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There should be no such thing as a spoiler if a film is worth seeing more than once. Directors know the endings of the stories they are hired to tell before they tell them, so if there was any validity to the idea of a story being ruined by knowing the ending in advance, no film would ever seem worth the making.

I am reminded, by reading Bill Cooke’s feature on the Planet of the Apes series in this issue, that I first saw PLANET OF THE APES at the age of 12 or 13, already knowing the details of its surprise ending. That knowledge filled me with a great sense of anticipation throughout and opened my eyes to a great many details and ironies in the story I might have otherwise overlooked on the first pass. The timing of the film’s release was critical to its reception among my generation; I had somehow managed to live through the years when TWILIGHT ZONE was running on CBS without seeing most episodes; the ones I did see (including “Eye of the Beholder” and “Nightmare at 20,000 Feet”) had left an imprint, but as keen on horror and science fiction as I was, I knew Rod Serling only as a television host, not as a writer who had

Imagination on the downbeat: Charlton Heston and Linda Harrison in PLANET OF THE APES.
taken the ironic twist endings he'd learned from O. Henry and Saki into the quantum realm of the shock zinger.

**PLANET OF THE APES** was released on February 8, 1968—three months before **WITCH-FINDER GENERAL** opened in the United Kingdom, eight months prior to the first playdates of **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**, and less than two months after the French premiere of Jean-Luc Godard's **WEEK END** (1967), which closed with the nihilistic words "End of Cinema." It wasn't the first film of its kind to build to a powerful, downbeat dénouement. Robert Aldrich's **KISS ME DEADLY** (1955) had also ended on a stretch of California beach under a spectre of atomic annihilation, with some prints softening the blow by including a shot of Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) and his secretary Velda (Maxine Cooper) crouching in the Pacific shallows like a prototypic Taylor and Nova. Roger Corman had begun sneaking social commentary and climactic irony into his films with **NOT OF THIS EARTH** in 1957, but the horror and science fiction genres started taking conspicuous turns toward cynicism and outright hopelessness with Mario Bava's **I tre volti della paura** (**BLACK SABBATH**) and Corman's **X—THE MAN WITH X RAY EYES**, released just a month apart in August-September 1963. Not coincidentally, both films were in their conceptual and production phases in October 1962, when the world's breath was baited by the Cuban Missile Crisis. Though these films had been there first, the Aldrich film was a commercial failure that came a generation before and the others had not been widely seen, which cleared the path for **PLANET OF THE APES** to offer the first shock ending of its kind to be widely experienced by adult audiences. It quickly became a film that friends urged on friends because of its ending, regardless of their feelings about the contemporaneous war and tensions between nations that gave it its underlying wallop. In retrospect, it's surprising that 20th Century-Fox's advertising didn't go the Alfred Hitchcock/William Castle route of urging people not to reveal the film's shocking ending (which the posters alluded to as "the most terrifying answer of all") or refusing to seat anyone during the last half hour... something/anything to draw attention to what the culture itself took upon its own shoulders to promote by word-of-mouth.

People of my parents' generation grew up with movie serials, just as the movie-going generations to follow mine grew up with franchises, remakes and reboots. For my generation, the *Planet of the Apes* films were the only real serial experience of my movie-going childhood. (Yes, there was also Hammer's *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* or *Quatermass* series, but there was always some discontinuous element of storyline, actor, or even the number of years allowed to pass between chapters, making their serial element seem half-hearted and self-embarrassed.)

Arriving in US theaters in the wake of such films as **THE WILD BUNCH** and **MIDNIGHT COWBOY**, **BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES**' 1970 summer release coincided with those of such films as **SOLDIER BLUE** and José Larraz's **WHIRLPOOL**, which ended with the random rape and murder of its heroine and denied audiences even the comfort of a closing end titles scroll. Though **BENEATH** went awry in many ways, it delivered a shock ending that actually outdistanced the original in terms of sheer audacity. There was none of the original's irony and wit in this grand finale; it resonated on the strength of an implacable bleakness fully equal to that of **WHIRLPOOL**, which, mind you, was literally the gulf between a G- and an X-rated film. I will never forget how the lights in the theater rose after **BENEATH**'s devastating fade-to-white, and literally staggering up the aisle to step out from that matinee screening into a bright afternoon.

Don Taylor's **ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES** dealt its audiences an equal sucker punch, luring us in with the charming portrayals of Roddy McDowall and Kim Hunter as Cornelius and Zira, gradually making them the fulcrum of a tough philosophic debate concerning abortion (coincidental with the US District Court phase of Roe vs. Wade), and leading us to a final port where both beloved characters were gunned to death—along with an infant chimpanzee we initially took to be their offspring. **CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES** was even more single-mindedly about revolution, mirroring the student and civil rights demonstrations of its time, and culminating in a social apocalypse that straightforward films on the topic like **THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT** had not been prepared to envision.

The *Apes* series remains unique in that its components were linked not by cliffhangers but by death and apocalypse. Looking back, I can appreciate that part of the thrill of attending each new sequel was knowing, going in, that I would be plunged into completely new, cold, unknown waters because the previous entry had destroyed everything that might be familiar to me in its closing moments. In this way, the *Apes* films stand out as the antithesis of today's safe remake/retread mentality, yet they played by similar rules and still made a fortune.
THE BLU PLANET
RETURN TO APE CITY — IN HIGH RESOLUTION

By Bill Cooke

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20th Century Fox’s PLANET OF THE APES and its four sequels have come to the home-video market numerous times in all the major formats, with each incarnation offering just enough of a difference to compel those who are “bananas” enough to buy and buy again. We can only hope that this latest bow, a lavish Blu-ray box set, will be the final word on the saga... at least we hope it will be, for a very long time.

The movies are available to buy separately or together in an oddly-shaped package that is too deep to fit comfortably on a standard bookshelf. This box is actually a series of cardboard plates that fold around a hardcover book — evidence that Fox didn’t learn very much from the fold-out nightmare that was THE ALIEN QUADRilogy. Most befuddling, the discs are held in place by rubber plugs that have been hot-glued to the cardboard and after prying a disc loose, it takes a lot of diligence to work it back in place. In fact, we had to give up trying to re-attach one of them, for fear of damaging the disc. Whether the souvenir book (exclusive to the box set) is worth all this hassle will be up to the individual. The text by Lee Pfeiffer and Dave Worrall is a good-enough appreciation of the films, with most of the real estate devoted to a graphic designer’s florid whims. Admittedly, the images can be striking at times, and the last chapter is especially nice, offering rare close-up views of many of the saga’s costumes and props.

If you’re a little frustrated with the packaging, all those hard feelings are bound to dissipate once you start exploring the discs themselves. But first

PLANET OF THE APES:
40-YEAR EVOLUTION
1968-72, 20th Century Fox, $129.99, BR (6 discs)

PLANET OF THE APES
1968, 111m 55s

BENEATH
THE PLANET OF THE APES
1970, 94m 36s

ESCAPE FROM
THE PLANET OF THE APES
1971, 97m 23s

CONQUEST
OF THE PLANET OF THE APES
1972, 86m 38s/87m 21s

BATTLE FOR
THE PLANET OF THE APES
1973, 86m 28s/96m 17s

Taylor (Charlton Heston) and Nova (Linda Harrison) learn the horrifying truth about the PLANET OF THE APES.
there is one annoying little hurdle to get past: a computer-animated, talking facsimile of the apes’ Lawgiver. Each disc opens to one of his “witty” sermons, and we’re thankful that a quick press of our remote’s skip button shuts him up quite nicely. From there, we’re taken to the main menus, which are mesmerizing little works of art in their own right. Each menu abstractly takes us through one of the film’s environments, with tone further set by an atmospheric section of music score. Stretching back over 40 years, the films may not rub shoulders with the most pristine-looking Blu-ray transfers out there, but are far sharper and more vibrant than they’ve ever looked outside of a theater, while the uncompressed soundtracks (remixed in DTS 5.1) sound better than they ever have... period. And, of course, each title comes with a host of special features, many of them appearing for the first time. We’ll explain more about these as we go through the collection one feature at a time.

“A can’t help thinking that somewhere in the universe there has to be something better than Man... has to be.”

A landmark in the science-fiction film and an American pop-culture phenomenon, PLANET OF THE APES (1968) was the result of producer Arthur P. Jacobs’ determination to realize what many considered an unfilmable novel. Even author Pierre Boulle (THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI) doubted that his Swiftian satire had any cinematic potential. But armed with a script by Emmy award-winning Rod Serling and the support of actor Charlton Heston, Jacobs finally won the interest of young 20th Century Fox exec Richard Zanuck (son of legendary studio mogul Daryl F. Zanuck), who agreed to back the picture as long as they could prove an audience wouldn’t laugh such a wild concept off the screen.

Taylor discovers astronaut Stewart (Dianne Stanley), the Eve of his space mission, desiccated by faulty animation suspension.
They shot one sequence as a test, an excerpt of which can be seen in the documentary *BEHIND THE PLANET OF THE APES* (included as an extra). Surprisingly, the makeups worn by Edward G. Robinson as Dr. Zaius and James Brolin as Taylor (neither of whom acted in the final film) look cobbled together out of a stage actor’s kit and are decidedly unconvincing compared to what eventually made it before the cameras. Not much can be said for the acting either, as nobody attempts a posture or gesture that is remotely simian. Nevertheless, the test did its job of convincing the money men—and the rest, as they say, is history.

A brief pre-credits sequence establishes the character of Colonel George Taylor (Heston), a world-weary astronaut on a one-way trip to the stars. Alone after the rest of his crew has long since bedded down in hibernation tubes, he peers out at the vast emptiness of outer space and cynically soliloquizes about the world he left behind. “Does Man—that marvel of the universe, that glorious paradox that sent me to the stars—still wage war against his brother? Keep his neighbor’s children starving?”

One year later, the ship crash-lands in a lake on a strange planet. Taylor and two of his crew barely escape before it sinks. “We’ve been away from Earth 2000 years,” announces the skipper to his shaken mates. “Time has wiped out everything you ever knew.” They set out in search of food, hiking aimlessly through the canyons of a lifeless desert—the second environment to reflect Taylor’s alienation from his fellow beings, his profound loneliness. Director Franklin J. Schaffner reportedly spent a lot of time and money crafting this opening trek, knowing that nothing was more important than creating an atmosphere to draw the viewer in. The settings are in actuality the arid landscapes of Southern Utah, but Jerry Goldsmith’s *avant-garde* musical score of echoplexed strings and other weird effects utterly convinces us that we’re on a completely different, alien world.

Wasteland gives way to lush forest, and our heroes discover they’re not alone—that humans

*Doctor Zaius (Maurice Evans), Maximus (Woodrow Parfrey) and Zira (Kim Hunter) are astounded and threatened by the talking human Taylor.*
on this planet are naked and dumb, like animals, and are hunted and dominated by a race of intelligent, talking apes. The revelation of the apes is among the great moments in fantastic cinema—right up there with the first sight of King Kong or Karloff’s Frankenstein Monster—as Taylor, caught up in the chaos of a hunt, first catches sight of them charging on horseback. A primal-sounding ram’s horn blares on the soundtrack, both a legitimate source of sound in the scene and a hair-raising, non-diegetic expression of the astronaut’s surprise and terror.

Captured, Taylor is taken back to the apes’ city. In Boulle’s novel, the simians drove cars and flew in helicopters (as they did in Serling’s original script drafts) but, for the final film, they live in houses hewn from rock and are still in the horse-and-cart stage of technological development—probably a wise decision, as Boulle’s original vision might have led to unintentional comedy. Our hero is thrown into a cage with a female for mating purposes (Linda Harrison’s “Nova” appears to be modeled somewhat after Raquel Welch’s cavewoman from an earlier 20th Century Fox hit, ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.), and becomes the test subject of an “animal” psychologist—a female chimpanzee named Zira (Kim Hunter). The Oscar-winning ape makeup by John Chambers are still—in this day of computerized special effects—fascinating to behold; not exact replicas of the apes we know, but more intelligent-looking, evolved facsimiles, complete with styled coiffes. Of course, the makeup are only half the illusion; it takes the skills of a fine cast of seasoned character actors (chief among them, Ms. Hunter, Roddy McDowall and Maurice Evans) to vividly bring these roles to life with their eyes, their voices, their facial ticks and postures.

Muted at first by a throat wound, Taylor amazes his captors with his ability to communicate through writing and gesture. Zira’s archaeologist husband Cornelius (McDowall) and the paranoid orangutan Minister of Science, Dr. Zaius (Evans), refuse to believe the man has any real intelligence until his neck heals and he starts to talk (“Get your stinking paws off me, you damn dirty ape!”)—then he’s deemed an outright menace, a blasphemy that threatens the validity of their ancient religious writings.

While atmosphere drove the first act, social satire dominates the second. Taylor was on a quest to find “something better than Man” among the stars, but ironically winds up defending himself and Mankind against a tribunal of apes every bit as stubborn and bigoted as the society he left behind. Boulle’s novel was informed by his degrading experiences as a POW during World War II, but the film has gone on to be a Rorschach test of American-cultural upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s, including the blacklisting of Hollywood artisans in the wake of the McCarthy hearings (APES co-writer Michael Wilson was one such victim), the plight of

Shaved (and somehow looking less intelligent for it), Taylor takes his woman and NRA membership to seek a new future in the Forbidden Zone.
African-Americans during the Civil Rights movement, and the protests of alienated youth over the Vietnam War. If Tim Burton's overwrought remake of 2001 seems so forgettable in comparison, it's largely because it lacks a similarly subversive edge.

Macho, arrogant and hilariously overripe at every turn, Charlton Heston makes a perfect receptacle for all this cultural malaise. Audiences in 1968 were used to Heston's deific heroes (BEN-HUR, Moses in THE TEN COMMANDMENTS) suffering temporary imprisonment, even torture, on their way to liberation—but nobody expected the degree of humiliation his Colonel Taylor would have to endure, nor the utterly hopeless fate that was in store for him. The film ends as it began, in a landscape of vast emptiness. In the beginning, Taylor stood before the void of space wondering what became of his fellow man; in the end, he's on a desolate beach, standing unbelieving before the answer to that question: the blasted, sand-sunken ruins of the Statue of Liberty. The twist—that the hero never left his own planet—was Rod Serling's invention and is considered one of the great surprise movie endings. However, the self-plagiarizing Serling had simply modified the concept from one of his earlier TWILIGHT ZONE episodes ("I Shot an Arrow into the Sky"), in which a group of astronauts think they are on an alien planet when they're actually just stumbling around in a Nevada desert. Viewers today are very likely to prefigure the twist (the apes, after all, speak perfect English, a fact that Taylor oddly never questions), but it still packs a pretty big wallop due to Schaffner's masterful visualization (revealing the statue slowly, abstractly), Heston's oft-parodied outburst ("...God damn you all to hell!"), and composer Goldsmith's canny decision to drop his music completely out of the mix, leaving us with nothing but the sobering sound of crashing waves. All elements combined, the experience leaves one feeling psychologically obliterated.

PLANET OF THE APES has been issued on DVD three times previously with each version improving a bit on the last. That tradition is upheld
by Fox’s new high-definition transfer for Blu-ray, which is consistently stunning and revelatory. In fact, the effect is akin to putting on a pair of glasses and seeing the film clearly for the first time. As Heston and his astronaut-comrades paddle and hike through the Utah canyons, you can detect—no, better yet, feel—the smallest details in distant mountain surfaces. This palpability extends to William Creber’s ingenious sets, where backdrops and props have more of a presence than ever before and actually compel us to study their craftsmanship at the expense of the narrative at times. Stray sheens of spirit gum aside, it’s a testament to John Chambers’ work that his Oscar-winning prosthetic makeups hold up so well under the naked, unforgiving eye of high definition.

As for supplements, be prepared to spend several hours poring through them all. Chief among them is the aforementioned 1998 documentary BEHIND THE PLANET OF THE APES, directed by Kevin Burns and David Comtois. Running over two hours, the program (previously available in DVD sets and as a stand-alone release) covers the entire series with an understandably heavier emphasis on the first film, and is a veritable feast of behind-the-scenes footage and insightful interviews with the makers. Two audio commentaries are also repeated from the former DVD edition, including one made up of interview outtakes from BEHIND and an isolated score track peppered with commentary from composer Jerry Goldsmith. Both are extreme disappointments, the first for being so non-specific to the images, and the second for its unbelievably long gaps of silence. Mr. Goldsmith’s brief recollections are mostly about his working relationship with Schaffner, with whom he collaborated frequently. As interesting and valuable to the score enthusiast as these sound bytes are, they would have made for a much better interview segment than feature-length commentary.

“Evolution of the Apes” is the most prominent of the brand new supplements, a 23m featurette with a heavy emphasis on author Pierre Boulle and the screenplay’s genesis, while “Impact of the Apes” explores the marketing of the series to children in the mid-Seventies and how the lucrative toy line for Mego became a model for the upcoming STAR WARS phenomenon. The set also includes a number of new, interactive supplements, including a sporadic text commentary from Apes authority Eric Greene, PIP video clips of real scientists discussing the scientific plausibility of time travel and the facts around ape intelligence, and—for those so inclined—a “Beyond the Forbidden Zone Adventure” game. Fans of the J.J. Abrams TV series LOST might get a kick out of an “unearthed” spicy propaganda film about Dr. Otto Hasslein and his Liberty One project—the program that sent Taylor and three other astronauts to the distant stars.

**“The only good human is a dead human!”**

Richard Zanuck’s belief in PLANET OF THE APES paid off. The film was an instant critical and box office success and whetted Fox’s appetite for a profitable return to the year 3955. However, as plans for a sequel got
underway, the producers were dismayed to discover that their intended star, Charlton Heston, was adamantly opposed to being in it. After some heated negotiations, the actor grudgingly agreed to appear in the picture as a personal favor to Zanuck and Jacobs, but only if he was killed off in the first scene. As the screenplay came together under the authorship of Paul Dehn (GOLDFINGER), the actor’s deal was further negotiated: Heston would disappear at the beginning of the story and reappear for the climax.

Like H.G. Wells’ THE TIME MACHINE, BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES (1970) presents a future Earth that is populated with two societies: one above ground, the other below. After a brief recap of the previous film’s finale (in which Heston’s famous “God damn you all to Hell” is modified to the more family-friendly “Damn you all to Hell”), Taylor and his human mate Nova continue their aimless journey on horseback through the arid Forbidden Zone. The pair experience a series of alarming phenomena (fire, earthquakes, mirages of transforming landscape) until Taylor—dismounting to investigate—mysteriously vanishes into thin air.

Meanwhile, a second spacecraft from the 20th century has crash-landed in the desert. Its sole survivor, Brent (James Franciscus), is on a mission to locate Taylor and his crew. Luckily for him, Nova rides past the crash site; and seeing the blond astronaut, she’s momentarily confused because he looks so much like Taylor. The two ride off together, Brent under the assumption the mute woman is taking him to his comrade (she wears his dog tags) when actually she is leading him to Ape City into the waiting arms of the militant gorillas.

The original PLANET OF THE APES was a hard act to follow, and while this first sequel has aspects to cherish, it ultimately suffers from being a rushed production of a dubious script. The film’s reduced budget is obvious from the start, with decidedly less spectacular desert backdrops substituting the first film’s remote Utah locations. Most damaging is Taylor’s replacement with a surrogate, so that half of the narrative plays like a condensed retread of the first film while we wait for new-guy Brent to get up to speed. Franciscus (THE VALLEY OF GWANGI) has the thankless task of playing this underdeveloped doppelgänger, and

James Franciscus as Brent, an astronaut who somehow follows Taylor back to the exact time and place of his disappearance.
his solution is to overplay every reaction absurdly. It's also disappointing that the familiar, beloved ape characters are given so little to do. Returning chimp scientists Cornelius (played by David Watson instead of Roddy McDowall, who was directing the film TAM-LIN abroad) and Zira (Kim Hunter) only have a couple of unremarkable scenes before they disappear from the story entirely (this proves fortuitous for subsequent sequels). Maurice Evans enjoys more screen time as Dr. Zaius, though he lacks the sharp dialogue exchanges that made him so memorable before. With his unique growl of a voice and ursine mannerisms, James Gregory impresses the most as the human-hating gorilla, General Ursus—a kind of Patton of the Apes. While I wouldn't go so far as to say he has his tongue planted inside his prosthetic cheek, it's apparent that Gregory saw the humor in playing a talking gorilla. A little social commentary on Vietnam is attempted when Ursus' gorillas encounter pacifist chimpanzee protesters, but it feels pretty forced and half-hearted compared to how Schaffner treated similar subtext.

It isn't until we actually go beneath the Planet of the Apes that the film hits its stride. Director Ted Post, a veteran of episodic television (RAWHIDE, THRILLER), builds considerable atmosphere and anticipation as Brent and Nova are inexorably led by an unseen intelligence through the subterranean ruins of New York City. Here they find a weird race of civilized humans (Jeff Corey, Victor Buono, Paul Richards, et al.), who for years have been defending themselves from intruders with their highly advanced psychic powers. These vain ancestors of the apocalypse hide their deformed faces behind latex "flesh" masks and have built a scary religion around the

Charlton Heston returns briefly as Taylor, only to be attacked by Brent under the mind-control of the mutant leaders.
last surviving nuclear missile—a doomsday device capable of destroying the entire planet. In a darkly comic sequence, the mutants congregate for a service and sing atonal hymns to the almighty Bomb. Their twisted religiosity would seem to be an influence on The Family in the upcoming THE OMEGA MAN, another end-of-the-world thriller starring Charlton Heston.

After being interrogated and tortured, Brent finds that the mutants are, in their own way, as paranoid and prejudiced as the apes. And when he's reunited with Taylor, also a prisoner, the film moves rapidly toward what has to be the most depressing, nihilistic conclusion ever conceived for a G rated film. Ursus' army breaks through the mutants' psychic barriers and marches on the underground city, shooting everyone on sight (in a surprisingly poignant moment, a curious gorilla soldier stops to caress the blonde hair of a dead woman played by producer Arthur Jacobs' wife, Natalie Trundy, a series fixture from here on), while our heroes are graphically riddled with bullets as they attempt to stop the apes from setting off the bomb. If that wasn't bleak enough, Taylor fulfills Zaius' greatest fears that Man will one day end the world. Bleeding to death, he falls on the buttons that activate the doomsday missile, ending the Planet of the Apes—and to Charlton Heston's relief, any prospects for another sequel—in a harrowing fade to white.

Fox's high-definition transfer, while not quite as stunning as the previous film's, is still very impressive. Many of the film's memorable widescreen images gain power in the extra resolution, though at least one—in which Ursus addresses an amphitheater full of apes—is rendered even more laughable due to the high number of extras outfitted with crude pull-over masks. Extras include the second chapter in Fox's new "Evolution" series of featurettes, "From Alpha to Omega: Building a Sequel," in which we learn Pierre Boulle actually wrote a rejected sequel treatment titled "Planet of the Men." In it, Taylor sires a son and raises a human army against the apes. Director Ted Post is on hand for an interview and stakes the claim for conceiving the film's apocalyptic ending, while actress Linda Harrison (Richard Zanuck's girlfriend during the making of these films) remembers Charlton Heston as a voracious eater on a strict exercise regimen: "He was my idol, I was ga-ga." James Franciscus is described as an "intellectual" who had to think out his characters' motivations,
while the role of Ursus was originally to be played by Orson Welles, until the esteemed director finally decided that real actors should never wear masks. The documentary explains how executive producer Richard Zanuck was forced to resign from Fox during the making of the film, prompting him to order the crew to “blow up the world” (a nugget that contradicts Post’s earlier claim). Everyone hated the ending, Post included.

Extras are rounded out by the trailer, pressbook and photo galleries in the form of interactive newspapers (“The Ape News” and “The Mutant News”) and an isolated score track. The moody score from Leonard Rosenman (*REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE, FANTASTIC VOYAGE*) uses a similar modernist canvas as Goldsmith, but is awash in a different and even more unsettling palette of atonal colors—not an easy listen for those unaccustomed to musical serialism, but a complex and rewarding work all the same. The isolated score does not contain composer comments, as did Goldsmith’s for *PLANET OF THE APES*, so the music’s interaction with the picture can be better appreciated.

“*Our chimpanzee friends are ready to answer your questions, too—not by signs, not by looks or movements... but by words.*”

When Fox ordered a third *Apes* adventure, it begged the question: where does one go after Armageddon? The logic of screenwriter Paul Dehn’s solution might not hold up to a lot of scrutiny, but it is novel and compelling nonetheless.

**ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES** (1971) features the most memorable opening of the series. An establishing shot of stark cliffs and pounding surf fools us into thinking we’re back in that desolate future milieu of the Forbidden Zone, until a helicopter suddenly enters frame and yanks us back to the present day of 1971. Colonel Taylor’s spacecraft has returned from its interstellar voyage and is being pulled out of the ocean by excited military personnel. Everyone is in for a shock, however, when the emerging astronauts unscrew their helmets and reveal
themselves to be... three very confused-looking chimpanzees.

The premise of *ESCAPE* is a simple flip of the original. Now it is a trio of talking apes who are the fish out of water, the strangers in a strange land. At first "chimpanauts" Cornelius (Roddy McDowall), Zira (Kim Hunter) and Milo (Sal Mineo) are afraid to reveal their intelligence, and consequently are caged at the Los Angeles Zoo. Zira finds herself under study by a kind animal psychiatrist (Bradford Dillman, assisted by Natalie Trundy), just as she once studied the talking human, Taylor, in her own time. But eventually the degradation of infantile testing becomes a too much for the former chimp scientist. "I loathe bananas," she informs her started keepers.

Milo, the genius responsible for raising Taylor’s sunken starship and making it operational again, is killed outright by a crazed gorilla, leaving Zira and Cornelius alone as they attempt to explain how they came to be to a scoffing government panel (a reflection of the orangutan tribunal from the first film). To the chimps’ surprise, the humans turn out to be a lot more accepting of them than their culture was of Taylor. They in fact become instant celebrities; and for a time, the film becomes very light-hearted and comical as the chimps are escorted to LA shops, dressed in designer fashions and treated to swinging parties in their new suite at the Beverly Wilshire.

The tone turns dark very quickly, however, when the ruthless Dr. Otto Hasslein (Eric Braeden, *COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT*), a scientific advisor to the President, questions Zira (under the influence of "Grape juice plus") and discovers unsettling truths about the apes’ future dominance over Man. The situation only worsens when Zira announces that she’s pregnant, motivating Hasslein (a human equivalent to the paranoid Dr. Zaius) to convince the President and his Committee that the baby must not be born and that the parents should be prevented from ever having offspring if they are to prevent a future takeover by talking apes.

Cornelius and Zira attempt to run from their fate with the help of their zoologist friends, who secure refuge for them in a circus while Zira gives birth. But increasing police scrutiny forces the

*Dr. Otto Hasslein (Eric Braeden) manhandles Cornelius and intends to have Zira’s pregnancy aborted, to the disapproval of Dr. Lewis Dixon (Bradford Dillmann).*
chimps to run once again, until Hasslein finally catches up with them in an abandoned shipyard and, in another disarmingly depressing finale, shoots the entire family—baby chimp too—in cold blood. In an epilogue, we return to the circus where, unbeknownst to all the people mulling about, a naked baby chimp sits before the bars of its cage and cries, "Mama!" Having switched her intelligent baby with a dumb one, Zira has sealed the fate of Mankind, setting a course for a Planet of the Apes.

The set-up of ESCAPE asks that you don’t think too hard about the order of events in BENEATH. For instance, there simply would not have been enough time for the chimps to find Taylor’s ship, raise it, repair it, and figure out how to fly it before the planet blew up. Nevertheless, ESCAPE is arguably the best of the sequels, a story that is both charming and tragic, and the linchpin for the continuing saga. It is dominated by the most endearing characters of the series (finally, the apes are the protagonists) and refreshingly departs from the adventure formula to tell what is, in essence, a touching and unique love story. By this time, McDowall and Hunter had perfected their characters’ personalities, and their talent for expressing emotion through the makeup appliances is truly extraordinary. It’s a testament to the writing and acting that, despite their appearances, they come across as more “human” than the people around them.

The entire cast is superb, but special mention should go to Ricardo Montalban’s sympathetic circus owner Armando (“Let me get this straight, you are asking me to risk imprisonment for the sake of two fugitive apes? Well, the answer is, a thousand times—yes!”), a spiritual man who loves all animals, and Eric Braeden’s Dr. Hasslein, a complex villain whose actions are ultimately vile but is not unbelievably motivated either. Armando believes that if it is God’s will for humans to one day be ruled by apes, “then, please God, let [them] be dominated by such as you,” while Hasslein takes an opposite view, revealing in an apex of frustration: “Later we will do something about pollution... later we’ll do something about the population explosion... later we will do something about the nuclear war... We think we have all the time in the world... How much time has the world got? Somebody has to begin to care!” The two characters embody the fundamental, polar divisions in our society: liberalism vs. conservatism, faith vs. science, emotion vs. logic.

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES looked great in its last bow on DVD, so the picture improvements here can only be called slight. The added resolution focuses our attention on the apes’ faces and the weaving of their wigs perhaps more so than the filmmakers intended, but the illusion holds up fairly well over all; with only three make-ups to perform this time out, Chambers and his staff were able to take their time and perfect the textures and flexibility of the facial appliances.

In “The Secret Behind Escape,” Sean Emmett remembers his mother, Kim Hunter, and how she incessantly smoked while learning her lines. Special time is devoted to the actress in this chapter of the “Evolution” featurettes, touching upon the troubles she encountered during the blacklisting of the 1950s. Apes authorities Greene and Russo speak the most, the former going into some detail.

Zira mothers her infant Milo, considered the missing link in the apes’ future tyranny over humans and thus a national threat.
about the film's many Biblical parallels, such as Herod's attempt to kill Christ by slaughtering infants and how Armando's circus is like a modern-day equivalent to the Nativity Scene as Zira's child is born. An 8m vintage film from 1971 follows director Don Taylor (THE ISLAND OF THE DR. MOREAU, 1977, and DAMIEN: Omen II) in the midst of shooting the circus epilogue. A gruff, no-nonsense kind of guy, Taylor looks a mite uncomfortable when cornered by an interviewer, explaining the story as "the most charming, beautiful script I've ever had." The camera also captures Ricardo Montalban, who is intensely focused on the job at hand, and the footage ends with the execution of the film's final shot, as a trainer tries to get the desired reaction out a baby chimp by raising a finger and barking "Kelly... 'Mama!'"

Aside from the expected promotional and behind-the-scenes galleries, the disc also gives us the complete score isolated on a separate audio track. Original PLANET OF THE APES composer Jerry Goldsmith returns for his second and final series outing, and responds very differently to the needs of this much more intimate, contemporary fable. Incorporating some delightfully weird pop elements, such as steel drums, the Indian sitar and electric guitar, the score is a mad collision between Stravinsky and 1970s funk that only an innovator like Goldsmith could have conceived and gotten away with. Those with a special interest in film scoring will find this isolated score track particularly interesting, as Fox has kept the sounds of the recording studio immediately before and after each cue for slate readings and occasional back-and-forth between the composer and orchestra.

"Where there is fire, there is smoke. And in that smoke, from this day forward, my people will crouch and conspire and plot and plan for the inevitable day of Man's downfall."

The open ending of ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES practically begged for a follow-up and, with major plot points already foretold, CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (1972) was no doubt an easy assignment.
In CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES, Ricardo Montalban returns as Armando, harboring Zira's child, now adult, secretly vocal and renamed Caesar (Roddy McDowall).

for screenwriter Paul Dehn. The real challenge went to producer Arthur Jacobs, who had to somehow realize a massive ape rebellion with a reduced budget of $2 million.

Twenty years have passed since Zira and Cornelius were assassinated. Unbeknownst to the world, their child (christened Milo in the previous film, symbolically renamed Caesar here) has grown to young adulthood and is posing as a trained chimp in his protector Armando's travelling circus. The film opens as Armando (Montalban) arrives in a city—presumably New York—to promote his show, leading young Caesar (Roddy McDowall) on a leash to keep up appearances. Much about urban society has changed, and it seems nobody heeded the warnings of Dr. Hasslein after all. As it would be written in the apes' sacred scrolls, a plague has wiped out all cats and dogs, leaving simians to fill traditional pet roles—only their owners have gone one deplorable step farther and made a new slave class out of them. The streets are filled with more apes than humans as they move from one menial task to the next, with disobediences harshly punished by an omnipresent police force. Caesar accidentally speaks in public (he yells "Lousy human bastard" at an abusive cop, a play on Charlton Heston's famous "Get your stinking paws off me, you damn dirty ape!") raising the ire of the crowd. While Armando undergoes intense questioning, the runaway Caesar sheds his familiar clothing and attempts to blend in with his own kind. More Spartacus than Caesar, he comes to understand fully just how cruel the humans are, leading to his orchestration and command of a violent uprising.

In ESCAPE, Cornelius explained how the process of apes becoming aware of their slave status took hundreds of years, but here, in CONQUEST, it takes a mere twenty. Is this sloppy screenwriting, or is writer Paul Dehn playing around with his character Dr. Hasslein's hypothesis—that time is like a highway with an infinite number of exits and possibilities, and that Cornelius and Zira's trip back in time actually changed (or accelerated) the course of history leading to events in the first film? Nevertheless, this is the sequel with the overall bleakest
tone. Shot among the steel and concrete plazas of the University of California's Irvine Campus (real estate once owned by 20th Century Fox), the mise-en-scène is all cold and colorless concrete. The only warmth comes from sporadic bursts of primary red, a foreshadowing of revolution. Red is the color of the gorillas' uniforms, the fires that they set, and the blood that splashes their faces.

**NIGHT OF THE BLOODY APES** might have made a nice alternate title if it hadn't been already taken. With such a thin and predictable plot, it's the film's violence and impassioned oratory we remember most. Apes are continually prodded and beaten, and the only likable character (Montalban) disturbingly commits suicide by hurling himself through a skyscraper window. In an obvious Biblical parallel, fascist Governor Breck (Don Murray) channels Pontius Pilate to Caesar's Christ figure as he tortures his subversive enemy on an electrified crucifix (seeming to "die," the ape-savior "resurrects" and fulfills his destiny as the deific leader of his kind). While the entire *Apes* series could be viewed as a parable of the Civil Rights conflicts between American whites and blacks, nowhere is the theme made more explicit than in the finale of this chapter, as waves of black gorillas set fires, smash windows and collide with rows of white policemen—tableaux inspired by documentary footage of the Watts riots. No stranger to the war genre, director J. Lee Thompson (**THE GUNS OF NAVARONE**) skillfully stages the action, while the cover of night helps create the illusion that many more ape extras are converging than were actually on hand.

This isn't an actor's film, but Roddy McDowall does his damnedest to make it one. While Cornelius in **ESCAPE** is arguably his best, most nuanced ape performance, here he was faced the challenge of playing his own son, and has to believably transition from a weepy innocent into a cold-hearted avenger. The turning point for him, when he discovers that his human father is dead and that he is now all alone, is made hair-raising by McDowall's primal outpouring of grief. Other notable performances include Severn Darden (**WEREWOLVES ON WHEELS**) as the Governor's effete interrogator, Kolib; Hari Rhodes (**DAKTARI**) as MacDonald, the lone human sympathetic to the chimp's plight (Caesar tells MacDonald, a black man, that "you, above everybody else, should understand that we cannot be free without power"); and Natalie Trundy, making her third appearance in an *Apes* feature as Lisa, a chimp slave and simian doppelgänger to *PLANET OF THE APES*' Nova.

When **CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES** was test-screened prior to its theatrical engagements, it was deemed too violent for family audiences. Images of bloodshed were consequently trimmed and a new ending had to be conceived in which Caesar, at the last moment, stays his ape army from killing the Governor. McDowall was brought back to record an addendum to his original speech in which he calls for compassion among his fellow apes, though no new footage was shot; instead, the editors artificially...
zoomed-in on outtakes, careful to keep McDowall’s mouth out of frame. Even back in 1972, this last-second reconciliation on Caesar’s part felt like a major cop-out, so, for fans of the series, arguably the most exciting aspect of this new Blu-ray edition is the inclusion of that original, uncompromised preview cut (87m 21s). Fox’s transfer quality is absolutely superb, with the reds of the gorillas’ uniforms popping off the screen in near three-dimensionality, while bottomless blacks add even more gravity to the apes’ nocturnal rebellion. Thankfully, the theatrical version (86m 38s) is also included, but—as far as this reviewer is concerned—once you taste the devastation of the original, there is no going back.

The “Evolution” featurettes continue with “Riots and Revolutions: Confronting the Times,” which notes the film’s release at the height of the blaxploitation craze and how it was embraced by African Americans who came to identify with the apes. In addition, actor Don Murray recalls practicing all of his lines in German so that he would have that “Nazi spirit” when he finally spoke in English. A special segment is devoted to Roddy McDowall, highlighted by reminiscences from Angela Lansbury and a clip of the actor’s appearance on THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW (in ape makeup, of course). The very brief “A Look Behind the Planet of the Apes” offers vintage footage of director Thompson shooting the ape training exercises that open the film. McDowall, a professional photographer as well as being an actor, can be seen snapping some behind-the-scenes shots while still in makeup.

The usual trailers and galleries round out the visual extras and, on the audio front, we have the score by Tom Scott isolated on its own track. Scott lacked the star power of Goldsmith or Rosenman, but his score is a worthy addition to the saga’s distinct canon of music. His percussive music upholds the series’ avant-garde tradition, but the style is rooted more in jazz and popular idioms than in the concert-hall modernism of his composer peers. Again, the score is revelatory for all the tracks that were eventually edited and even dropped entirely from the film’s final mix.

Don Murray as fascist Governor Breck, rendered unto Caesar following a bloody revolution of the apes.
The final chapter in the Apes saga, BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES (1973), is set 10 years after events in CONQUEST. The humans have already waged their prophesied nuclear war; and, in the film’s establishing images, we see a population of survivors living and working alongside apes, all under the leadership of Caesar (McDowall). Everybody lives in huts and tree houses, and technology has reverted back to pre-Industry. Guns are kept under lock and key and, in yet another Biblical parallel for the series—this time the story of Cain and Abel—the apes live by a strict moral code: “Ape shall not kill ape.” The most unlikely development in John and Joyce Corrington’s screenplay is that all apes have intelligence comparable to Man and can speak—surely abilities that would have taken many generations to achieve.

Caesar has mellowed considerably since the night he revolted against Mankind, having wedded the former chimp slave Lisa (Natalie Trundy) and fathered an heir to his throne—a clever, sweet-hearted teenager named Cornelius (Bobby Porter). But trouble is brewing in Caesar’s utopia; while humans are not treated like animals as they were in PLANET OF THE APES, they are very clearly second-class citizens, and prejudices are heightening under the constant bigoted tirades of Aldo (Claude Akins), a gorilla in charge of the military. Meanwhile, Caesar, his human friend MacDonald (Austin Stoker as the brother of Hari Rhodes’ MacDonald from CONQUEST) and the orangutan scientist Virgil (Paul Williams) embark on a journey to the ruins of New York City. There, in an underground maze of pipe-laden tunnels, they retrieve the taped testimonials that Caesar’s late parents gave on the fate of the world, but rouse a colony of sick, irradiated humans in the process. The leader of this group, Kolb (Sevem Darden, reprising his role from CONQUEST), recognizes his old chimp adversary and assumes they’re under attack. Swiftly, he organizes a military campaign against Ape City intending to stomp out the apes’ dominion over Earth once and for all. (Their sad artillery consists of customized jeeps and filthy
school buses.) As the conflict heats up, Aldo goes berserk, attempting to slaughter all humans in the compound and—worse—breaking the sacred law by killing another ape. Despite their superior fire power, the mutants are beaten back into their hole, but, until Aldo is finally dealt with, there will be no peace in Caesar’s kingdom.

With boxoffice returns diminishing and budgets declining for each succeeding sequel, BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES was planned from the outset to be the final chapter—a point that Fox decided to exploit and advertise prominently on the one-sheet poster. That poster also promised “The Most Suspenseful Showdown Ever Filmed,” priming Apes fans for one of the biggest letdowns of their moviegoing lives. Perhaps because he achieved so much with so little resources the last time, director J. Lee Thompson was hired to helm once again, but even his skills at camouflage could only go so far on a $1.5 million budget. The bottom line is that audiences went in expecting a breathtaking battle—a big finish to one of the most successful film series—and instead got a tired little skirmish and production values more suited to television than the big screen.

Even the make-ups suffer under the reduced budget, seeming stiffer and more mask-like this time out. McDowall is able to overcome these limitations due to his experience, but many of the supporting cast (Paul Williams aside) lack comparable personality and seem lost beneath the appliances. Worst of all is the estimable John Huston, who appears briefly as the orangutan Lawgiver in the film’s future-set prologue and epilogue. He lacks any sort of nuance in his face and body movements and might just as well have dubbed the part. The film is a little more interesting when it leaves the tree-house suburbs of the apes and journeys beneath the ground for a look into the dreary lives of the men and women who will eventually become the psychic (and psychotic) mutants of BE-NEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES. Simple industrial corridors disappointingly replace the more expensive landmark-filled caverns of the second film, but the environment is effectively claustrophobic all the same. Severn Darden is amusing as the cynical mutant leader, whose lust for
war seems mainly motivated to fight his own accursed boredom—and possible impotency. Of the film’s technical aspects, the dissonant music score by Leonard Rosenman fares well, opening with an infectious, grotesquely euphoric march that heralds Aldo as he gallops through Ape City on horseback.

Fox presents the final BATTLE in two forms: the US theatrical version (86m 28s) and a restored preview cut (96m 17s) with nearly 10m of additional footage. The latter, long an exclusive in a Japanese LaserDisc box set of the entire series, was finally unveiled officially in the US for Fox’s previous DVD edition; it is a decidedly better film, mainly because of one brief but important restored scene in which the mutants nearly launch the Alpha-Omega bomb we know from BENEATH, but decide to hold onto it—and adore it—instead. Photographically, this is the least captivating film in the series, seemingly shot in a short period of time when the California skies were consistently cloudy and gray. The added clarity of Blu-ray does little to polish the dreariness.

But every gray cloud has a silver lining. The final featurette, “End of an Epic: the Final Battle,” achieves a great deal by opening up our appreciation of the film just a little bit. Interviewees include supporting actors Noah Keen (Abe, the Teacher), Austin Stoker and cinematographer Richard Kline, who praises the leadership of J. Lee Thompson and explains how certain short-cuts were employed, such as filming explosions with multiple cameras, to create the illusion of greater chaos than the low budget allowed. And descriptions of Paul Dehn’s original unproduced script—a nihilistic tale about a ruthless Caesar and his raising of an empire not unlike that of the decadent Romans—fire the imagination over the film that could have been. Humans did not fare well at all in Dehn’s brutal scenario; their vocal chords were surgically severed, rendering them mute. Eventually, however, the producers desired to end the series on a more optimistic note, hiring the Corringtons (writers of THE OMEGA MAN) to provide an alternate view of the saga’s timeline—a hopeful future where apes and humans tenuously truce to live side-by-side in peace. The final image—a statue of Caesar in a garden where human and ape children play together—leaves us with a feeling of ambiguity as a drop of moisture spills from its eye.

Will Ape and Man continue down this path of unity, or will the future somehow correct itself and end as we saw it in the year 3955? Does the deified first King of the Apes cry out of joy... or sorrow?