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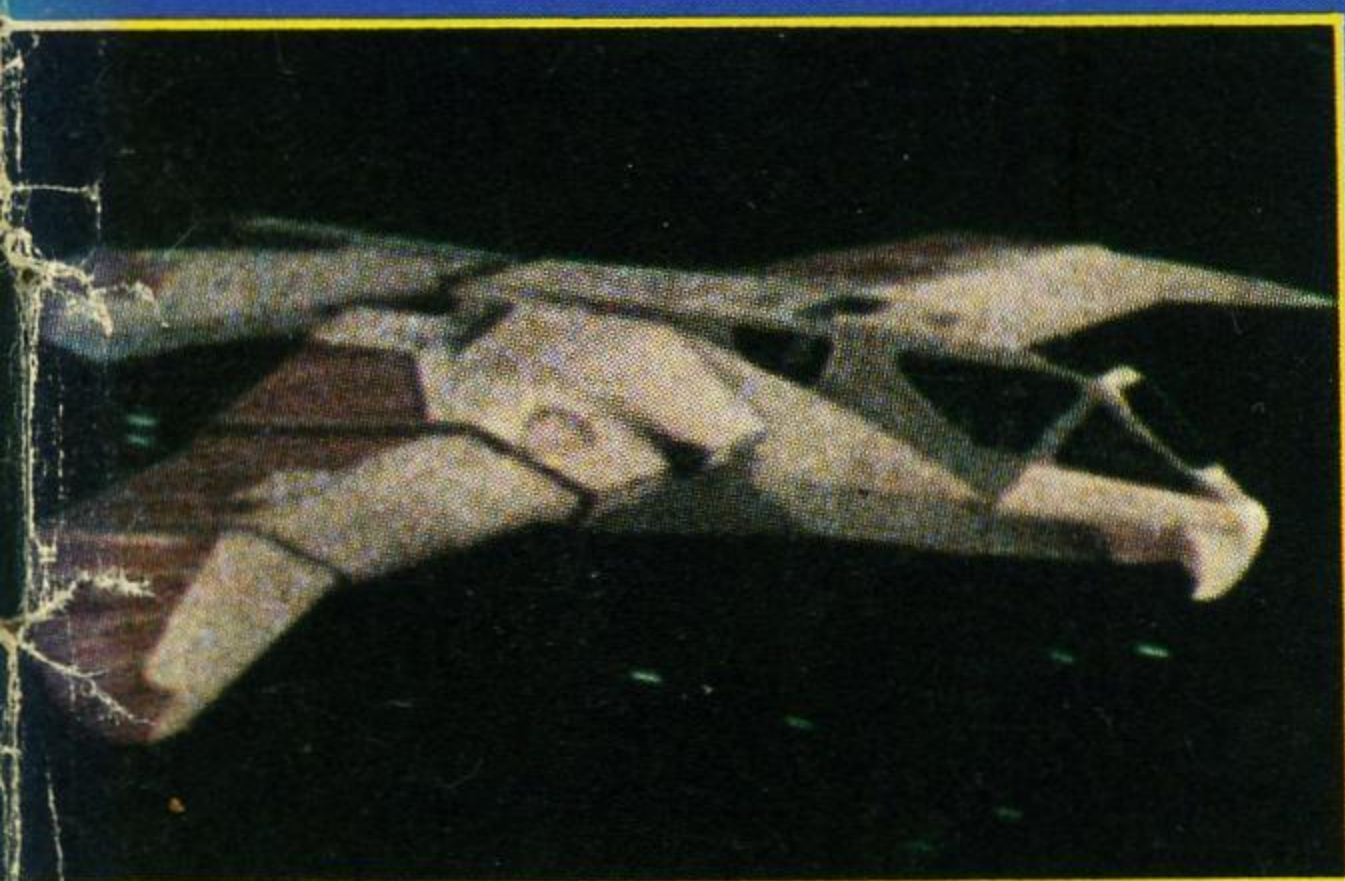
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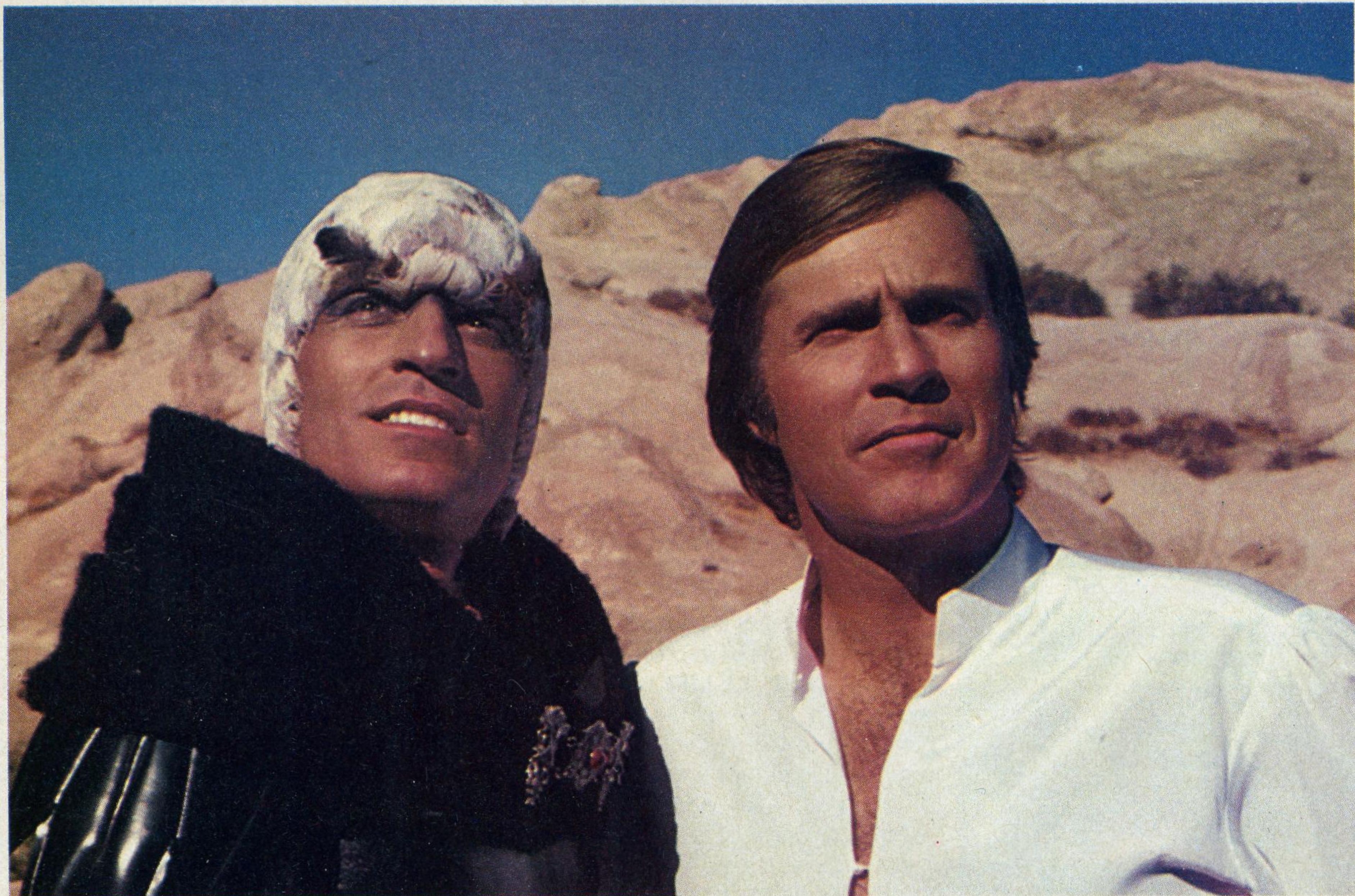




# STARLOG

APRIL 1981  
Number 45

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FUTURE



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## Packaging Apes for TV Profit

**D**uring the early 1970s, 20th Century-Fox persuaded the movie-going public to "Go Ape!" Theaters across the country ran 12-hour marathon programs of all five *Planet of the Apes* films and audiences went bananas. As usual, the television world was keeping a watchful eye out for hot properties that could be whipped into successful series. So it came as no great surprise when CBS-TV latched on to the idea of a series based on the *Apes* movies.

Roddy McDowall, whose name and voice had become synonymous with the films, was a natural star. As a result of the arduous make-up job required to turn the human actor into his chimpanzee counterpart, McDowall's face was insured for \$1 million with Lloyd's of London. The plot of the TV series was somewhat similar to the first film: two 20th century humans pass through a time warp and crash on the ape planet. Forced to flee from ape authority, in the persona of orangutan scientist Dr. Zaius and gorilla security leader General Urko, the humans attempt to find a way back to the 20th century with the help of their chimp friend, Galen (McDowall).

Series executive producer Herbert Hirschman gave the power of speech back to the human populace of the ape planet (they were mute in the films) because it was logically assumed that guest stars might like to have some lines of dialogue.

The formula seemed sound. If the movies could succeed, the TV series should, too. It didn't. The *Planet of the Apes* TV series premiered on September 13, 1974 and came to an abrupt end on December 27th.

As mentioned last month, the average syndicated series runs about 100 episodes. Shorter series, those that run for only two or three years, also crop up from time to time. Even *Battlestar Galactica*, with only 21 hours in syndication has managed to secure a once-a-week slot in syndication, but it seemed very unlikely that a series which only ran less than half a season would even make a once-a-week syndication run.

After holding on to the episodes for five years, 20th Century-Fox decided to edit the one-hour shows into TV movies and sell them as additional *Apes* movies. TV stations around the U.S. had been playing the five feature films in a "Planet of the Apes Week" format. It dawned on Fox executives that they could get 10 episodes back on the small screen in the form of a second set of *Apes* movies, giving TV stations a chance to "Go Ape" for another week.

The five films are broken down as follows:  
**Back to the Planet of the Apes**—This first film starts off with the pilot episode wherein astronauts Pete Burke (James Naughton)



Two apes who harbor the humans in *Life, Liberty and Pursuit*.

and Allan Virdon (Ron Harper) crash on Earth 1,000 years from now. The astronauts befriend a chimp named Galen who helps them to escape. In the hope of finding a way to get back to their own time, the astronauts search for a computer in an earthquake threatened city. With the computer, they can play back their flight records.

**The Forgotten City of the Planet of the Apes**—The trio are forced to become involved in the strange gladiatorial games of the district run by prefect Tolar (William Smith). Galen, Burke and Virdon nearly escape the gorilla police and find an abandoned government research project with a computer containing a vast amount of recording information about the human-ruled world.

**Treachery and Greed on the Planet of the Apes**—The fugitives try to save the life of a human blacksmith and his son, whom gorilla leader Urko (Mark Lenard) has threatened with death should his horse lose another race. The trio also attempts to expose a crooked gorilla (Percy Rodrigues) by framing him in a plot to kill Urko.

**Life, Liberty and Pursuit on the Planet of the Apes**—Galen must charm an old flame (Jacqueline Scott) into accepting that a book on human surgery is no hoax when Virdon is shot. Meanwhile, Burke is captured by the

ape authority and is to be brainwashed by a brilliant ape scientist named Wanda (Beverly Garland).

**Farewell to the Planet of the Apes**—Escaping from a forced labor camp, the trio becomes involved in a plot to develop a glider to drop a fragmentation bomb on the gorilla council.

\* \* \*

While the new package of *Apes* telefilms began to make its way around the country on local TV stations, an interesting scheme was hatched by the ABC owned-and-operated stations to make their presentation a little more special and original. Roddy McDowall was called upon to re-create his role of Galen to tape new footage for the presentation by the ABC stations entitled *The New Planet of the Apes*. The footage created by Fox to open each feature was scrapped and replaced by McDowall as the now aged Galen recalling his exciting adventures. Each "chapter" of the five-part presentation opened and closed with a monologue by Galen.

This special presentation was made for the ABC owned-and-operated stations and can only be seen on them (though it's possible that ABC affiliates may get this version, it is unlikely that any affiliates of CBS, NBC or the independents will get this version). While some other ABC o-and-o stations have run the full two-hour versions, WABC-TV New York had to cut out the third *Apes* movie and arrange their presentation in a "cliffhanger" format. As a result of the unique structure of the telefilms (two one-hour episodes per film), WABC was able to do a fairly clean job of cutting the films to fit their five 90-minute 4:30 movie slot.

According to WABC, the ratings for the week (November 17th) were considered quite good (an average of 13.4, with a 30 share).

The success of the *Apes* package may result in the return of other limited run series in the form of syndicated TV-movies. *Fantastic Journey*, *Logan's Run*, *Man from Atlantis*, *Spiderman* and others may find new life in this format.

Thanks go to Jennifer Gertz at WABC New York and Steve Astor's office at 20th Century-Fox Television for their assistance. ★

**Correction:** Last issue it was stated that a network affiliate cannot have programming from more than one network. However, there are areas of the country that only have one or two stations. In this case, a station may broadcast programming from two or more of the networks. It has also been brought to my attention that PBS is considered a network. An in-depth profile of PBS will appear in a future column. D.H.





Top: Dr. Zauis (Booth Colman) and Gen. Urko (Mark Lenard) pursue the fugitives. Above: Burke (James Naughton) Galen (Roddy McDowall) and Virdon (Ron Harper) hide from a gorilla patrol in the *Planet of the Apes* TV movies.