CASTLE of FRANKENSTEIN
OPERATING TABLE OF CONTENTS

BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES
It breaks the “sequel jinx” as a controversial and uniquely attractive film capable of standing strongly on its own. ..... 5

TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA
Chris Lee making up the old, diabolical and Satanism as he portrays the legendary Count in a different “vein”. ..... 8

CoF SLAYMATE: VERONICA CARLSON
Horror-Fantasy film’s favorite femme slaymate-slaymate of the year. Cushing’s had her, Lee’s had her, so she’s all ours and yours, courtesy CoF. ..... 11

THE WITCH’S BREW
The witches pot has thrived, filially and medically for thousands of years. In this new feature, you’ll learn how “There are more things in heaven” etc. ..... 13

HISTORY OF HORROR FILMS -
All Manner of Fantasies. Part 2 of the monumental article tracing the genre’s genesis from Melies to Corman. ..... 17

KARLOFF’S LEGACY: TARGETS
Dan Bates in an inclusive and moving tribute to Boris Karloff and powerful analysis of his last film. ..... 25

LITTLE NEMO
One of the greatest “comic” strips, its creator Winsor McKay, raised newspaper graphics to a noble, beautiful level rarely ever attained since it was first introduced In: 1910! ..... 26

MAROONED!
Mar is not only an abridgement for Marmot but also for Marooned, proving you may take space-men out of the country, but you can’t bring the spacemen to the country! ..... 28

THE OBLONG BOX
Fried, penned and broiled, this is the Price paid. ..... 32

SMASH GORDON
Not only great graphics in the CoF tradition by Jaunty Frank Brunner, the debut of a new intergalactic menace who makes Mingo look Merciful by comparison. ..... 34

THE MEN BEHIND THE COMICS:
Frank Brunner. ..... 36

HEADEDITORIAL — Psyche It To Me!
Where the Head Man of CoF raps away in the Land Of Hi ment the existential and materialistic verities, the metaphysical riches or deficiencies and grooviness of the nobles, i.e. the way-outness of the In ness (or the In ness of way-outism) in: (1) THE COMIC BOOK COUNCIL, (2) "IN" Movie Houses; (3) WORLD OF SFantasy FAN-
- DOM. ..... Plus a zillion other mind blowers. ..... 38

Front Cover: “Nightcraft,” as delineated by the feverish imagination and fine hand of Piervent Frank Brunner, “Nuff said!
Back Cover: Dedicated appropriately to those four great Englishmen, The Beatles, who’ve stimulated, contributed and pioneered more in the World of Imagination than much of the world yet realizes.


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SUBMISSION INFORMATION:
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 Beneath the Planet of the Apes

Cast & credits:
Starring Charlton Heston as Taylor, James Franciscus as Brent, Kim Hunter as Zira, Maurice Evans as Dr. Zela, Linda Harrison as Nova, Paul Richards as Mandran, Victor Buono as Pat Mah, James Gregory as Ursus, Jeff Corey as Caspary; plus: Natalie Trundy, Thomas Gomez, David Watson, Don Pedro Colley, Ted Andrews, Greg Sierra, Eldon Hurst, Lou Wagner.

All those moviegoers who wondered what became of Charlton Heston and Linda Harrison after they headed into the Forbidden Zone at the end of Planet of the Apes two years ago will have a chance to find out this year in this fascinating sequel. 20th has created a follow-up which starts off exactly where the 1968 film ended. In fact, the final scene of the earlier film serves as a prologue to the present one.

As a rule, film sequels seem to bear the “sequel curse” and have been notoriously inferior to their originals; but the curse for the moment seems to have gotten lifted by Paul Dehn and Mort Abrahams (who both wrote the story, Abrahams scripting)—they used their imaginations aptly in dreaming up further adventures for the Pierre Boulle characters (Abrahams has a rich background in SFantasy work he’s done over the years, particularly for TV, and goes all the way back to 1952-53 when he worked on ABC-TV’s marvellous production of Tales of Tomorrow every week).

After not wanting to take a long role in a sequel but willing to do a short one (with special billing) to tie the films together, his Taylor character makes a mysterious disappearance early in the movie. He turns up again for an explosive climax, however.

Meanwhile Linda Harrison (actually Mrs. Richard Zanuck in her other life), as Nova the human who can’t talk, is sent out into the desert to discover yet another American astronaut whose ship has also crashed on the planet of the apes. James Franciscus as the “naut plays her companion in a series of mishaps in which both are captured by the apes and escape with the assistance of the married couple of chimpanzee psychologists who were in the original (Kim Hunter plays her role again, but David Watson has replaced Roddy McDowell). Franciscus and Miss Harrison then make their way to the subterranean area referred to in the title, which is nothing less than the ruins of New York City after a nuclear war. It is inhabited by a weird race of mutants with superior mental powers whose domain the apes invade in a bloody climactic battle in which both sides meet up with horrible results.

A weakness is that Beneath lacks the essential novelty of its predecessor in its unique concept of a universe in which apes act like humans but not the latter while holding them in slavery. The sequel is also deficient in the drivel humor of the original. There is also some obvious—due to mention obtrusive—proselytizing over the folly of war that sometimes threatens to turn the picture into a sermon.

Producer-director Richard Zanuck’s hold on luminous lovely Linda Harrison shouldn’t be misconstrued if it is interpreted as overly affectionate. Harrison fans, do not groan too deeply: Yes—she’s also Mrs. Zanuck.
But most of it is fun. The sets, especially those of NYC's ruins, are exquisite, and the makeup designed by John Chambers for the apes in the first film is repeated with fidelity. Another actor carrying over from the first PLANET is Maurice Evans, and a new character—a militant ape general—is well played by James Gregory. Acting throughout is nevertheless no more than adequate.

* * *

Being yet another critique—this time: accept the socio-esoteric fantasy significance and metaphysical eroticism of BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES by the hon. resident critic at large:

Sir Buddy McWeiss

Taylor and Nova gallop through the Forbidden Zone and—Zap! Taylor suddenly disappears. Nova rides bareback (and to some extent barefoot) all by herself until, just by coincidence she runs across Brent who just happened to cross the Time Barrier into the future to search for the missing Taylor. And so Nova and Brent ride off into the sunset to find Charlton Heston and brave the perils of Ape City.

The main problem with the film is contrivance. The first portion deals with Brent (James Franciscus) and Nova (Linda Harrison) being captured by the apes, receiving aid from a much-talked-about Zira and Cornelius, and finally escaping. We do have, however, a new element in what so far seems to be nothing more than a sequel to PLANET OF THE APES. James Gregory plays a power-hungry warrior general called Ursus who believes in seeking territorial expansion for the ape empire through the use of warfare. All through the streets of Ape City are seen groups of young simians carrying signs saying "Doom comes soon and 'Unite In Peace,'" which is supposed to be extremely relevant and timely. So far though, all we have is monotonous continuity and transparent contrivance.

When Brent and Nova enter the Underground city, the real merits of the film begin to take hold. The mat shots involving the ruins of Radio City Music Hall and the N.Y. Stock Exchange are quite effective. The remains of the Queensborough Plaza subway station is also very good (even if it in no way resembles its real counterpart).

We also get our first look at the underground mutants who use non-visual thought projection to inflict pain upon Brent and Nova, and yet not harm them physically. It is a weapon of illusion, just as their visual deterrents (the pillar of fire and curtain of rain) to keep their enemies away. Because the brains of the apes are so small, they are unable to hold the mental suggestions of the mutants, leaving the creatures basically defenseless. On top of all this, these underground creatures worship a cobalt bomb, responding to it as God's instrument on earth.

All of this leads up to an eventual confrontation between the mutants and the apes, and a reunion among Nova, Taylor, and Brent.

So we have basically a film with good special effects, devoid of blatant sexual excitement (all G rating), and generally always interesting, at the very least. But it certainly hardly at all resembles the original of '68, and what bothers me most is that the basic source of inspiration seems to have sprung from a dollar sign rather than an idea. The production will undoubtedly make money on the strength of PLANET, but I'm sure most people will be somewhat let down after seeing this new effort.

The ending will not be revealed, but you can be sure there won't be a sequel to BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES!

— Sir Buddy McWeiss —

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