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PLANET OF THE APES

THOSE DAMN DIRTY APES HAVE SPENT 50 YEARS MONKEYING AROUND IN MOVIES, COMICS, NOVELS, GAMES AND EVEN A THEME PARK. JOIN US AS WE TRACE THE APE EVOLUTION...

WORDS PAUL BRADSHAW

"I CAN'T HELP THINKING THAT, SOMEWHERE IN THE UNIVERSE, THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING BETTER THAN MAN."

Captured, beaten and forced into a labour camp by the Japanese army in 1943, French writer Pierre Boulle relived his harrowing experiences for the rest of his life, first exorcising them in his gruelling war novel *The Bridge Over The River Kwai* (1952) before turning to science-fiction in 1963 with *Planet Of The Apes*.

A dark allegory about inhumanity, in which a trio of humans explore a planet orbiting the star Betelgeuse, which is populated by intelligent apes, the book launched one of the biggest franchises ever made. Spanning five decades, nine movies, two TV series, hundreds of comics and a head-scratcher of a timeline, *Planet Of The Apes* became the rebel child of mainstream sci-fi, each new chapter defining and reflecting controversial developments in US social politics.

While the franchise's main gambit – reminding us of our inability to stop treating each other like animals – has undeniable subtextual power, it has also quietly evolved through two critical turning points in Hollywood sci-fi history, setting benchmarks for special effects and storytelling both before *Star Wars* and after *Avatar*.

Boulle's book laid the groundwork, but it shares surprisingly little with any of the films, and a direct adaptation has never been attempted. Framing his story with a side-strand in which a pair of honeymooners discover a message in a bottle, Boulle's action is set entirely on a remote monkey planet



➡ that definitely isn't Earth, and features no spoken dialogue.

Back in the early '60s, science-fiction was the terrain of the B-movie, but the success of *Fantastic Voyage* in 1966 began to change that, and prompted 20th Century Fox to hunt out other "respectable" fantasy titles to adapt – bringing them to Boulle and *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling.

"As talented and creative a man as Boulle is," Serling observed at the time, "he doesn't have the deftness of a science-fiction writer. Boulle's book was a prolonged allegory about morality... But it contained within its structure a walloping science-fiction idea." So out went Boulle and in came Serling, bringing with him a "walloping" re-written script for the film that climaxed with what's now

recognised as one of the greatest twist endings of all time.

Charlton Heston was cast in the lead, Roddy McDowall donned John Chambers' monkey suit, Franklin J. Schaffner took the director's chair and cinema history was made long before Heston fell to his knees and realised, yes, he was on planet Earth after all. Nominated for three Oscars and winning one (for Chambers' stellar effects work), the 1968 film became a bona fide phenomenon.

Luckily, it left plenty of room for sequels – and the film quickly ballooned into a time-travelling, genre-stretching behemoth that gave audiences a new chapter almost every year until 1973. *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes* (1970) introduced a new astronaut (James Franciscus' Brent) and a nuclear threat that tied the series into contemporary headlines for the first time. *Escape From The Planet Of The Apes* (1971) took us back through time to the present day, taking aim at media culture and celebrities.

Conquest Of The Planet Of The Apes (1972), meanwhile, gave us civil rights marches, race riots and Caesar – the child of the revolution who would go on to shape the franchise. The future-set *Battle For The Planet Of The Apes* (1973) wrapped things up, sort of, by closing the loop on the original film, but the growing appetite for all things ape meant the universe was more than ready to expand beyond the cinema.

IT'S A MADHOUSE!

Charlton Heston and Linda Harrison in the original 1968 film.

EVOLUTION OF THE SPECIES

The three eras of *POTA*'s groundbreaking effects...



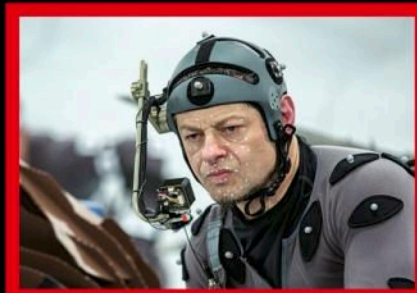
Prosthetic make-up 1968-1973

Make-up designer John Chambers, an ex-army medic who specialised in creating prosthetics for wounded soldiers, oversaw all five of the original *Planet Of The Apes* movies, masterminding the rubber appliances that would form the apes' expressive faces. The pioneering make-up led to odd on-set dining behaviour (lunch was liquefied and drunk through straws) and pranks aplenty.



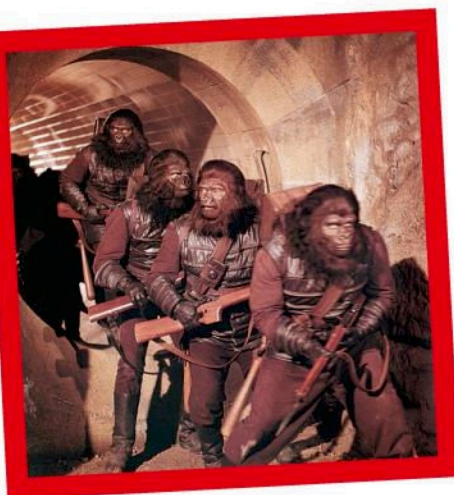
Modern make-up 2001

For his post-millennium reboot, Tim Burton stuck with prosthetics (despite 20th Century Fox pushing for CGI), handing the job of crafting his monkey cast to life-long *POTA* fan and effects supremo Rick Baker. Each ape spent almost five hours in the make-up chair, with Burton commenting: "It's like going to the dentist at two in the morning and having people poke at you for hours. Then you wear an ape costume until nine at night."



Motion capture 2011-present

By *Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes*, CGI had come on enough that director Rupert Wyatt felt confident handing ape duties to Weta Digital. With a fancy new camera that could pick out mo-cap dots in daylight, the Kiwi company broke new ground in mo-cap (with Andy Serkis performing), while the animation hit heady highs with details such as pores, tears and pupil dilation – things that would be refined to near perfection in 2014's *Dawn* and this year's *War For The Planet Of The Apes*. **JW**



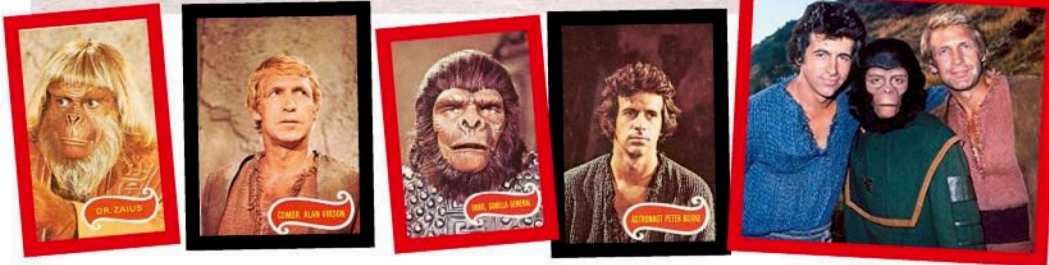
GOING APE

Get ready for some monkey business at Fox World...

In 2015, it was announced that 20th Century Fox would be ransacking its library of titles to open an \$850m theme park in Dubai. Along with themed hotels, restaurants and rides, it would feature lands based on some of its hottest franchises: *Rio*, *Ice Age*, *Titanic*, *Night At The Museum*, *Predator* and, yes, *Planet Of The Apes*.

"This will build a tremendous amount of fan engagement with these brands," said Jeffrey Godsick, then-president of Fox Consumer Products. "There are strong merchandising opportunities and it will allow us to connect with our audiences on an ongoing basis."

Plans for the Dubai park were jettisoned, but a similar project will open at Resorts World Genting in Malaysia, in 2018. It will be called Fox World and will offer a "fully immersive entertainment experience" across 35 acres of land, with more than 25 rides and attractions aimed at both adults and kids. Expect the thrills to be hairy. **JG**



'BOULLE'S BOOK CONTAINED A WALLOPING SCIENCE-FICTION IDEA' ROD SERLING

Not that it hadn't already. Ever since the first film opened, the ape faces of Taylor, Ursus and Zaius had been *everywhere*. Preceding *Star Wars*' blanket merchandise campaign by almost a decade, Fox pushed *POTA* into every toy shop and supermarket throughout the late '60s – with play-sets, action figures, monkey masks, lunchboxes, piggy banks, kites, puzzles, plush dolls and costume kits fuelling a worldwide 'ape mania'. King of the collectables (and still worth a fortune on eBay) were the Topps trading card sets, which repackaged key scenes from the movies with a stick of 5c bubblegum.

With more than 300 individual *Apes* items on sale by the end of 1973, *POTA* was bigger than ever when the movie series wrapped up – helped in part by the syndication of TV reruns. Not wanting to lose momentum, Fox commissioned Serling

TRADING PLACES

(top) Chimps revolt in *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes*; (above) small screen stars Ron Harper and James Naughton on classic Topps cards.

to pitch an idea for *Planet Of The Apes: The Series* and, taking bits of his draft script and ignoring a lot more, the TV show launched in 1974 as a separate, stand-alone chapter set in the middle of the Apeverse.

Ron Harper and James Naughton were cast as the new astronauts who found themselves cutting into the timeline somewhere after *Beneath*, and Roddy McDowall returned as a new ape – but his appearance wasn't the only thing that jarred. Why were the native humans speaking? Where was the nuclear apocalypse? What happened to all the politics? Why was one episode all about evil shark gods?! Clearly, Fox saw *POTA* less as a universe and more as a franchise – something the fans responded to by switching off their TVs.

Cancelled after just 14 episodes, *POTA: The Series* was an expensive flop – but Fox wasn't ready to call it quits just yet. Commissioning *Return To The Planet Of The Apes* as an animated series in 1975, the producers turned to DePatie-Freleng enterprises (the company set up by Looney Tunes legend Friz Freleng) and gave it free rein... but no money. The bizarre result is a show that still stands as the biggest anomaly in the *POTA* universe – a weird mesh of big ideas and zero budget that gamely tries to take the action back to the movie timeline.



BEASTS OF BURDEN The movies that failed to get off the ground...

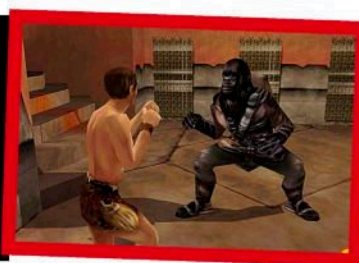
When Tim Burton's beastly *Planet Of The Apes* remake emerged to drag its knuckles across multiplex screens in 2001, it was all the more disappointing for being the end result of 13 years' worth of wrangling to relaunch Fox's prize franchise.

In 1988, the mooted *Return To The Planet Of The Apes* positioned itself as the true sequel to 1968's *Planet Of The Apes*. It would see the descendent of Taylor, played by Charlton Heston in the original, lead an uprising against his hairy rulers, and was days

from entering pre-production when Fox brought in some new execs who requested script rewrites before scrapping it altogether.

The next rendition to gain momentum was *Return Of The Apes*, in which a pair of scientists – one of them played by Arnold Schwarzenegger – would travel back in time to cure humanity of a genetic sickness. Phillip Noyce was lined up to direct, only for the whole project to fall apart when an executive insisted on the addition of a comedy scene featuring apes playing baseball.

Amie, however, remained in place as Chris Columbus became attached to a new version, in which an ape astronaut unleashes a virus on Earth and scientists must visit the apes' home planet to quest for a cure. James Cameron came in to produce, promised to take the script in a different direction, and then dropped out after *Titanic* caused such a splash he no longer fancied monkeying around. Shame – any of the above would surely have been more fun than Burton's listless reboot. **JG**



➡ Another set of astronauts crash land on Earth, this time finding an alt-future ape planet full of colonnaded monkey palaces, chimps flying jet-planes and an underclass of human mutants. Hampered by a ridiculous budget, the animators were forced to use as many still images as they could to keep the costs down. Unsurprisingly, an ugly, cheap Saturday morning 'toon that skipped over five films' worth of backstory didn't last long – and *Return* was axed after 13 episodes.

Driven into obscurity by the likes of *Star Wars* and the glossier sci-fi appetites of the '80s and '90s, *POTA* wouldn't be back on screens until Tim Burton's "reimagining" in 2001 – but there was another, alternative, Apeverse out there that had been going strong ever since the first film.

Switching publishers a dozen times over the decades, the *POTA* comics

began as a manga in 1968 and survived almost 50 years of conflicting storylines, film tie-ins, franchise crossovers and multiverse upheavals.

Still best remembered for its Marvel run between 1974–77, the Stan Lee-backed *POTA* series ran for 29 issues and featured original canon stories in black-and-white panels alongside articles on the making of the movies. The licence changed hands every few years thereafter, with Boom! Studios taking over in 2011, launching the current series, which now stands as the longest-running adaptation to date.

Wisely sidestepping the multiverse by setting their story 500 years before the original 1968 film, Boom! has since confused everyone once again by publishing a *Star Trek* crossover in 2014 (*The Primate Directive*) that saw Captain Kirk and George Taylor (Charlton Heston's character) teaming

up to try to stop the klingons from installing a puppet gorilla government.

By 2014, of course, cinemagoers had already been reintroduced to *POTA* via Tim Burton's oft-forgotten, mostly maligned 2001 *Planet Of The Apes*. Paying homage to the kitsch of the original film series but abandoning its timeline, the film positioned itself closer to Boule's book than Schaffner's movie, preserving the "other" shock ending (Earth is overrun with apes!) that was written out in 1968. A commercial success but a critical failure, Burton's film failed to reignite interest in the franchise – though it did kick-start another merchandise blitz.

New action figures, new trading cards and new apes flooded supermarket shelves once again, alongside William T. Quick's novelisation of the film. Itself one of many movie tie-ins, the book inspired two prequel novels, *The Fall* and *Colony*, which added even more chapters to the newly expanding timeline, though they failed to blend with the continuity of the comics, the films and the TV shows.

Also up was the franchise's first videogame – a PlayStation tie-in made

REIMAGINED
(top left) The animated series and PlayStation game, both doomed to failure; (left) Tim Burton's 2001 reboot was also a disappointment.



MONKEY TALK

Could apes ever shoot the shit? Well...

In the rebooted Apes trilogy, we watch as Caesar (Andy Serkis) goes from a chattering chimp to the most articulate of apes, but could monkeys ever really perfect the art of small talk? According to scientists at Princeton University, macaque monkeys have the right "vocal anatomy" that gives them the potential for speech but, sadly, their limited brain power holds them back.

"Now nobody can say that it's something about the vocal anatomy that keeps monkeys from being able to speak - it has to be something in the brain," said Dr. Asif Ghazanfar in December 2016. "Even if this finding only applies to macaque monkeys, it would still debunk the idea that it's the anatomy that limits speech in non-humans."

After the discovery, technicians at the VUB Artificial Intelligence Laboratory in Belgium created a simulation of what a macaque might actually sound like if it was smart enough to talk - the results are decidedly more eerie than Andy Serkis' vocalisations as Caesar. It might be a good thing if our evolutionary cousin never learns how to speak its mind... **JW**



without any seeming knowledge of Burton's film; arriving late, crashing early and disappearing without a trace. Except that it wasn't *technically* the first POTA game. Originally developed for the Atari 2600, an earlier Apes title had been swallowed up in the videogame crash of 1983. Presumed lost until the mid '90s (when someone found a copy in a mislabelled box), the game was subsequently rejigged by indie developers Retrodesign and published online as *Revenge Of The Apes* in 2003.

Almost a decade after Burton's film, talk stirred of a 'proper' reboot. Post-*Avatar* and post-Gollum, SFX

MONKEY SUIT
(above left) Andy Serkis first takes on Caesar in *Rise*; (above) mo-cap transformation; (top) riding to war in the new film, out now.

technology had advanced enough for producers to consider a new take on POTA that didn't rely on prosthetics. Led by Andy Serkis' motion-capture performance, *Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes* was a global triumph in 2011. Transporting the Apeverse back to the beginning (*again*), it grounded the franchise with new human leads, believable effects and a viral-outbreak

even draws inspiration from the film of *Bridge On The River Kwai*.

More importantly, POTA is back. Caesar's face is on t-shirts again. Action figures are back on the shelves. Comics are taking up the new timeline. There's even talk of a ride being built at a new theme park in Malaysia (see box, p131). "It endures," says long-time fan and one-time *Battle* extra John Landis.

'I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF ITS NEXT INCARNATION IS A MUSICAL' JOHN LANDIS

origin story that re-opened all the doors that had been slammed shut over the previous decades.

Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes followed in 2014, with *War For The Planet Of The Apes* opening this summer, bringing the story strands ever closer to the dystopia that Boulle originally envisioned. Tying the broad themes back into current social politics, the new series is as provocative today as the first films were in the '60s - this year's battle-heavy chapter

"I wouldn't be surprised if its next incarnation is a Broadway musical."

From book to film to TV to comics and beyond, the Apeverse has become an untameable beast. But with more knots, holes and false starts than any other movie mythology, it's big enough now to hide everything behind a 400lb CG gorilla and the promise of more films to come. "It might be three films, it could be four. It could be five. Who knows?" says Andy Serkis of the rebooted series. "The journey will continue."

