us that never, *never* will the human have the ape's divine faculty for being able to distinguish between evil and good. The only good human is a dead human!



*Roddy McDowall, Kim Hunter,
and Sal Mineo arrive in 1973 after
they escape in *Escape from the
Planet of the Apes*.*



*Natalie Trundy is trussed-up in
Conquest of the Planet of the
Apes.*



Apes batter Don Murray in their rebellion from Conquest of the Planet of the Apes.



*Eris Braeden and Bradford Dillman (right) prepare to inject Roddy McDowall and Kim Hunter with truth serum in *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*.*

