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WOMAN OF THE APES

All-too-human on a monkey planet, Linda Harrison went on the run & married a studio head.

BY TOM WEAVER

No doubt most of the reason that Planet of the Apes became a top-grossing science fiction movie was its array of special FX, its amazing "Ape City" and the superb, groundbreaking makeups which transformed some of Hollywood's great character actors into simian scene-stealers. And yet all it required to take many male eyes away from the hard

first runner-up in the Miss United States part of the competition and, perhaps more importantly, was "spotted" by then-talent scout Mike Medavoy and presented to 20th Century Fox. Throughout her acting years at Fox, and amidst movie roles in Planet and its sequel Beneath the Planet of the Apes, she dated studio boss Richard Zanuck and mar-

ried him in 1969. (Divorced in 1978, she has more recently been seen in Zanuck's Cocoon movies.) Once again a Marylander, and "probably the happiest [she has] ever been," Linda Harrison looks back with contagious cheerfulness on her show biz years—and the adventure of being the sole beauty on a planet of beasts.



Charlton Heston was Linda Harrison's idol as a little girl—"You know, Ben-Hur"—but he also co-starred with her in two Planet of the Apes films.

work of all of these talented FX and makeup artisans was a sun-tanned, skimpily-clad homo sapien beauty with a long mane of brunette hair and big brown eyes. The character for whom red-blooded audiences went ape was, of course, "Nova," and the "specially-introduced" actress, former beauty queen Linda Harrison.

A native of Berlin, Maryland, Harrison was Miss Berlin at 16, then a New York garment center model. Homesickness brought her back to Maryland, where she entered and won the state beauty pageant. During the finals in the Miss International contest (held in Long Beach, California), she was



STARLOG: While competing in these beauty pageants, did you have designs on becoming an actress?

LINDA HARRISON: Yes, *very* definitely. In fact, it was all "pre-planned" in my mind to enter the beauty contest and get to California and be seen. And it really turned out exactly the way I wanted it to.

STARLOG: Did you have to do a screen test at Fox?

HARRISON: They gave me a "personality test," which was very interesting. They set the camera in front of me and I would talk to the camera—they asked questions—and then I turned to each side. They asked me what kind of man I would be attracted to, and *why*, and I just remember so clearly what I said: I wanted a man that had a lot of interests in common with me, that we had to have a wonderful chemistry. I just went on talkin' like I had done it all my life! They then signed me up for what's called a "60-day option" and I went and studied with Pamela Danova, the studio coach. At the time, Richard Zanuck was head of the studio and his father, Darryl Zanuck, was chairman of the board. Richard's assistant Harry Sokolov, a lawyer, was looking for a date for the premiere of *The Agony and the Ecstasy* [1965] starring Charlton Heston. Well, I was thrilled: I had never been to a premiere, I was all of 20 years old, and Heston was my idol as a little girl—you know, Ben-Hur! So, they picked me because Harry was from Baltimore. That's when I first met Richard Zanuck, *that* evening. He became quite smitten, and that started a romance. That was during the 60-day period that I started dating Richard, and then I was signed to a seven-year contract.

STARLOG: What was the first thing you were ever in?

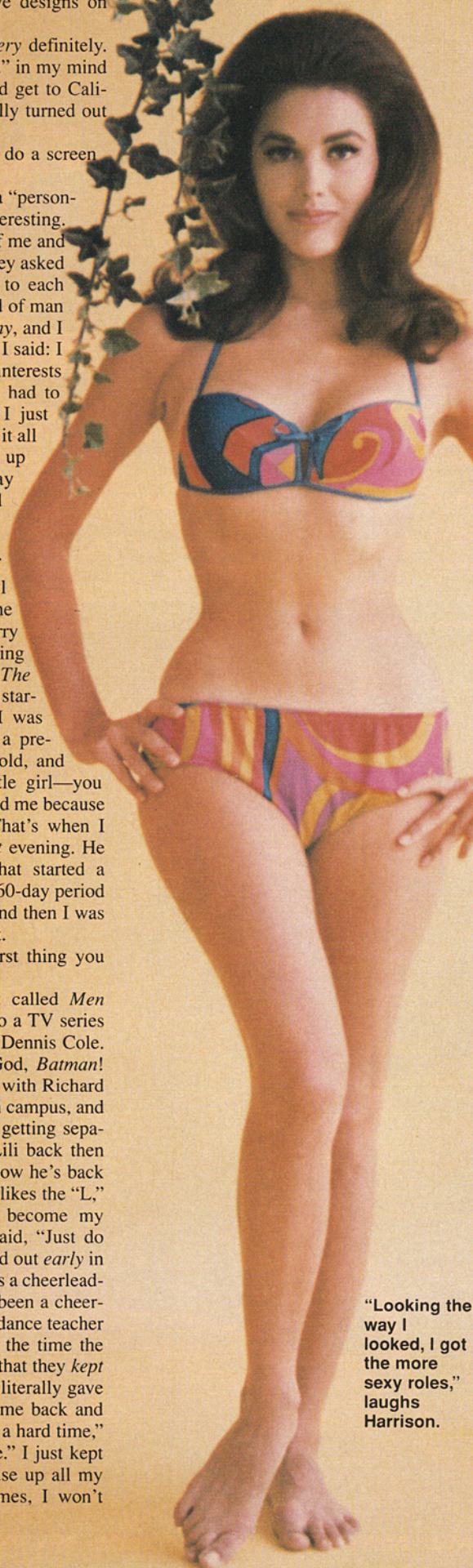
HARRISON: It was a pilot called *Men Against Evil*, which turned into a TV series called *The Felony Squad* with Dennis Cole. Then, I did a *Batman*. Oh, God, *Batman*! You gotta remember, I'm now with Richard Zanuck, who was a big man on campus, and he was then in the process of getting separated. (He was married to a Lili back then and then he married *me*, and now he's back to *another* girl named Lili. He likes the "L," I guess [laughs]!) Dick had become my mentor and teacher, and he said, "Just do what they tell you." So, I started out *early* in the morning on *Batman*—it was a cheerleading scene. I was 20 and I had been a cheerleader in high school. And the dance teacher at Fox worked us so hard, by the time the shot came at 5 p.m., the scene that they *kept* was me falling over, because I literally gave out! And the dance teacher came back and said, "Linda Harrison gave me a hard time," complained about my "attitude." I just kept telling her, "You're going to use up all my energy, so when the shot comes, I won't have any."

STARLOG: What was it like, dating "the boss"?

HARRISON: Dick just fell madly in love, and so did I with him. And he did *not* like me going to the acting school I was attending, working with other actors like Ron Ely. So, he *built* a talent school. It was famous, 'cause out of it came Tom Selleck, Sam Elliott, Cristina Ferrare, Jackie Bisset, Jim Brolin, myself—all these actors were just *thrilled* to be getting into this school. Well, *one* reason Dick had the school was so he would know where I was [laughs]. It was a wonderful experience, wonderful development for the actors. We had coaching, fencing, dancing—we went for hours and we really formed a bond. Of course, I wasn't there as much as the rest because I was flyin' off with Dick Zanuck, all over the world. It was kind of neat, being his girl. Everybody else was shaking, *would* they get their contract, *would* they get in a film? You know what that business is all about—especially back then, when the studio heads had a *lot* of power.

STARLOG: What was your first movie?

HARRISON: The first movie I did was *Way...Way Out* [1966] with Jerry Lewis; it was a nice cameo part, a wonderful scene between Jim Brolin and I. After that, I did *A Guide for the Married Man* [1967]. And all during this period, Dick was telling me about this fabulous book called *Planet of the Apes* and that it was going to make a great movie. He said, "I want you to play the ape, Dr. Zira"—in fact, during the makeup



"Looking the way I looked, I got the more sexy roles," laughs Harrison.



Harrison and Heston contemplate their new leashes on life.

testing, I had to go through the whole business with the mask and everything for Zira, the part that eventually went to Kim Hunter [STARLOG #160].

STARLOG: That was the part he wanted you to play in the movie?

HARRISON: No, I think they always had me in mind for Nova. But they needed someone to do the screen test, and you keep trying to employ your actors. So, I did the screen test. The part that was hard for me was actually doing the mask, where they put all that plaster on your face and you have to lie there still for a long time. Fortunately, I was an acrobat growing up, and a very good one—I won a lot of contests—so I knew how to control my body and be “quiet.” You had to do that, you had to be very still and lay there and be a “good patient.” (A young actor will do *anything* to get their mug on the screen!) [Director] Franklin Schaffner got involved on the movie and liked it, and [producer] Arthur Jacobs, a great showman. Dick and Arthur got together and there was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm. It took a *lotta, lotta* work, especially in the makeup department. It takes a certain kind of producer to do a film like that, with apes running around!

STARLOG: Did you ever read the book?

HARRISON: Yes. Well...I might have read a few pages [laughs]. I really wasn't into reading those kinds of books!

STARLOG: Kim Hunter said that there was a bit of trepidation—that people thought *Planet of the Apes* would either be a giant hit or a terrible embarrassment.

HARRISON: You know, from my experience working on films that have kind of “stayed” and become classics, you almost sense it when you're doing it. There is a cur-



Harrison concedes that Nova is her best-known role, bar none.

rent, an energy going on. I sensed that. If you're going to analyze it *from the brain*, you'll say, “It could go one way or the other,” but the *intuitive* feeling was that we had something unique. I'm an intuitive person, and I would say that that's what I was reading.

STARLOG: Did you enjoy all the location shooting?

HARRISON: It was wonderful. We went to Page, Arizona, *beautiful* country, and I just marvelled at how they move an entire production, like a little mini-town, and set up. It was beautiful working out there in the desert. That was where we shot the beginning, the spaceship crashing and the astronauts walking around. Schaffner was just fabulous. He was a very laconic man, he didn't say much, but he was very aware of everything he was doing. The complaints were that he “kept everything in his back pocket,” what he was going to do during the day. But when you think about it from an artistic point-of-view, he was very smart because he didn't let anything else interfere with his focus. The elements were all there—the [behind-the-scenes] people; Leon Shamroy, an Academy Award-winning cinematographer; the cast; *everything*. It was fabulous! Dick and I were joined-at-the-hip but he didn't come out to Page—I had my sister Kay there. So, at one point, I told him, “You come out here!” He said, “OK, how do I get there?” I said, “Get your Lear jet and get out here.” [Laughs] And he did! It was very, very exciting, it was *moviemaking*.

STARLOG: Your Nova outfit was reminiscent of what Raquel Welch wore in *One Million Years B.C.*

HARRISON: That's true. That has been the traditional costume for “cave girls.”

STARLOG: Where did you shoot the apes' first scene, where they beat the bushes and hunt the humans?

HARRISON: That was done at the Malibu Ranch. We had built Ape City there. And it was *stinking* hot! Whew! The scenes of us in cages were also shot at Ape City.

STARLOG: It must have been worse for the ape actors than for you.

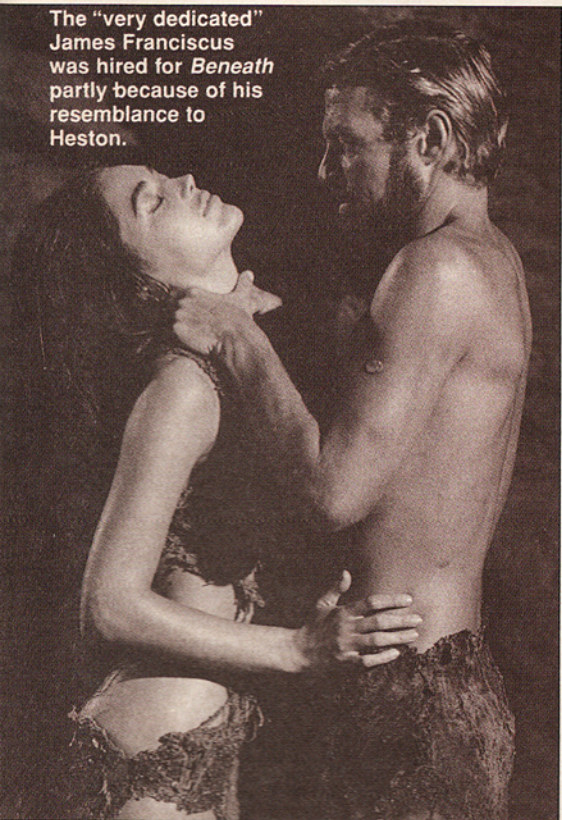
HARRISON: Oh, God! And they reported to the set at 3 a.m.! But they were *fabulous* troupers, Roddy McDowall and Kim, and those were difficult, difficult roles. Maurice Evans was older and I don't know if his health was that good, and he had an even harder time. But actors have to endure all that sort of stuff, just like everybody else. We had good morale, good people.

STARLOG: What about the “ape” bit players and extras? Did they seem to be having any problems?

HARRISON: Well, the extras just had a mask that they would pull on over their heads. The primary actors had the tough part. But, you know, I was so delighted and grateful to be in this picture that I probably never saw the *negative* side as much. I just *didn't*. I remember one piece of advice Dick gave me: “You go to work on time and listen to your director and do your job. And I don't want to hear any complaints about you!” I

TOM WEAVER, veteran STARLOG correspondent, authored Creature from the Black Lagoon (MagicImage, \$19.95). He profiled Peter Mark Richman in STARLOG PLATINUM EDITION #5.

The “very dedicated” James Franciscus was hired for *Beneath* partly because of his resemblance to Heston.





According to Harrison, she didn't have the personality or desire to be "a star."

had to be *even more* careful, and *nice*, because I was his girl friend.

STARLOG: The movie's end was shot at Point Dume, on the California coast.

HARRISON: Right. That's where we shot the part where Heston and I ride off and find the Statue of Liberty. Actually, that was a matte shot. And that [special effect] took a lot of innovation and talent. You've got to remember that this film was made in '67, and a lot of new things were tried that were never done before. There were many breakthroughs, in the makeup, shooting and everything. So, it really contributed a lot to the industry. By the way, it was *wonderful* there at Point Dume. We shot there at the very end of this long [production] and we were probably there a full month. We did a lot of beach stuff—Dr. Zira talking about what Man had done, *that* long speech.

STARLOG: Any "lighter" moments during the movie's making, that you can recall?

HARRISON: I turned 22 during production, and at lunchtime one day at Point Dume a big cake was brought out. I was sitting with Heston, who was kidding me about being "all of 22." (He must have been in his 40s.) And then I came back, with all my makeup on, to the studio, and Dick had a big party there, in the commissary. He made a wonderful speech about this girl who had come into his life, and how grateful he was. It was very exciting, a good time.



STARLOG: How did you like working with Heston?

HARRISON: *Loved* it—he was a wonderful actor to work with. He knew Dick very well, he knew it was my first [big] picture, he taught me how to "favor" the camera (I was kind of camera-shy). We spent a lot of time together, waiting for shots and everything, and he was just very, very pleasant, a very good person.

STARLOG: Did you watch rushes?

HARRISON: Sometimes. And it was a fabulous experience, to be able to sit in on those. It was so beautifully shot and so different and so professional with Schaffner [running the show].

STARLOG: What more can you remember about Arthur Jacobs?

HARRISON: Arthur was a fabulous promoter, and his wife was a very good friend of mine. What I remember most was everyone's enthusiasm. The way Dick did things, he really *inspired* his people—he was always "up." (At the time, I think we had the logo "Think 20th.") Arthur was a great party-giver and promoter—everything "apes," you know!—and he was a perfect guy for this picture.

STARLOG: Did you ever meet author Pierre Boulle or screenwriter Rod Serling?

HARRISON: Not Boulle, I don't think; they bought the book from him and then Serling came on and did the screenplay. I met Rod, he came on the set. I had

watched *Twilight Zone* a little bit, but I was never into television or film too much as a young person.

You've got to remember, I was 21, 22 years old and there were all these "new personalities" coming into my life.

STARLOG: If, as a kid, you were "never into TV or film too much," how did you manage to decide to become an actress?

HARRISON: Well, it's funny—the people who are "movie buffs" aren't necessarily artistic people or people inclined to be actors. I was more interested in *concentrating* and *focusing* on my goal, rather than utilizing my time watching film. I was 18, going to high school in Maryland, working in the summertime at a famous restaurant called Phillips Crab House. I was a normal kid, dating and falling in love, and there wasn't much time, really, to watch movies. I don't even watch a lot of films *today*.

STARLOG: When *Planet of the Apes* came out, some Fox publicity materials called it a satire. Was that their way of hedging their bets, in case no one would take it seriously?

HARRISON: I'm not sure what was in their minds. I thought it was serious science fiction—that's what it *was*. They knew what they had and they knew it was "different," and they must have felt it could go one way or the other. But you'll find a lot of the great pictures can go one way or the other.

STARLOG: What kind of roles did you want to play? Or would you play whatever

"It was kind of neat, being [the boss] girl," Harrison recalls of her stint at Richard Zanuck's 20th Century Fox.

they told you to play?

HARRISON: Nova was a very good part for me, I had the quality for it. But my career was never top priority, I was very interested in my relationship with Dick and eventually becoming his wife and having a family. I enjoyed working in front of the camera but not full-time. I didn't have the personality or the desire to be a "star." I didn't really think about it too much. But as an actress, when they offered you something, you were supposed to take it and do the best you could. You know it's a tough business, and you're

STARLOG: Surrounded by gorillas and mutants in these *Apes* movies, did you fear that your character might get lost in the shuffle?

HARRISON: No. The fact that I was the human, I stood out.

STARLOG: You were on horseback in both movies. Were you an equestrienne?

HARRISON: No, not particularly. And I had to look like I had never been on a horse, so try to do that and get the horse where he's supposed to go! But I do remember having a lot of fun in the second one; with Ted Post,

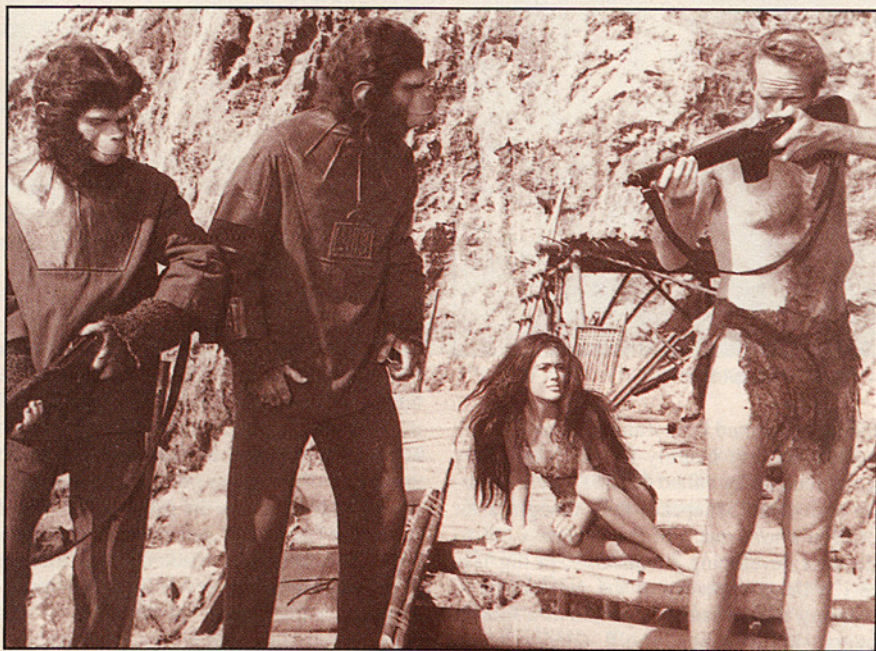
guest spots on TV, and then *Airport 1975*.

STARLOG: When big decisions needed to be made at Fox, did he ever ask your opinion? Did you offer opinions?

HARRISON: He got my opinions. His partner was David Brown (a wonderful man), and David's wife was Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan*. And we went all around the world together. So at all those dinners you would throw out ideas—we were constantly trying to figure out what kinds of films worked and what didn't and what to go with. You just kind of go by your gut. So I was always "into" those conversations. Dick is a listener, so you would throw out different things and he would just sit and take it all in. But his decision to actually go with a certain picture or a certain actor or director was something he did himself. After hearing and gathering all of the information, he went by his own instinct.

STARLOG: That was around the time of X-rated Fox movies like *Myra Breckinridge* and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*.

HARRISON: It's such a hard business, running a studio and trying to figure out the hits. For some reason, Dick and David decided to go with films that were quite beneath them, that they hadn't done. But sometimes you've got to do something to get back on track. It was a series of things: The relationship with his father [Fox chairman of the board Darryl F. Zanuck] was strained, because "the son was rising"—and Dick needed to spread his wings. And the father wasn't ready to let go. Pretty soon there was a wedge between father and son, and there was a terrible change in their relationship. It was like a divorce, like any situation where two people come to a crossroad and things splinter. Darryl fired Dick, and David, and me [laughs]—I was under contract, I was eight months pregnant. But something good



Harrison sensed as she was doing *Planet of the Apes* that the film was destined to be a classic.

just grateful for any piece of film work that you may be able to get. Looking the way I looked, I got the more sexy roles [laughs].

STARLOG: How long did it take for someone to figure out that a sequel to *Planet of the Apes* would be a good idea?

HARRISON: Oh, well, that was immediate—those were the years of the sequels!

STARLOG: *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* reportedly had half the first film's budget. Did you feel the pinch at all?

HARRISON: No, I didn't. Of course, they "cashed in" on the first one [reused costumes, sets, etc.] and that, in a way, takes away from some of the artistic challenge that the first had. But that's how the producer saw fit to do it, and Ted Post was a wonderful television director. And I was really featured a lot, so as an actress, that sat well. It wasn't as good as the first, 'cause of course we had Franklin Schaffner on that first one and he was one of the top, top directors.

STARLOG: Burt Reynolds was supposedly up for the James Franciscus role, and he didn't want it.

HARRISON: I don't recall that. I remember they thought that Jim would be good because he looked a lot like Heston. Jim was the kind of actor who did a lot of homework behind the camera, a Method actor. He took it very seriously, he was very dedicated.

it was more relaxed. I remember running down this hill and getting up so much speed that one of these fabulous makeup men—big guy, burly chest—had to step in and stop me. Otherwise, I would have tumbled, God knows where! It was a very arduous picture, physically, with those horses and everything, but we just got in there and did our jobs! After *Beneath*, I was cast as one of the starlets in a new TV series called *Bracken's World*, which was a series Dick for a long time had wanted to do, about a Hollywood studio. So, I got that part and I had to finish *Beneath* and go right into the pilot—I didn't even get a day's rest. And I had to start remembering lines [laughs]!

STARLOG: Now, apart from *Bracken's World*, did you do much acting while you were married to Zanuck?

HARRISON: No. I gave birth to two sons, Harrison Richard Zanuck on February 23, 1971, and Dean Francis Zanuck August 11, 1972. I think I did a couple of

The "ape actors," like Kim Hunter (left), were "fabulous troupers," Harrison says.





Franciscus and Harrison are corralled by their Ape City captors.

comes out of bad; I had always said to Dick, "You go on your own." He was, what, 34, 35. He needed to show that *he* was also his own man, apart from his father. So, Dick and David went to Warner Bros., and then from there formed Zanuck-Brown. That's *history*, what happened when they formed their own company! I *always* told him, "Something good is gonna come out of this. You and David are the best team in Hollywood!"

It's very interesting to "get in the heads" of these two men. Here are two men who ran a major corporation, Dick and David, and

then they formed little Zanuck-Brown. They wanted to start humbly [*laughs*], and they got a screenplay called SSSSSSS by a make-up man [Dan Striepeke] they thought a lot of. You know, much of this business has to do with developing *friendships*; [a big factor] is the personality of the person you're working with, what they're like as a human being. Many times you'll take a script because you like the guy and it looks good and it fits well into *your* agenda at that particular time, so you'll give him a chance. That's actually how SSSSSSS came along. It

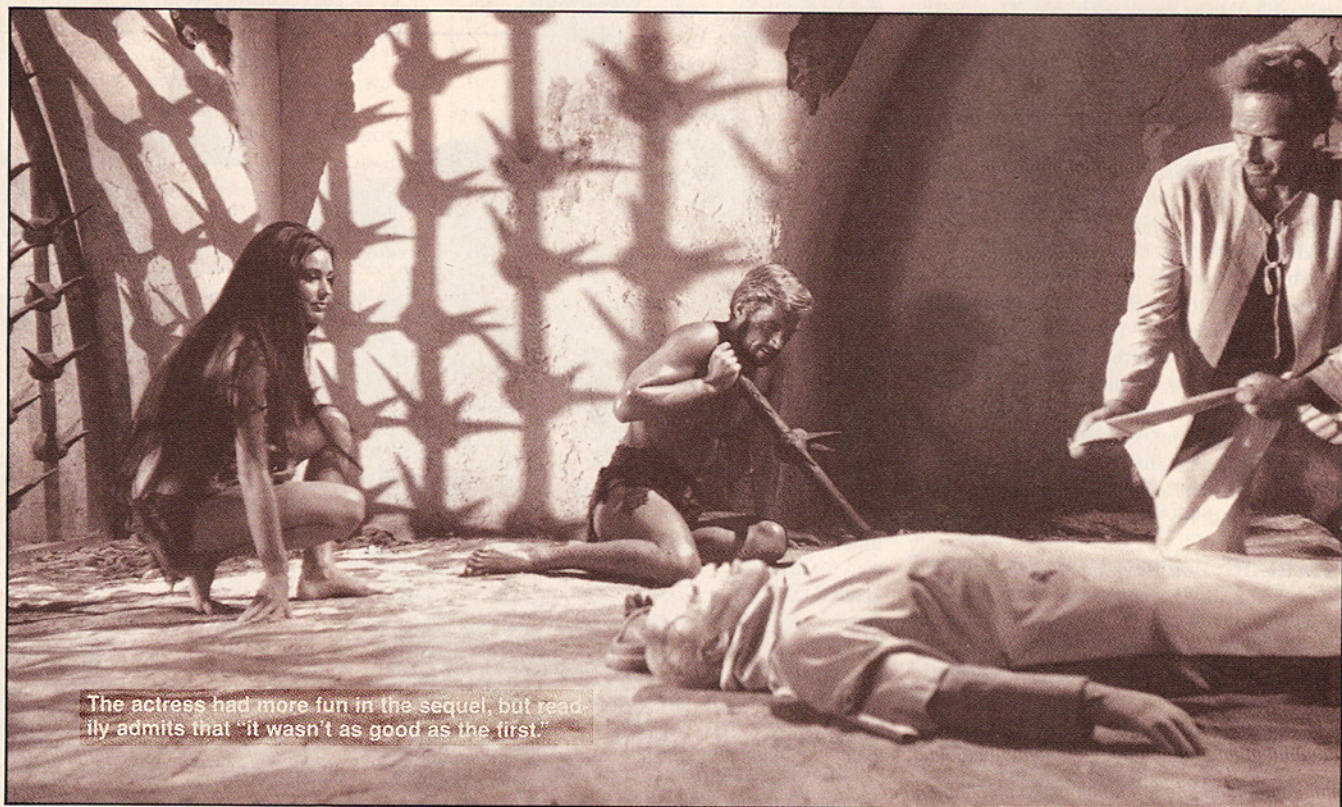
was something they could shoot for under \$1 million, *very* inexpensive, so they did it. But then they got ahold of *The Sting* [1973], and you know the rest. I was with a famous team of producers, Dick and David, and they had such an extraordinary life, so colorful and so dramatic. Most people [in her home town] think of me as, "She led this glamorous life, they were out there doin' drugs." It wasn't that at *all*, I had a very stable husband. He had a *job*, he had to go to *work* every day. He was a fundamental family man. But we had so many great experiences. They should do a book just on *him*.

STARLOG: Why are you billed as "Augusta Summerland" in *Airport 1975*?

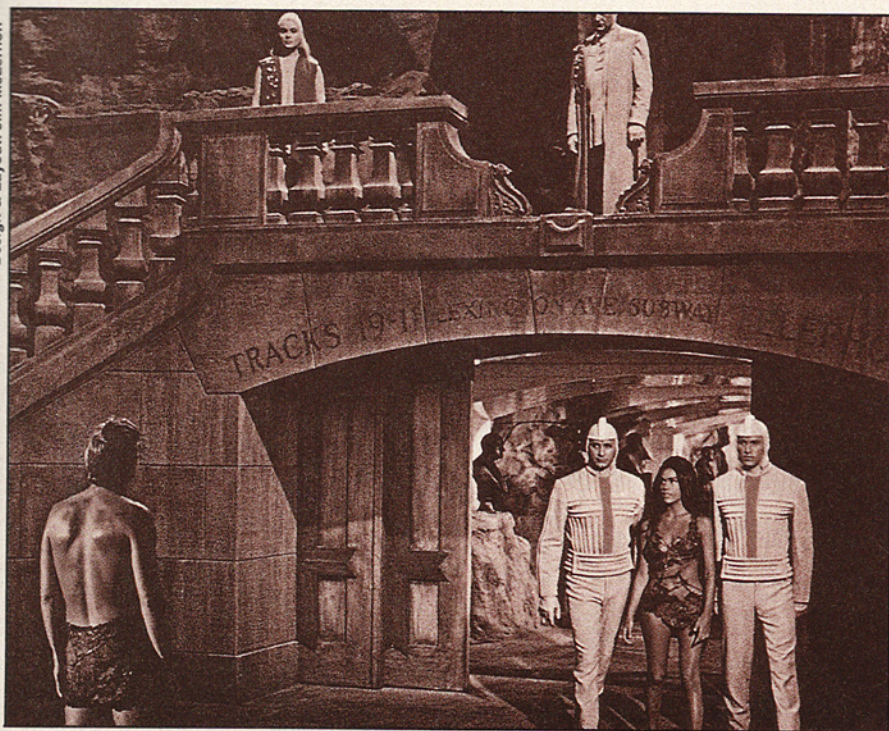
HARRISON: [*Laughs*] Well-I-I, you know life can make its turns! I was married to Dick, and for one reason or the other, I got involved with a guru—which was the "in" thing at the time. The guru claimed in his cult that you *change* from who you were born, and so as you make that change, you need a new name [Augusta Summerland]. Unfortunately, this guru wanted to make movies from *his* screenplays. And for whatever reason, he put a terrible wedge through my relationship with Dick. It ended that I left Dick. I was analyzed during that time; I think so much, at 20 years old, was thrown at me. I came from a small town of 2,000 and much of what was given to me there, the *values*, have put me in good stead. But I think that I got "lost" somewhere, my "identity." Or women's lib made us think that we were supposed to be unfulfilled. Or *whatever* got into my "being" at the time—it was rough. I left Dick, and it was very hard.

STARLOG: How did you become involved on *Cocoon*?

HARRISON: I was going to an acting class, studying, and we did a showcase and I



The actress had more fun in the sequel, but readily admits that "it wasn't as good as the first."



Spitting distance from the Statue of Liberty, the New York City subway system survived *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*.

invited Dick and Lili, his present wife. About this time, *Cocoon* was in development stages. Dick said, "I think there's a part for you. In about six months, Ron Howard will be auditioning." So, I just got myself psyched up for it, went in, read and got it. Ron was a fabulous guy to work with, because he *really* works from your naturalness, *who you are*. He gives you a lot of range, a lot of space, to bring out that naturalness, *not* the usual schtick of an actor. And I loved doing that. And there was another picture where you sensed, intuitively, that it was *special*. The elements were right, the people

HARRISON: Yes. And, you know, they're doing a remake. Oliver Stone!

STARLOG: Would you be tempted by the offer of a part in *that*?

HARRISON: Sure!

STARLOG: What else do you want your fans to know about Linda Harrison?

HARRISON: For me, for Linda Harrison, I feel extraordinarily lucky. I started here in Ocean City, working at Phillips Crab House, and I dated their son Stephen Phillips, and he was the last man I dated before I went to California and met Dick. I came back here four years ago, now I'm back with *him*. So, I feel very privileged, it's neat being with somebody you've known a long time and were with when you were very young. I experienced 25 years in California where I married a wonderful man, had two wonderful children, and met so many wonderful people—a *full life* there. And now I have *another full life*! So, it's almost two lives, two lifetimes already in *this one*.

I still look great and I *feel* good, but I really think the acting phase of my life is over. I don't like to say that, because then you're closing that door, but there's another door opening which is probably going to bring me *more* happiness. And so, to me, that's very, very exciting. I *like* the name recognition that I got from my work, and I have two sons that will be in the work, and I *love* filmmaking—I think what they can do and who it reaches makes it a very exciting medium. I like to get a part, but I'm *not* the kind that'll give up everything, move and go to classes. It's going to have to be handed to me—which basically it was before. There *might* be a part in my future—and there *might not*. But right now I'm probably the happiest I've ever been, and that's important to me.



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were right, and each day it was just a "high" to work on the film.

STARLOG: You have a much smaller part in *Cocoon: The Return*.

HARRISON: They had to cut *everybody's* part down—*lots* got cut. We overshot. They didn't cut us because we weren't acting right or anything; [it was a case of] the movie not being the way they wanted it, so they started cutting to try to salvage it, to pull it together. Sometimes in the editing, they can pull off miracles.

STARLOG: You'll always be remembered as Nova. Is that OK?