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Primates ruled the Earth in the TV series, which starred Dr. Zaius (Booth Colman), Galen (Roddy McDowall) and General Urko (Mark Lenard).

SECRETS OF PLANET OF THE APES

Revealed at last!
The movie primates
went prime-time,
monkeying around in a
short-lived TV series.

By MARK PHILLIPS

Star Trek was a favorite of Larry Alexander and his family. But on a Friday evening in 1968, the TV writer and his wife went to a NY theater to see *Planet of the Apes*, and they were mesmerized. "It was a fabulous film," he says. "We then raced home to see that night's *Star Trek* on TV. We watched about 10 minutes, and had to shut it off. We literally couldn't watch it. Its production values looked so primitive compared to what we had just seen. *Apes* had established higher standards for science fiction."

Yet selling *Planet of the Apes* had been nothing but trouble for independent producer Arthur P. Jacobs. Major studios turned down the project as too much of a financial risk. Richard Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox, finally purchased *Apes* only after a screen test with Charlton Heston (as astronaut George Taylor) and Edward G. Robinson (Dr. Zaius, orangutan) proved the monkey makeup would work.

Rod Serling's original screenplay (based on Pierre Boulle's novel) had astronauts land near a modern-day ape city where gorillas drove cars and flew planes. Michael Wilson did a rewrite, placing the apes in a stone-age setting and injecting more humor.

Monkey Movies

Planet of the Apes was still a huge gamble. "The audience must accept these ape characters as intelligent beings," a Fox press release stressed. "This is no masquerade party. It is very much for real." The casting of respected veterans such as Roddy McDowall, Kim Hunter and Maurice Evans (who replaced Robinson) as apes helped to elevate the pro-

ject's status. John Chambers' revolutionary makeup (which would win a special Oscar) was kept top-secret. Actors weren't allowed to leave the soundstages wearing their appliances. Directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, *Planet of the Apes* made \$25 million during its 1968 release, a robust box-office take for its time.

Burt Reynolds turned down the role of astronaut Brent in the 1970 sequel. Instead, James Franciscus plays the character in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, in which he discovers a subterranean world of mutant humans who worship a doomsday bomb (STARLOG #104). Heston, who briefly returns as Taylor, detonates the bomb and destroys Earth.

But this didn't stop writer Paul Dehn from

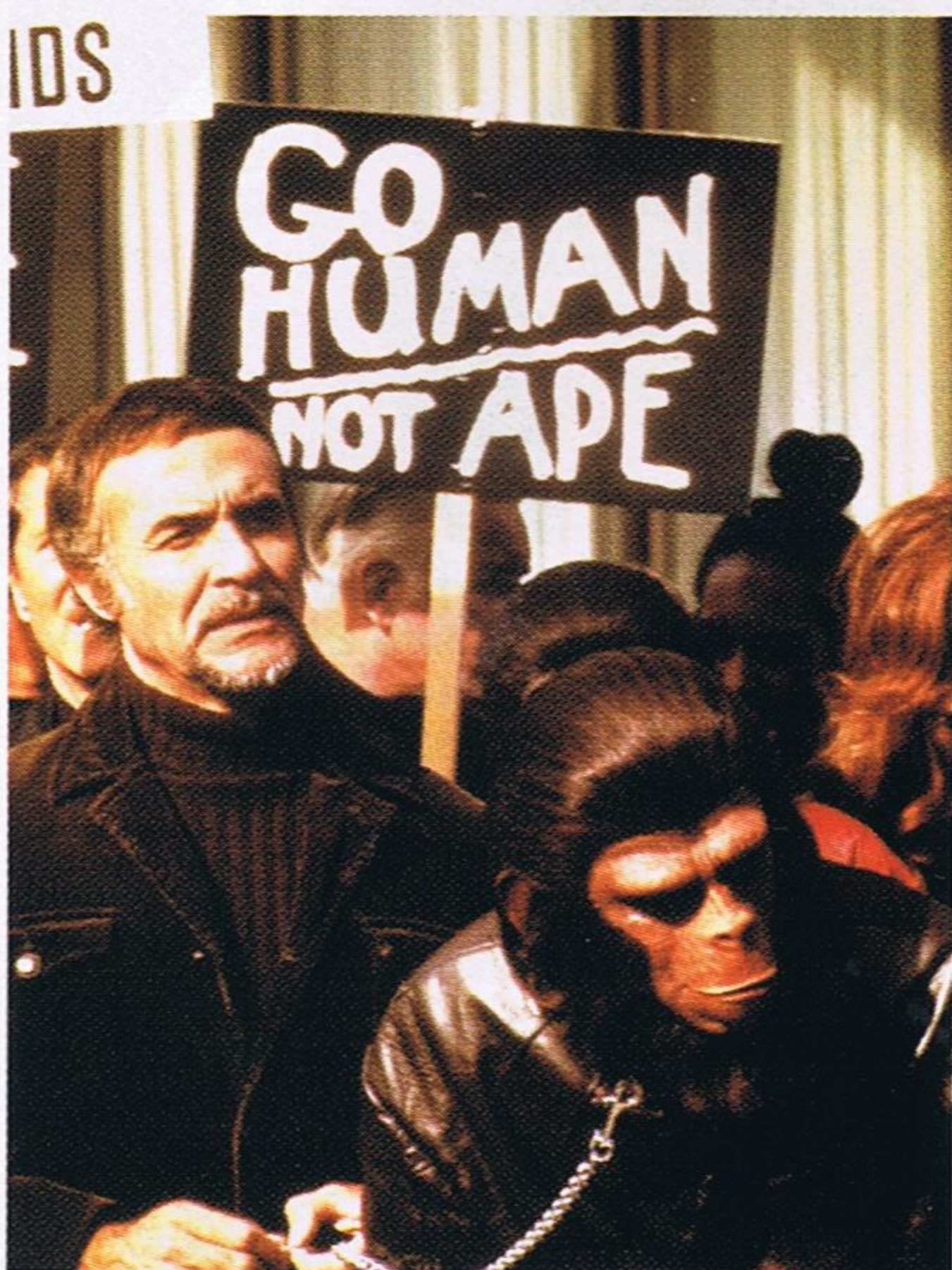
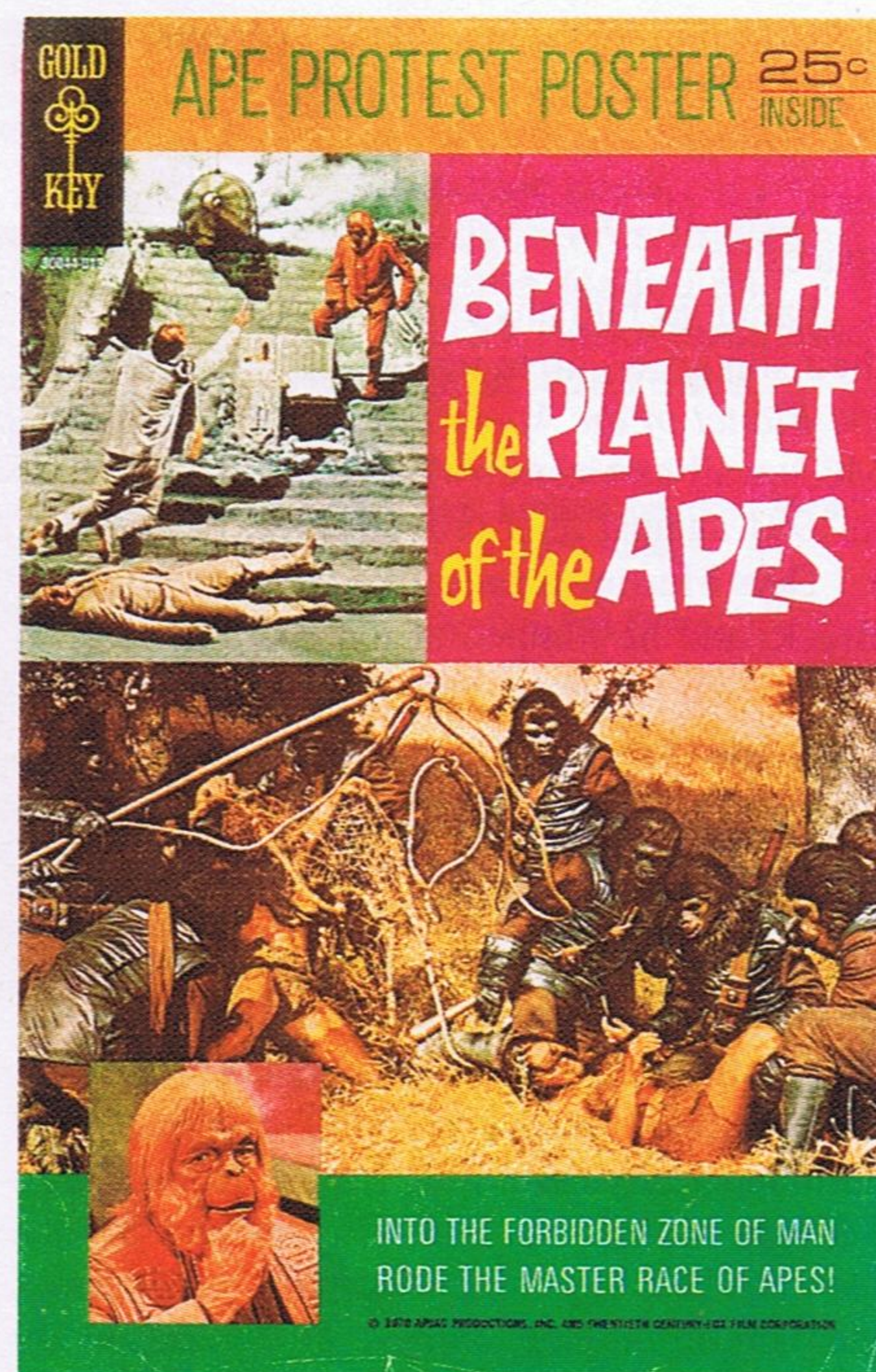


This ill-fated human crew (Jeff Burton, Charlton Heston, Dianne Stanley, Robert Gunner) crash-landed on a *Planet of the Apes* in the original 1968 movie.

Planet Photo: Copyright 1968 Apjac Productions, Inc. & 20th Century Fox Film Corp.

Gold Key adapted *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, the second film in the simian saga. In its bleak ending, Earth blew up.

Humanity's cruelty—as championed by dictatorial Governor Breck (Don Murray)—ignited revolution and the *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*.



Cornelius and Zira made an *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* to 1970s Earth, befriend the human Armando (Ricardo Montalban), who survived to protect their son Caesar in the next movie.



Battle for the Planet of the Apes brought Caesar (McDowall) conflicts with his son Cornelius (Bobby Porter) and divisions within his own primate legions.



Porter's *Battle* death scene became a surrealistic experience at the crew screening. His little sister began weeping at Cornelius' passing even though Porter was alive and well—and sitting right next to her.

devising 1971's *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, where heroic chimpanzees Cornelius (McDowall) and Zira (Hunter) time-travel back to present-day Earth using Taylor's spaceship.

Paranoid humans end up killing them, but their son grows up to instigate the *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*. This 1972 sequel stars McDowall as Caesar, who leads an ape revolt in 1991 against their cruel human masters.

Don Murray played the callous Governor Breck, and he jumped at the chance to break away from his good-guy typecasting. "It was great fun to play someone as nasty as Breck," he says. Murray rehearsed the role in German, which he was fluent in, to emphasize the character's Hitleresque aspects.

"One of the best things about the film was its concept, showing us how Earth became the Planet of the Apes," Murray observes. "It was imaginatively conceived, with excellent performances by my old friend Roddy and Ricardo Montalban, Hari Rhodes and Severn Darden. The only thing holding it back was its lack of production values. That reduced its scope."

The film concludes with Caesar's apes capturing Breck as buildings burn around them. "The original ending had the gorillas killing Breck with the butts of their rifles," reveals Murray. "It was quite bloody. But they changed that, and allowed him to live."

Part of that was because parents had reacted angrily to *Conquest's* violence in previews. "It was also because they wanted me back as Breck in the next film, *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*," Murray recalls. "But they didn't ask me if I wanted to return until *Battle* was about to start production. I declined, because I had already played the part and saw no pleasure in repeating it."

Battle for the Planet of the Apes (1973) was the last film in the series, and takes place shortly after the ape takeover. Caesar presides over a small village where apes keep humans as servants and teachers. General Aldo (Claude Akins) wants all humans dead, and resents Caesar's benevolent rule. Violence erupts when human mutants from a nearby

city attack the village.

Quark's Bobby Porter gives a sensitive performance as Cornelius, Caesar's doomed son. "I was still in college, and fondly remember skipping class to go monkey around," says Porter. "*Battle* was the first film I did as an actor rather than a stuntman. The *Apes* films had gotten down to very slim budgets by this time. I was hired after the stunt coordinator, Paul Stader, introduced me to the director, J. Lee Thompson, one of Hollywood's true gentlemen."

Porter received pointers from McDowall. "Roddy was a legend," Porter says. "I couldn't have had a better mentor. The 4 a.m. makeup calls and miserably long days were quickly forgotten when he stepped on the set and began his magic. I asked my makeup artist to find out how Roddy—who had his makeup applied in a separate room, because he loved to listen to opera—was able to be so expressive. And I was allowed to have my makeup altered to mimic Roddy's, but only after I swore not to reveal the secret and convinced Roddy that Cornelius should have the same range of expressions as his father, the great Caesar. *Battle* was an amazing summer job that changed my life."

Prime-Time Primates

After the films had run their course, Serling created a TV series outline in spring 1973. Astronauts Alan Virdon and medical officer Stan Kovack are navigating the belt of Orion when turbulence engulfs their ship. They crash-land on Earth in 3085 A.D. and, after befriending a chimp named Galen, flee from gorillas. They're also on a quest to find Colonel Taylor and a rumored sanctuary for civilized humans. Serling postulated a very alien world, ranging from primitive to futuristic cultures.

Anthony Wilson and Art Wallace streamlined Serling's premise to make it less costly as astronauts Alan Virdon (Ron Harper), Pete Burke (James Naughton) and ape Galen (Roddy McDowall) become enmeshed in weekly dilemmas as they encounter human settlements ruled by apes. "We aren't planning



For the small screen, James Naughton and Ron Harper essayed Pete Burke and Alan Virdon, who are marooned on TV's *Planet of the Apes*.



Dr. Zaius has been portrayed by Maurice Evans (two films), Richard Blackburn (the 1975 cartoon), Heston (cameo in the 2001 remake) and Colman (pictured, TV series).

this as a comedy," executive producer Herbert Hirschman asserted before production. "This will be a *serious* drama."

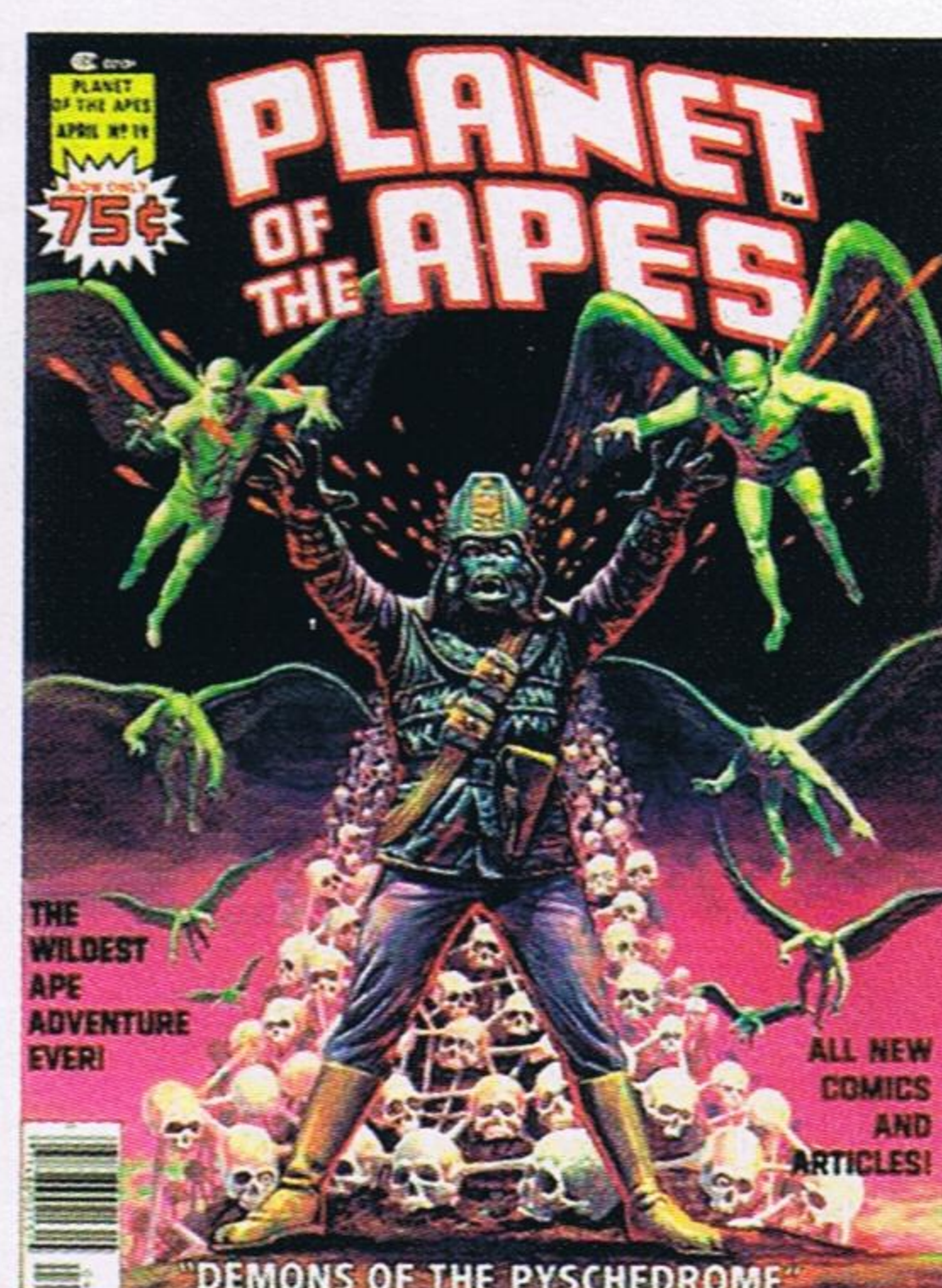
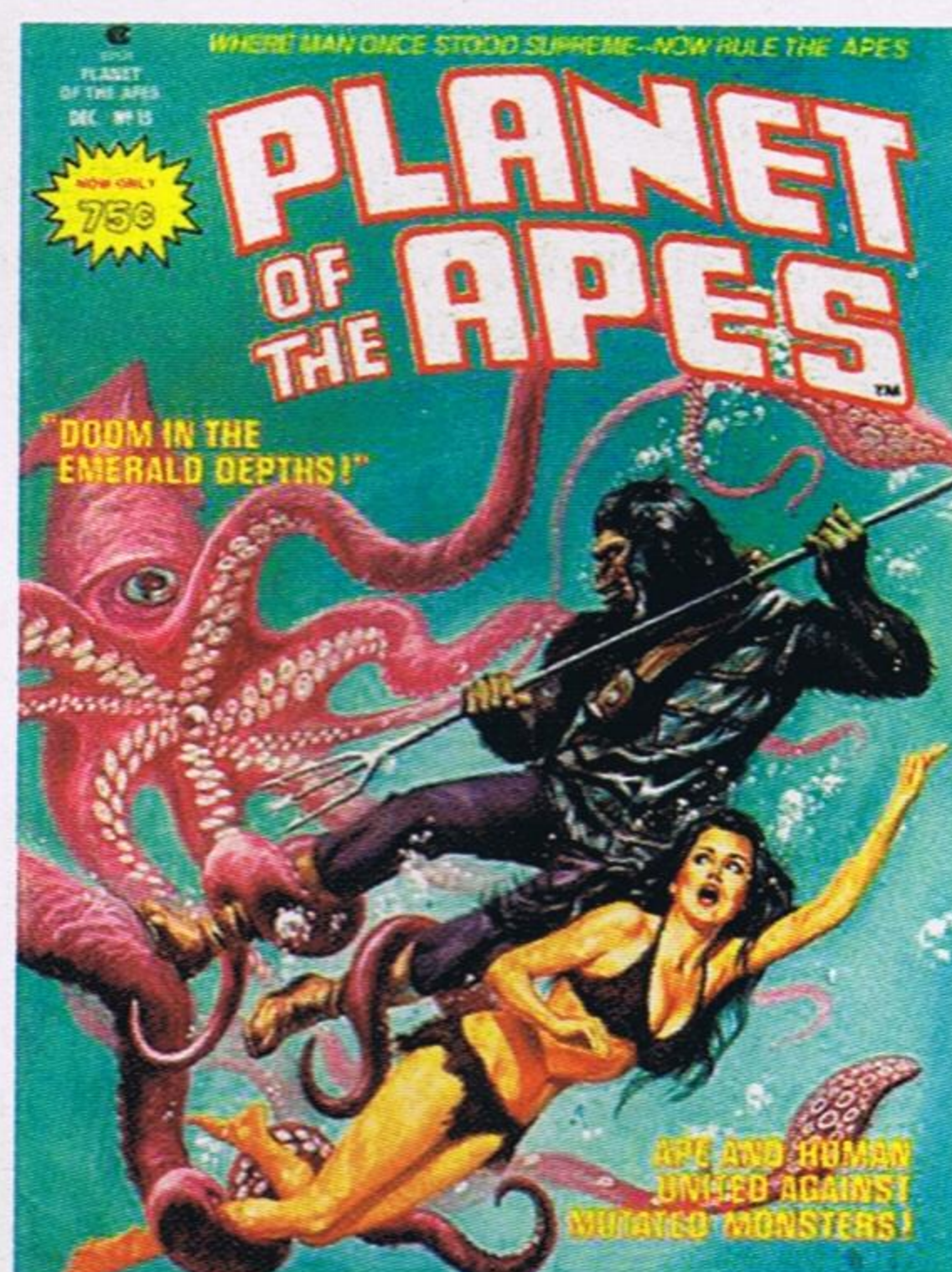
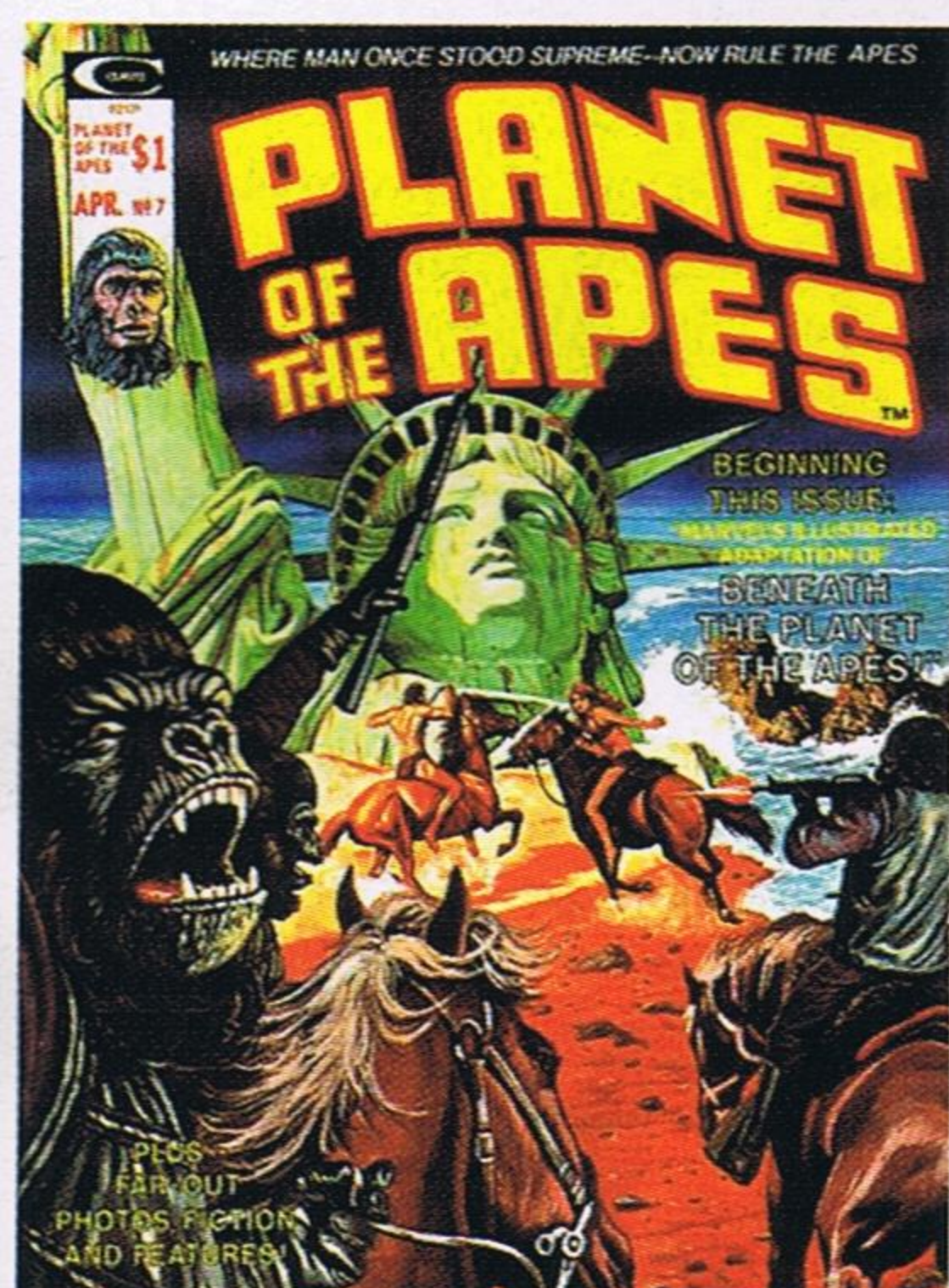
When it premiered on September 13, 1974, everyone from CBS to *TV Guide* predicted the



McDowall played the first Cornelius and Caesar in the *Apes* films. He essayed another heroic chimp, Galen, for TV.

Although 14 episodes were produced, only 13 aired. That lost show (and all the others, plus the movies) are included in the DVD box set.





Exploring beyond both movies and TV, Marvel unleashed comic book adventures in black & white. Malibu and Dark Horse published later *Apes* titles.

Comics Cover Art: Bob Larkin/Copyright 1974, 1975, 1976 Apjac Productions, Inc. & 20th Century Fox Film Corp.

Friday night show would be a hit. "It looked to be a winner," says Booth Colman, who played Dr. Zaius. "It was auspiciously pre-sold without a pilot, and everyone was agreeable and enthusiastic when we began the series. What really interested me was the possibility that *Apes* could have a long run. That's very important to a freelance actor."

Aiding Dr. Zaius, gorilla General Urko (similar to *Beneath's* warmongering Ursus) relentlessly pursued the human heroes. He was played by STARLOG favorite Mark Lenard (Spock's father).

Porter guested in the first episode, "Escape from Tomorrow," as Arno, a young chimp who sees the astronauts' spaceship crash-land. "We shot those scenes in the blazing heat of summer, in ape makeup and wardrobe, and in front of brutally hot nine lights," he recalls. "It was a nightmare. We had some guest actors who had never experienced appliance makeup before, and they suffered *dearly*."

He also appeared in "The Good Seeds" as Remus, the son of an ape farming family that reluctantly gives the fugitives refuge. "I was still paying my way through college, and that check paid for my next semester's books," he says. "I had no idea this acting gig would end up turning into a 37-year career. 'Good Seeds' was well-written, and it may have contributed to my desire to write. I later co-authored an episode of *Land of the Lost* [the Ron Harper-starring Saturday morning dinosaur series] of which I'm quite proud."

Eileen Dietz played Porter's chimp sister, Jillia, in the same episode. The NY-born Dietz recalls, "I had just finished shooting *The Exorcist* in New York, where I played the demon who possesses the child. They applied makeup to make me resemble both the child [Linda Blair] and the devil, so I was used to spending hours in the makeup chair."

She moved to California and was soon cast in *Apes*. "They had this big room, with rows of people getting ape makeup put on. You had to eat with a mirror in front of your face, because you couldn't tell where the snout was. It was weird, drinking everything through a straw. The only uncomfortable thing about the costume was that the feet had sneakers in them, so your feet would sweat. But it was a fun show to do, and everyone, particularly Roddy, was

very nice to me. It was a good episode that examined themes of racism, fears and prejudice. It's poignant how Jillia wants Galen to remain behind with her."

Jacqueline Scott played Zantes, the ape mother of Porter and Dietz's characters, in "The Good Seeds." Well-known to genre buffs for her appearances on *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*, Scott was identified with her many roles in Westerns such as *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*. "I had done other shows for casting director Marvin Paige, and when he told me about *Planet of the Apes*, I thought it would be a nice change from Westerns," she says. "But when I read the script, it said, 'The humans come over a hill, and they see a farmhouse.' Well, I screamed! 'Oh, my gosh! I'm going to play an ape farmwife!'"

Nevertheless, she loved the episode, and eagerly endured the makeup. "They had about seven makeup men, and they were the best," she lauds. "They had to blend the makeup and appliances into your skin, and lay hair on your face and hands. The most difficult thing was that the makeup guys were hysterically funny, but once they started putting your mask on, you couldn't laugh or else you would ruin it."

Scott returned in "The Surgeon" as ape physician Dr. Kira, who operates on an injured Virton. "That was a wonderful show; I played Roddy's fiancée," she says. "She would have been a recurring character had the series continued." Naughton's younger brother, David (later *An American Werewolf in London*), had a small role as an ape intern.

Ape Agonies

The mainstay conversation about *Apes*, then and now, is the makeup, supervised on the series by Dan Striepeke. "We got into the makeup chair at 5 a.m. to be on the set by 8," recalls Colman. "Nonessential conversation was discouraged because talking loosened the masks. The makeup people would constantly fix, dab and adjust the makeup throughout the day, and that took some getting used to! Lunch wasn't the best of times either, eating with a straw. Yet it was a happy set most of the time."

A.D. Bill Derwin remembers makeup nightmares. "If you played an ape and had green or blue eyes, you had to wear uncomfortable brown contact lenses," he says. "On

location, the heat was over 100 degrees. We had a couple of people who literally ripped off their ape heads and went home; they couldn't handle it. Tom McDonough would replace them. He could handle anything in that make-up—horse riding, stunts, supporting roles. Amazingly, most of the guest stars and stuntmen *did* function under such adverse conditions."

George Robotham didn't. "*Apes* drove me crazy," said the veteran stuntman (who died in 2007). "I finally tore off my gorilla mask and handed it to Paul Stader. I said, 'Paul, the last two hours of my life have been an absolute, unmitigated living hell. I'm out of here. Good luck.' I nearly suffocated playing a sea monster on *Outer Limits*, and I almost drowned on *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, but they were cakewalks compared to dressing up as an ape. It was hot, scratchy, miserable and claustrophobic. It's the *one* show in my career that I've tried to forget."

Scott is sympathetic to Robotham's plight. "He wasn't the only one. Other people ripped off their masks, too; it psyched them out. Your first instinct was to stretch your face and mouth, and pull the mask loose from your face. But that was the worst thing you could do, because then the mask would just flop around on your face all day. It was definitely a challenge, but as an actress, I loved that. You had to find different ways of moving and expressing yourself. Marvin told me that the two actresses who dealt with the makeup best were Beverly Garland and me. When some of the crew said how pretty I looked, I knew they had been on the show too long!"

More than 60 actors auditioned for the regular roles of the two astronauts. Franciscus was offered Virton, which he turned down. Marc Singer screen-tested for Virton, and Barry Jenner auditioned as Burke. Impressed by Singer's acting, the producers cast the young actor in the second episode, "The Gladiators." Singer played Dalton, a sensitive young man forced by his demanding father (William Smith) to fight other humans in gladiator games. But Dalton eschews violence, and decides to promote peace instead.

"It was the early stage of a steep learning curve for me, the technique of film acting," says Singer, who would later star in *V* and the



Apes on horseback? Not for long. On one occasion, a stepped-on wasps' nest sent the gorilla equestrians running for the hills.

Beastmaster films. "I had come from the stage, and the transition was like moving to a foreign country."

The segment required Singer and Smith to engage in hand-to-hand combat. "In my inexperience, I punched Bill in the stomach," Singer states. "That was the one and only time I've ever hurt an actor or stuntman in my entire career, and I lived to tell of it. Bill had a reputation as a notorious real-life tough guy, but we became fast friends."

John Hoyt essayed Barlow, the ape who presides over the games. An elderly character actor known for his roles in *When Worlds Collide* and *Attack of the Puppet People*, Hoyt was a nudist. That memory makes Singer chuckle. "John was in his ape head and hands, and little else, having shed his suffocating robes, standing under a golf umbrella for his off-camera lines. It's hard to forget a sight like that. But he was always a favorite of mine when I was a kid hooked on TV and the movies. Working with him was like stepping backward into my childhood and forward into a new world, all at the same time."

Recalling the merciless locations, Wallace offers, "Some of the actors in gorilla costumes dropped unconscious from the terrible heat [in Malibu Canyon]. I remember in one scene, gorillas on horseback were threatening humans with rifles, and one of the horses stepped into a wasp nest. The wasps came buzzing out of the hole, and it was the first time I've ever seen frightened gorillas bolt from their horses. They were hollering, trying to get away from stinging wasps!"

On another occasion, Wallace saw one ape stuntman frantically dancing around in circles, desperately pawing at his mask. "I asked

another ape extra what was wrong with him. He replied matter-of-factly, 'A fly probably flew into his mask, and he's trying to get it.' It was strangely funny, but at the same time very sad and peculiar. I had the greatest respect for those stuntmen and extras. They went through hell."

Simian Stories

There were several unfilmed scripts. In one Serling teleplay, Galen is put on trial by a group of hostile humans living in the NY subway. Virдон must act as his defense lawyer in order to prove that Galen is an intelligent and peaceful being. In "A Fallen God" by Anthony Lawrence, an ape family worships an old radio transmitter, which is surrounded by candles. Virдон uses the radio to contact an advanced human civilization in a far-off city, but the radio is destroyed by fearful humans. And in Stephen Kandel's "The Hostage," the fugitives discover an illegal organization made up of apes and humans who want to

bring the two cultures together. But some of the humans are terrorists who scheme to use an old-style laser weapon to destroy the apes rather than negotiate for peace.

Despite great expectations, the series' ratings were a disaster. The first episode debuted in a disappointing 43rd place, and subsequent episodes dropped like a rock. *Apes* finished the 1974-75 season ranked 67th out of 84 shows. It was the most expensive (and lowest-rated) CBS series of the year, except for *Khan*, a

crime drama that finished 80th and, ironically, replaced *Apes*.

"The feeling on our set went from great hope and excitement to bewilderment, shock and disappointment," Harper recalls of *Apes*' change of fortune. "I was sure we would be around for at least a couple of years."

"It was a real shame," laments Colman. "My makeup guru, Frank Westmore, told me that we were going to be cancelled. Had the stories been better written and the characters developed, we could have had a three-year run. But the stories didn't have the imagination or quality necessary to sustain viewers. One could only cope with the dialogue, develop a personality for the character, hit your mark and hope it looked believable."

Although he scripted the first two episodes, Wallace says, "I thought it was a terrible idea to turn *Apes* into a weekly series. But Herbert Hirschman [who executive-produced *The Twilight Zone*] convinced me that we could make provocative statements on our world and, when I wrote my episodes, I *truly* believed in the show. The early time slot forced *Apes* to become more of a children's program, and the terror and mystery of the apes was ruined because they turned the gorillas into buffoons. Every week, the astronauts knocked them out with ridiculous judo chops and backflips."

It was impossible for the TV show to compare with the motion pictures. "Contrary to the features, the series—as with all of television—had to be shot fast and furiously," Porter observes. "We had little time or money to be cinematically creative, and the audience may have been disappointed in that."

The cost factor also contributed to *Apes*' demise. "They didn't do more shows because the makeup was so expensive," says Scott. "The nice thing is that the episodes aren't dated. They'll go on forever, and children will love them."

Apes was, in fact, a huge hit when broadcast in the UK a year later. In 1980, 10 episodes were compiled into ersatz TV movies. In some California markets, new introductory footage of McDowall as an elderly Galen was added, the ancient ape revealing that Virдон and Burke did one day "find a spaceship" and return home.

And the TV series and five theatrical films continue to prosper on DVD (with the movies being released this month on Blu-ray). "Everybody loves the TV series now," says Dietz. "When I'm a guest at conventions, people can't wait to talk about it. I'll say, 'Look, I was only on the show, not the movies,' and they'll go, 'It's the TV series we want to know about. We love it!'"

"The simple fact that we're having this discussion 34 years later is a great testimony to the impact of the individuals who participated in a rather remarkable piece of Hollywood history," declares Bobby Porter. "I'm proud to have been a small piece of something that is unique and timeless. I was at the right place at the right time, and I'll be forever grateful to those who took a chance on a college kid who 'worked cheap'!"



With McDowall's blessing, Porter learned the secrets of more animated ape makeup on *Battle*. He suited up to guest on the TV show, too.