



PLANET OF THE APES—MONKEYING AROUND WITH SATIRE AND SF

Retrospective by Dr. John L. Flynn

Introduction

“Planet of the Apes,” Twentieth Century-Fox's stunning and profound science fiction thriller, first hurtled viewers into the strange simian civilization where man was regarded as a savage brute to be controlled and ultimately exterminated in the winter of 1968. The Arthur P. Jacobs production opened so big in New York that for the first three weekends the motion picture not only beat out previous record holders but also bested records it set on preceding weekends. Eventually, the film emerged as the second highest grossing, non-roadshow feature in the studio's history. Critical reaction to “Planet of the Apes” was also very favorable. Liz Smith in *Cosmopolitan* called it "a blockbuster movie! A genuine fourteen-carat film. Big, fascinating, and totally entertaining." Pauline Kael, one of genre's harshest critics, proclaimed in the *New Yorker* that it was "a

very entertaining movie" as well as "one of the best science-fiction fantasies ever to come out of Hollywood." She urged potential ticket-buyers to "see it quickly" as it had "the ingenious kind of plotting that people love to talk about." Joseph Gelmis in Newsday wrote that it was "a first-rate adventure with serious moral, theological and social implications." The Independent Film Journal captured the sentiments of the remaining critics, stating, "Those movie-goers who have yearned for a splendid science-fiction adventure film will happily embrace Twentieth Century-Fox's 'Planet of the Apes,' a highly entertaining futuristic tale."

Although well able to stand on its own as a first-rate science-fiction adventure with plenty of action, suspense, thrills and intrigue, "Planet of the Apes" was also an intelligent allegory. The questions that the film raises about man's war-like habits and his threat to the natural balance of the universe have the flavor of Jonathan Swift or Aldous Huxley. Science fiction, at its best, has often dealt with these issues. In the classic models of literary science fiction, including Plato's Republic, Campanella's City of the Sun and More's Utopia, shrewdly-conceived satires about contemporary society reveal problems inherent in man's attempt to separate thought from reason, passion from creativity and truth from fact. Perhaps, the real genius of "Planet of the Apes," with its savage and often biting commentary about human folly, was its connection to these classic works and many others like them.

Origins

Origins for "Planet of the Apes" can be traced straight back several centuries to the first great satirist. Swift (1667-1745), the Irish satirist and poet, wrote one of literature's most famous works of satire, Travels into Several Remote Nations of the

World by Lemuel Gulliver (1726), and imagined a world not dissimilar to Boulle's.

Popularly called Gulliver's Travels (collected and revised in 1735), this four-book epic found the titular character marooned in several uniquely alien cultures. The uniqueness of each alien culture was then contrasted with that of Lemuel Gulliver's world, and subsequently revealed many of the absurdities of the 18th century British society from which he came.

Swift's most biting parody--and the one which Boulle must have borrowed as a basis for his novel--was Book IV: "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms." Gulliver finds himself stranded in a society of intelligent horses, who do not (for example) understand human concepts such as war, the telling of lies, or sexual passion. In fact, humans are commonly referred to as Yahoos by the Houyhnhnms, and are shunned by the graceful creatures. When Gulliver's ship is wrecked and he first washes ashore, he is mistaken as a Yahoo by the Houyhnhnms. He is caged and marked for extermination. Gradually, though, his intelligent actions reveal Gulliver to be "civilized." He is adopted by one of the Houyhnhnms, and quickly learns much about their advanced but emotionally sterile society. The Houyhnhnms (like their Vulcan descendants, a few centuries later) have purged all emotion from their society, and structure lives devoted to pure reason. While Gulliver may admire the horses for their intellect, he finds them soulless; and yet, he has nothing in common with the bestial humans. By the end of the story, the ship's Captain is ready to return to his less than perfect English society. Swift reminds us that no matter how bad we may find some of the political or cultural aspects of our society, ironically, it is still our own society.

Similarly, the great English novelist Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) wrote about another Dystopia, set in 2108 after an atomic and bacteriological war has devastated most of the world and apes now rule in place of man. Written in 1948 as an original screenplay (then later released in book form), Ape and Essence follows the attempts of a human biologist to make sense out of the topsy-turby world. When a group of researchers from New Zealand, the last bastion of human society untouched by the final war, arrive in post holocaust Los Angeles, Alfred "Stagnant" Poole is captured by ruthless, de-evolved humans. He discovers their society has gone savagely wrong, with science being replaced by a type of devil worship. A baboon culture, on the other hand, living concurrently with the humans, is far more civilized, and has replaced man's society with one modeled after Hollywood's golden age. The baboons are contemptuous of the savage humans, and take steps to limit their reproduction by introducing the new creed of Belial, which preaches sexual abstinence (for all but two days out of the year). Poole is shocked by all he sees, and returns by his schooner to New Zealand with news that America is beyond all hope of salvation. The pessimism of Huxley's book is unalleviated, and its presentation, as the work of a misanthropic screenwriter, pokes fun not only at human folly but also the studio system in Hollywood. His work nicely anticipates the kind of struggle that Arthur P. Jacobs would go through to make Boulle's novel a film.

Monkey Planet

La planete des singes, a witty, philosophical tale belonging properly with Karel Capek and other social satirists of the day, was first published in 1963. The idea of a world where apes had evolved into an intelligent society and where human were hunted

or enslaved was hardly a new one. Both Swift and Huxley had imagined similar worlds, but Boule's ironic yet compassionate message, pinpointing many of the problems he saw in his world, struck a raw nerve. His novel was translated by Xan Fielding into English, and released in Great Britain as Monkey Planet; later, it was retitled Planet of the Apes for its American release. Few realized at the time the kind of impact the novel would have upon Jacobs and the Hollywood establishment, but the author simply regarded it as one of his minor works.

Pierre Boule was born in Avignon, France, on February 20, 1912. Trained as an electrical engineer, Boule spent eight years in Malaysia as a planter and a soldier. He wrote both William Conrad, his first novel, and his best known work, The Bridge On the River Kwai, while he was stationed there. (He later received an Academy Award for scripting that novel into film.) When he returned home a disillusioned ex-patriot, he began writing moral fables to contrast his profound experience in the Orient with those absurdities of life he found in France. Three of his books, Contes de l'absurde (1953), E=MC2 (1957) and Garden on the Moon (1965), took to task his distress about science and man's overdependence on machines. They have been all classified as works of science fiction by the world press, but Boule has rejected that label, preferring to call his work social fantasy.

When he wrote the original novel, which became Planet of the Apes, Boule was inspired by a visit to the zoo where he watched the gorillas. "I was impressed by their human-like expressions," he explained. "It led me to dwell upon and imagine relationships between humans and apes." Sketching out the novel over a period of six months, Boule called upon several familiar devices--almost cliches—to tell his story. He

wasn't really interested in writing a science fiction novel; but to get his characters from the earth to his imaginary world, he relied on space travel and Einstein's relativity theory.

Monkey Planet, structured in many ways like Swift's Gulliver's Travels and other incredible journeys from the 18th and 19th centuries, begins within a story frame. Jinn and Phyllis, a wealthy couple of leisure, are rocketing around the cosmos on holiday when they discover a message in a bottle. Written in some ancient dialect that Jinn thinks might have originated on a forgotten green world known as Earth, the multi-lingual space traveler translates for his wife. . .

"I am confiding this manuscript to space, not with the intention of saving myself, but to help, perhaps to avert the appalling scourge that is menacing the human race. Lord have pity on us. . ." the narration begins. Ulysse Merou, a little known journalist from Earth, has spent the last few months on a planet where apes have evolved into sentient beings and humans are ignorant savages. When he and his two companions first left Earth in the year 2500 bound for the star Betelgeuse, some 300 light years away, they had hoped to make contact with some intelligent alien civilization. Professor Antelle, a learned French scientist, had perfected a new acceleration rocket (which travels at the speed of light), and they made the journey in less than two years. Back on Earth, according to Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, nearly three and a half centuries had passed.

Once their ship started decelerating toward Betelgeuse, Merou, Antelle and the expedition's physician Arthur Levain began making calculations to land on a planet revolving at a distance equivalent to the Sun and Earth. The planet had apparently developed a similar atmosphere, collection of continents and cities, and many of the same

plants and animals. Descending in their space "launch," while the ship remained in orbit, they were surprised to discover the planet's strange resemblance to the Earth. They could see roads, landmarks, cities and towns that had twins back at home in France. The three explorers, with their chimpanzee mascot Hector, simply accepted the parallels, and named the new planet Soror.

But before any of them could explore further, several savage humans, resembling primitive cavemen, descended from the trees and killed Hector. The primitives then welcomed the three astronauts with strange grunts, and offered to feed them. Merou was, at first, shocked by their murder of the chimpanzee, but gradually accepts his new "friends," in particular Nova--a beautiful cave girl. Professor Antelle and Arthur Levain study the primitives with a much more discerning eye; Levain, a misanthrope, does not expect much from man, and is not surprised by the actions of the savage humans. To him, man has always been a primitive savage, and nothing in man's history has proven otherwise. Antelle takes a more scientific approach; he studies their simple customs, and discerns that man has devolved into primitives leaving his vast civilization in ruin. But the professor believes they can be re-educated.

Mere moments later, their study of the primitives is interrupted by the sounds of four-wheel drive vehicles speeding through the jungle paradise. The human savages scatter in all directions, leaving Merou and the others to wonder what has frightened them. Ulysse Merou is surprised by what he finally sees. Gorillas wearing pith helmets and carrying high-powered hunting rifles drive into their view, and begin shooting the primitives. The three astronauts run for their lives, and are separated from each other: Levain is killed and ends up as a mounted specimen in the simian's museum of natural

history. Antelle suffers a severe blow to the head, and shows up later as an exhibit at a local zoo. The narrator is wounded and hospitalized for medical attention. (Nova is likewise captured, and caged with Merou.)

Though temporarily dazed by his situation and new surroundings, Ulysse Merou manages to convince Dr. Zira, a female chimpanzee veterinarian, that he is intelligent. She naturally doesn't understand French (being his native tongue on Earth), but Merou is able to make his meanings known by sign language. Gradually, he learns to speak the simian language, and Zira learns a few phrases of French. Merou explains that he has traveled light years to her planet from Earth, and is delighted to communicate with such an intelligent creature as herself. She is charmed by his manner, and introduces him to Cornelius, a young member of the Academy of Science and her fiancée. Cornelius is also astounded by the intergalactic traveler. Their interest in Merou is strongly discouraged by Dr. Zaius, a stately orangutan who is one of the chiefs of state. He fears that the human is some type of mutant sent among them to destroy the simian culture.

Ulysse Merou is released from his captivity, given an apartment in a city not that dissimilar from Paris, and allowed to speak before the President. His speech before the President and the Scientific Congress is carried live on all the television stations. He states: "Illustrious President, noble Gorillas, learned Orangutans, wise Chimpanzees . . . I know my appearance is grotesque, my figure repulsive, my features bestial, my smell sickening, the color of my skin disgusting. But I am a rational being, not a mechanical toy or parrot, and I come from a distant planet known as Earth."

At first, the simians react to him with laughter and disgust; but then, little by little, they accept Merou as an equal. He becomes the toast of the town, the hit at every party

and the celebrity that everyone wants to meet. Merou adjusts to this life of fame, and takes Nova as his common-law wife. (Apparently, only apes are allowed to marry in this society.) He teaches her how to talk, and surprises Zira, Cornelius and Zaius with her ability to learn. Ulysse Merou also reveals that his "wife" is pregnant with their first child. Cornelius has important news of his own; he has discovered in his archeological digs a burial mound with human skeletons. The mound itself is meaningless, but the implication that humans once buried their dead confirms a theory Cornelius has had about the evolution of their species. Naturally, Zaius is alarmed by the two revelations, and is now convinced more than ever that Merou represents a clear and present danger to the future of the simian race. (Zaius secretly orders his gorilla henchman to have Merou sterilized and Nova killed before she can give birth.)

During a routine visit to the zoo, Merou discovers his fellow astronaut, Antelle, caged behind bars with the other savage humans. He attempts to talk to the old professor, but the man no longer understands or recognizes him. Merou is saddened by this chance meeting, and realizes that the simians will always look upon him and other humans like him as nothing more than animals. He brings his concerns to Cornelius, but the chimpanzee scientist is too involved in a new experiment. Cornelius is using brain surgery to make primitive humans talk. Merou is not amused by his "marvelous achievement," and returns home disgusted and depressed.

Zira soon learns of the orangutan's secret plot, and arranges for Ulysse, Nova and her newborn child to escape. They have been kept under close watch, but not close enough. Cornelius substitutes one of his experimental humans for each of them, and they slip away to Merou's space ship. Zaius, who cannot make the distinction between one

man or another, celebrates his triumph, while the fugitives blast off for home. Three and a half years later, Merou and his family arrive back on Earth to discover that, in the centuries since his absence, simians have risen to dominance and man has de-evolved into primitive animals. . .

Phyllis and Jinn finish reading Ulysse Merou's narrative and conclude that it is a work of fantasy. Man is incapable of rational thought; only apes have the capacity for knowledge and intellect. Phyllis and Jinn are chimpanzees!

Pierre Boulle's La planete des singes is a very witty tale full of irony and social satire. The novel works nicely on a number of levels; first, as an action-adventure featuring a reluctant hero, evil villains and an exotic location; then, as a biting parody of human conventions and folly, and finally, as a historical indictment revealing man's dangerous flirtation with powerful forces beyond his control. Like Swift, the book can be read by both children and adults, with enough substance to satisfy both tastes. Like Huxley, the notion of a world where simians have evolved into an intelligent society and where man is the animal provides a wonderful balance of contrasts, both philosophically and morally. Even the wraparound story featuring Jinn and Phyllis helps to punctuate the ironic ending. The ending of the book is unexpected; most who read it for the first time (after having seen the movie) expect Merou to discover the Statue of the Liberty. But from Boulle's perspective, his ending is far more rational and unexpected, even if it's not cinematic.

The book was an immediate success when it was first printed in Great Britain (under the title Monkey Planet), then later released in the United States as Planet of the Apes. Most critics drew the immediate connection to Jonathan Swift's work, and hailed

Boulle as the next great satirist; others identified the tale properly with Karel Capek's R.U.R. and Huxley's Ape and Essence. Before the book was even released in the English language, Arthur P. Jacobs had purchased the rights. He had been in Europe shopping for "a new 'King Kong.'" Jacobs didn't want to remake "King Kong," but he was looking for material that might make a big picture like "Kong". A literary agent called from Paris, and invited him to read the work of Françoise Saigan. Jacobs complied with his wishes, but wasn't particularly thrilled with the work. During the meeting, the agent mentioned Boulle's novel, and the Hollywood producer purchased the rights based on a short description by the agent. Jacobs later read the novel, and found that it far surpassed his expectations. To him, Boulle was a genius.

After the success of the original film, Arthur P. Jacobs did ask Boulle to write a sequel for him. Boulle agreed, and presented them with an interesting story treatment, titled "The Planet of Man." As with most motion pictures, the story underwent a number of changes to become "Beneath the Planet of the Apes." Of course, the changes were so numerous that Boulle considered the second film an inferior sequel. In his treatment, Taylor realizes that man is still capable of learning, and attempts to educate them back to normal life. The apes view his teaching as a great danger, and a terrible war breaks out between the simians and the humans. Some of the primitives challenge Taylor's leadership because of his desire to make peace with the apes, and in the end the humans totally destroy the simian culture.

Taken together, Boulle's original novel and treatment for a sequel are highly imaginative works. But neither is particularly cinematic. In fact, once Arthur P. Jacobs had purchased the rights to Monkey Planet, he had to find a talented screenwriter who

knew how to turn an abstract piece of satire into a saleable motion picture. Jacobs turned to one of Hollywood's most skilled writers—Rod Serling.

For Your Consideration: Rod Serling

Rod Serling, the creator of The Twilight Zone and Night Gallery, had been born on Christmas Day in Syracuse, New York, 1924. An army paratrooper in the Second World War, he later studied at Antioch College under the GI Bill. In 1948, he went to New York as a fledgling writer. Freelancing in radio and then television, he wrote ninety scripts before signing a contract with CBS. He worked as a teleplay writer for Kraft Theatre, Playhouse 90, The Hallmark Hall of Fame--from which came his Emmy-winning scripts "Patterns" (1955), "Requiem for a Heavyweight" (1956) and "The Comedian" (1957). In 1959, he created the science fiction anthology series, The Twilight Zone, and won a Peabody Award, two Sylvania awards, and four Writer's Guild awards for his work. Soon after, he turned to writing motion picture scripts, adapting two of his winning television plays and the screenplay for John Frankenheimer's "Seven Days in May"(1964). Serling was considered one of the finest talents in the industry, and the ideal writer to cleverly adapt Boule's novel.

While Arthur P. Jacobs spent the next three and a half years trying to sell the idea to one of the studios, Rod Serling labored to produce a useable screenplay. He could hardly be considered an original writer, but he did have a knack for turning existing ideas into workable stories. Rod did his best with the book, replacing some of its more labored allegories with tight dramatic situations and action sequences. But no amount of creative writing could hide Boule's weak plotting, stilted characters or the novel's overblown

parody. Serling simply stuck to the basics of the story, overlaying many of his own ideas and commentaries. The resultant screenplay was an effective if not highly original effort.

"In my initial version, the ape society was not in limbo as it was in the film," Serling revealed. "It had an altogether twentieth-century technology--a modern city in which the doors and automobiles were lower and wider. All living was adjusted to the size of the anthropoid, and I felt the overall concept was much more accessible for contemporary audiences. But of course it was much too expensive to do."

Unlike the original novel, Serling's script begins in space aboard an interstellar craft just as three astronauts are awakened from deep sleep. John Thomas, a tall broad-shouldered man in his mid-thirties, is the captain of the mission, and the narrative's cynical hero. William Dodge, a stocky man in his twenties, and Paul Lafever, a soft-spoken, introspective man in his forties, are the other two members of the expedition. They have traveled several light years to reach this unknown planet orbiting the giant star Betelgeuse. According to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, more than a century has passed on earth, while they've aged hardly a day.

Descending to the planet in a small pod, they land on the earth-like planet. They emerge amidst trees, mountains, lush foliage and waterfalls; they hear the sound of birds, feel a light wind and recognize the semblance of human laughter off in the distance. Thomas, Dodge and Lafever feel as if they have discovered paradise, and climb out of their spacesuits to take a swim in an unspoiled lake. At the beach, however, they find the footprint of a woman, and trace other evidence of humanoid life to people living in the trees. Thomas warns them not to show any hostile movements and urges his men to put away their weapons. The primitives are naked, and react to the men's strange clothes.

Thomas divests himself of his shorts and the savages react positively to him. He then shows them how to open a coconut with his knife, and they react positively to his prowess with the weapon. They are like animals in a zoo--Thomas reasons, with a big smile. A woman (later identified as Nova) tries to smile back, but she can't quite make a smile; the facial expression is difficult for her.

Later that night, around a campfire, the astronauts continue to study the primitives. The humanoids are gentle, tentative, curious and basically intelligent, but they are clearly low on the evolutionary ladder--not even to the stage of the Neanderthal on Earth. They have no culture, no language, no art, and are surprised by the fire. Dodge considers setting himself up as king, with seven wives (one for each day of the week), while Thomas exchanges smiles with Nova. Lafever warns both of them about Cortez and the Aztecs. His words echo coldly in the darkness as they turn in for the night.

Thomas and Lafever are awakened in the morning by the sound of a car straining in low gear. They wake their friend, and climb a nearby hill for a better look. Two apes dressed immaculately in the white garb and pith helmets of British hunters emerge from the vehicle. Other apes quickly join them for a mass hunting expedition as literally hundreds of clothed apes and monkey forms fire shots at the fleeing humans. Literally hundreds of primitives are wiped out in the first few seconds by the gunfire, while others flee in terror. Thomas falls, clutching his hand to his throat, the victim of a stray bullet. Lafever is scooped up in a giant net, and Dodge is simply killed outright.

Sometime later, in an animal hospital, a veterinarian chimpanzee named Zira pays Thomas a visit. She is alert and intelligent; she carries a leather briefcase, and tends to his throat wound with great kindness and expertise. Because of Thomas's ability to move

his lips but not make sounds, they think he's probably an escaped circus animal. He still wears trousers and a ring from Annapolis. Days turn into weeks as Thomas continues to heal; the guards are cruel to him, but Zira treats her pet "blondie" (Thomas) with utmost care. She believes that he can talk, and is a most prime specimen to her. The Earth astronaut tries to write words on the wall and in the sand, but Zira simply doesn't see them. Frustrated, Thomas grabs for her pen, but is shoved back into his cell.

Once Thomas is fully healed, Zira introduces Dr. Zaius, an orangutan official, to her "man," promising the eminent ape that they'll learn something special from him. Zaius dismisses Thomas' attempts to speak as mere mimicry. "Man cannot learn," he decries. "He can respond to conditioned reflexes, but no more." Zaius then recalls a situation in which a female, aged 18, could actually speak about a dozen words, but could not relate the words together. The orangutan is frightened by Thomas, and suggests that Zira try experimental brain surgery to discover just how intelligent the creature really is. Then, for laughs, Zaius taunts Thomas with Nova, before finally shoving the primitive woman into his cage.

When a delivery truck arrives with supplies, Thomas seizes the opportunity to escape. He hides out in the truck as the vehicle moves out into the city. He watches as it passes stores with ape mannequins in the window; sees chimps and monkeys walking back and forth, and a gorilla policeman directing traffic. Outside a movie theatre (in a tip of the hat to Aldous Huxley), Thomas views the large poster of two monkeys in passionate embrace. The astronaut nearly manages to get out of the city when he is spotted by two children. Cries from the frightened children summon a nearby gorilla cop who pursues the human. Thomas is chased down the sidewalk, then recaptured.

Three weeks pass, while Dr. Zira continues a series of intelligence tests. Thomas again tries to write Zira a note, and succeeds with a simple message: "I can speak. I am a civilized man. I am from another planet." Zira takes her pet to a special lecture hall for conversation, and in the course of an hour learns about Thomas' incredible ordeal. He reveals through notes that he is from Earth and that a shuttle from his atomic-powered spaceship landed on their planet. He also demands to know what happened to his fellow astronauts survived. But she has no answer. She is completely astounded by him. Even though she's still not convinced that this is a clever hoax, Zira puts a call into animal control and learns that they captured at least one other who was wearing strange clothes.

Thanks to a mutual friend of Zira's, Thomas finds Lafever behind bars, caged like a wild animal. Thomas is initially elated until he realizes that Lafever is no longer the same--he has been changed. His brain has been cut open, and he is missing the key elements that had made him intelligent. Thomas begins to sob.

At the National Academy of Science, Zira presents her astounding discovery to a group of scientists. They are skeptical. They find it hard to accept that, on Thomas' home planet of Earth, humans are in the ascendancy and apes are kept in cages. They dismiss it as a joke. Even Dr. Zaius thinks its some kind of hoax perpetrated by a ape training the human. "Within a week, he will regain his voice, and I'll expect your apologies then," Zira concludes leaving with Thomas. Dr. Zaius has other plans for the human, and sends him to the surgical wing for experimental brain surgery. Zira is aghast, but powerless to save him. However, just as the surgery is to begin, Thomas exclaims, "No. Get away! Let me alone!"

News of the talking human spreads quickly through the simian community, and a congressional committee is hastily convened to consider the matter.

Thomas is ushered down the long central aisle of the Congressional chamber toward the podium. Flashbulbs go off in his face; television cameras grind; laughter fills the room until the Gorilla president, wearing a frock coat and bow tie, rises from the speaker's diadem and walks to the lectern. He introduces Thomas, who has asked to talk to the assembly members. Thomas is dressed in an ill-fitting suit, and talks to them about the world he is from. He says that men are the intelligent ones on Earth, but he is pleased by the wisdom of the apes to let him talk. He tells them that he came to the ape planet in a nuclear-powered spaceship, but his plans are not hostile. He wants just to make contact with them. He is then questioned by reporters. They want to know where his craft is, but he remains guarded. He is a success, however, redeeming himself admirably.

Dr. Zaius continues to be annoyed, and meets secretly with the Gorilla president. He's worried that Thomas may well be far superior to them in technology, and might unleash his superior power in wars of conquest. The President reluctantly agrees with the learned orangutan, and discusses ways to control and/or silence their space faring visitor. Meanwhile, Zira introduces Thomas to their way of government, their religious institutions, and her fiancée Cornelius. Thomas finds many similarities and many differences between their two cultures. For example, he is surprised to learn that Church attendance is mandatory, and that young people are placed in apprenticeship programs to learn skills. What strikes Thomas the most is the fact that the simian culture is a fairly young one, with little in the way of ancient schools of art.

At a museum, Thomas sees Dodge stuffed in an exhibit about primitive man, and becomes enraged. Zira comforts him by arranging to have Nova brought to him. Thomas tries to adjust to his new life, taking Nova as his common-law wife. He teaches her how to talk, and surprises Zira, Cornelius and Zaius with her ability to learn. "He has proven himself remarkably adaptable," Zaius comments with irony. "He goes from the floor of a cage to the giver of social teas." At the tea, Nova begins to talk--asking if they want lemon or cream in their tea. Zaius is upset; he sees the writing on the wall about their future. (He wants Thomas sterilized before he can impregnate Nova with his offspring.)

Cornelius has important news of his own. While the leader of the Fourth Northern Archeological Expedition, he discovered evidence of an earlier culture--possibly older than the apes. He invites both Zaius and Thomas to review artifacts and potteries at the main camp, in particular a large rectangular box. Later, when they open the box, the two apes find a human skeleton. (The box is a coffin, and they have stumbled upon a burial ground.) Zaius dismisses it as a pet semetary, but Cornelius has also found a tombstone with human writing. (Apparently, man was once civilized enough to bury the dead.) Zaius is not convinced, but Thomas begins reconstructing in his mind a human civilization not that different from his own. The evidence mounts when they discover a human doll that talks, and this revelation opens the door to the knowledge that man was first. Man was once the dominant creature on the planet, but somehow his great civilization collapsed and was replaced by a simian one.

When they discover an old reel of film, which is mostly damaged, the truth becomes shockingly clear. Thomas expertly threads the film into a projector, and they

all watch a section of the film showing the mushroom cloud from a hydrogen bomb. The credits then roll, revealing "This film has been prepared by the Atomic Energy Commission. Filmed with the Cooperation of the United States Air Force." Thomas is stunned; he tells everyone that this is Earth, and that they've uncovered the remnants of his Earth society from 1000 years before. His spaceship must have traveled in both time and space, and he ended up back on Earth in a time warp. Man must have bombed himself back to the stone age, and in the ensuing centuries apes must have emerged as the dominant creature.

Zaius doesn't like Thomas' rewriting of history, and orders his gorillas to strike. The astronaut struggles to retain his freedom, but ends up in hospital. Zira is there; Thomas is afraid he'll be lobotomized, but Zira promises to protect him; she has also hidden Nova. "History has been rewritten again," Zira decries, holding up a newspaper revealing: "Earth Man--Space Traveler a Hoax" "Scientific Academy Admits 'Creature was a Mechanical Man'" Thomas is scheduled for experimental brain surgery, but Zira has no desire to see him lobotomized. Later, in the operating theatre, Zira rescues her pet by switching a mechanical man for Thomas. Zaius operates on the mechanical man, while Thomas and Nova escape with Zira's blessing. As they blast off into space, Cornelius and Zira watch them go, and Zira tells him that man might yet build a good world.

Serling does manage to streamline Boulle's overblown parody into a harrowing, bizarre and masterful story, but the first few drafts of the screenplay are less than perfect. The action is reduced to a few key sequences that move the story along at a far greater pace than the original novel. From the astronaut's landing and their first contact with the

primitive humans to the torturous hunt and Thomas' eventual capture, Serling's plot moves at a breakneck speed. Regrettably, the story slows down to a snail's pace (as in the novel) in the second act, while the experienced Twilight Zone scripter indulges in his own brand of sermonizing. Boule's imaginative satire may well be gone, but it has been replaced by Serling's need to bludgeon the audience with his views on society, cultural pretenses and nuclear annihilation. Far too much time is wasted moving Thomas from his cage to the Congressional Chambers and finally into the public sector. The menace of Dr. Zaius is moved into the background, and the overall tone of the piece becomes comedic (following Thomas from one simian function to the next).

By the third act, all the tension of the opening scenes has been lost, and Serling has to rebuild that sense of anxiety and terror with an entirely new threat. He also waits until the later scenes to introduce Cornelius, Zira's fiancé, then assigns him far too many duties. In fact, his expedition almost seems like an after-thought in order to provide Serling with an excuse to introduce the lost film on the atomic bomb. By this time, the ending of the motion picture is no longer a surprise. We all know that the planet is Earth, and his surprise revelation is not particularly effective. Any person who has seen an episode of The Twilight Zone is well aware of Rod Serling's fondness for twist endings, but he has telegraphed this ending all along.

In an interview shortly before his death, Serling claimed that he had written another ending which reflected Boule's original notions. "The book's ending is what I wanted to use in the film, as much as I loved the idea of surprise twist. I always believed that the original ending would have been better," he defended. But in the final version of

the script submitted by Serling, he had abandoned the novel in favor of a completely different ending suggested by Jacobs.

The famous and most visually-striking scene in "Planet of the Apes," when Thomas (later renamed Taylor) and his primitive bride Nova come upon the half-sunken Statue of Liberty, was the result of two or three people thinking exactly the same thing at the same time. While having lunch with Blake Edwards, the director who was originally chosen to helm the picture, Arthur P. Jacobs suggested they needed some dramatic way to inform audiences that the whole adventure had taken place on Earth. He and his lunch companion discussed many alternatives, including the latest draft that Serling had submitted with the lost spool of film. Edwards complained that it didn't work because it was too predictable, but couldn't think of an alternative that might be used. Jacobs felt equally pressed for an original idea.

As the two filmmakers finished their lunch, and prepared to walk out, they looked up at a mural of the Statue of Liberty painted on the back wall of the delicatessen. Jacobs and Edwards both looked at each other and exclaimed, "Rosebud." Arthur P. Jacobs added, "If we never had lunch in that delicatessen, I doubt that we would have had the Statue of Liberty as the end of the picture." They contacted Serling, and yet another draft of the picture was prepared with the new ending. (Years after the film was released, Boulle commented that he "disliked the ending that was used," preferring his own.)

The Charles Eastman Draft

Rod Serling completed several additional drafts for Jacobs, working well over a year and finishing between thirty and forty drafts. He jokingly said, at the time, he could have "taken the excess pages and made a series out of them." But his work still lacked

the narrative punch that the studios were looking for in the screenplay. For one, Serling had placed (in keeping with Boule) the ape society in the Twentieth Century, and for two, the dialogue was still far too stilted, allegorical, even for a science fiction film. Jacobs showed Serling's most recent draft to actor Charlton Heston, and he was immediately taken with the project. (At the time, Heston was one of the most popular and influential actors in Hollywood, and he had also starred in some of the most successful films of all time, including "The Ten Commandments" (1956), "Ben-Hur" (1959), and "El Cid" (1961).) Heston made a few suggestions of his own, and recommended director Franklin Schaffner, whom he had just worked on "The War Lord" (1965), to Jacobs. The three met, and tossed various ideas around, but neither Heston nor Schaffner thought the film would ever get made. Charlton Heston wrote in his journal on November 3, 1965: "'The Planet of the Apes' project seems in limbo. It's certainly the different kind of script that I'd like to make into a film."

When Serling departed, he was replaced by a young screenwriter from Hermosa Beach, California—Charles Eastman. Jacobs provided Eastman with a copy of the original novel, several of Serling's best drafts, and instructions to punch up the dialogue and breath some life into the characters. Eastman wrote roughly forty pages, and was then discharged. His screenplay was almost completely unusable. The following summary may provide a clue as to why.

Fifty light years away from Earth, a spaceship begins decelerating around the main sequence star Rumford in preparation for a landing on the third planet. According to the ship's chronometers, four hundred and fifty years have passed on Earth, while less than a few years have passed on the ship. A map of the universe shows its course

through space, listing Andromeda, Tau Ceti, Betelgeuse and the Sol systems. In the pilot's seat, a skeletal figure sits, watching over the command station with lifeless eyes. The figure has been dead for years, and the rotting decay has left only an empty spacesuit and bones.

The ship's computer brings members of the crew to life from their hibernation chambers. Several dozen members stir to life, and climb out of their deep-sleep stations, disoriented, covered in a chemical pudding. Each of the members of the crew are classified as a Command (for administrative and command duties), an Index (for computer access), an Elite (for reproduction) and a Drone (for heavy labor). The classifications are designed to correlate work assignments, and prevent overlap. Elite 25 Petchnikoff, a rosy blind man in his 60's, is one of the first to arise, and carries his pet monkey to his quarters. Index 0 O'Toole, a young man, helps Index 53 Reverse Maryanne, a sleek woman who knows about agriculture, to her feet, and proceeds to tell the woman how attracted he is to her. Command 81 Boise, the communications' expert, reports that they are unable to contact Earth. Command 60 Maddox, the nominal hero of the story, pulls himself together, and orders all the others to their stations. The ship itself, christened "Immigrant One," is an agriculture vessel designed to transport farming samples and colonists to another star system.

Their first crisis arises when they discover that Command 1 Duffy, the ship's senior officer, has died en route to their destination. He has apparently tampered with their controls, and they are nearly a year ahead of schedule. Petchnikoff says, "Things are not as they should be . . ." And his sentiments are echoed throughout the entire crew. What they don't know is that their mission was purposely destined to fail.

Command 60 Maddox takes command of the ship, arranging to have Duffy's computer chip installed in his head so that he can control the ship . . .

Charles Eastman's script ends at this point in the narrative, roughly forty pages (or forty minutes) into the story. One of the most obvious problems with his effort has to do with exposition. So much time is spent on exposition, establishing all the characters and their job classifications, that there is little time left to introduce menacing apes. In point of fact, there is very little menace to the story, and that translates as very little action. Admittedly, the mysterious death of Captain Duffy and our desire to learn what he has done to the space ship pique our interest. But isn't this supposed to be a movie about apes?

Enter Michael Wilson

When the Charles Eastman script proved unusable, Jacobs hired Michael Wilson to write a new draft of "Planet of the Apes" based on one of Serling's treatments. Contrary to popular belief, Wilson did not actually collaborate with Rod Serling on the script. But Wilson was the ideal choice for this work as he had provided unaccredited rewrites of "The Bridge on the River Kwai" and "Lawrence of Arabia," two the great cinema epics of the day. Years earlier, he had won an Academy Award for his screenplay for "A Place in the Sun" (1951) and a Writer's Guild award in 1957 for "Friendly Persuasion." He had also distinguished himself with the screenplays for "Five Fingers" and the critically received "Salt of the Earth."

"Rod Serling and I did not collaborate," Michael Wilson explained. "He wrote the first draft screenplay. I wrote the second, third and final drafts."

Wilson liked much of what he read in that first draft screenplay, including the scene breakdown, the concept of the piece and the overall thrust of action. Like Jacobs, he found the dialogue stilted, and never believed in the contemporary feel of the story. Much of his rewrite focused on those two areas. He shortened the story, choosing to restrict the central human figure to long-term captivity and thus reduce the number of scenes (and ultimately scene changes). He displaced the ape culture to one that was both socially and politically in a state of limbo; even though the dialogue was purposely contemporary, the look of the simian world was somehow removed from modern times. Wilson also renamed two of the key players, and took a crack at incorporating Jacob's twist ending more into the overall makeup of the story. His final draft became the blueprint for the highly successful and award-winning motion picture.

Hurtled some 2,000 years through time and space, measured in terms of interstellar mathematics and two onboard clocks, four American astronauts crashland in the wilderness of an unidentified planet around the giant star Betelgeuse when their spacecraft suffers a malfunction. The lone female in the quartet dies; but the male survivors, including Taylor, a misanthrope, Dodge, a scientist, and Landon, an all-American, trek across countless miles of arid desert until they discover life-supporting vegetation. A footprint in the sand causes them to stumble upon a sub-human populace living like animals in the woods.

Their freedom is short-lived, however, for they are hunted and eventually captured by a band of mounted hunters--uniformed gorillas on horseback. During the frenzied hunt, the three astronauts are separated from each other: Dodge is killed and ends up as a mounted specimen in the simian's museum of natural history; Landon is used

in a laboratory experiment in which his frontal lobes are removed. Their leader, Taylor is wounded in the throat and hospitalized for medical attention.

Though temporarily mute, he is able to convince Dr. Zira and Cornelius, a young archeologist--both of whom are chimpanzees--that he can speak, read and write. Their interest in Taylor is strongly discouraged by Dr. Zaius, a stately orangutan who is one of the chiefs of state. Zaius suspects that Taylor is a mutant, and part of a much larger threat to the simian culture. When Taylor demonstrates that he can speak, and think, the orangutan orders him emasculated and lobotomized. (Zira and Cornelius are also charged with heresy, and accused of "creating" Taylor through a laboratory experiment.)

Zira, Cornelius and Lucius resent the infringement upon their freedom of thought and speech, and arrange for Taylor's escape from captivity. Because he has grown fond of a sub-human woman named Nova, Taylor insists that she accompany them. Fleeing into the Forbidden Zone where the spaceship crashed, they head for an important archeological dig that may have some answers about the ape's fear of humans. The party is overtaken by Zaius and his gorilla militiamen, but Taylor seizes Zaius as hostage, and the gorillas are ordered to retreat.

Once inside the cave, which is the site of the archeological discoveries, Cornelius displays artifacts that tell a different picture of their past. In particular, a talking doll confirms that man was first, and the simian culture evolved later. Zaius has known the truth all along. He reveals his fear of human civilization, pointing out that alone among God's primates, the human kills for sport, lust and greed. The simian religion preaches that "the human will make a desert of his home and yours . . . he should be driven back to his jungle lair for he is harbinger of death."

Taylor offers to release Zaius unharmed if the latter will promise not to press charges of heresy against Zira and Cornelius. Zaius agrees. The human astronaut then climbs on a horse with Nova, and heads down the beach to "his destiny." Not far from the cave, Taylor discovers the remains of the Statue of Liberty, sunken in the sand. He then realizes that he is still on Earth, having unknowingly passed through a time warp, thousands of years into the future. In agony, Taylor pounds the sand, decrying man's folly at destroying himself.

"Virtually all my work was in the final film--with one significant deletion," Wilson commented after the film was released. "In the penultimate drafts of "Planet of the Apes," Nova was pregnant with Taylor's child. In this version, Taylor was killed by the bullet of an ape sniper just after he sees the Statue of Liberty. The meaning is clear: if her unborn child is male and grows to manhood, the species will survive. If not, modern man becomes extinct. Such an ending left open the possibility of a sequel long before sequels were discussed. Nova's pregnancy was deleted from the film, I'm told, at the insistence of a high-echelon Fox executive who found it distasteful. Why? I suppose that, if one defines the mute Nova as merely "humanoid" and not actually human, it would mean that Taylor had committed sodomy."

The Battle to Make "Planet of the Apes"

Finally, with a workable script in hand and actor Charlton Heston and director Franklin Schaffner aboard, Arthur P. Jacobs approached Richard Zanuck, the head of production, and the Board of Directors at Twentieth Century-Fox with his pet project. Zanuck was the son of legendary studio chief Daryl F. Zanuck, who had literally resurrected Fox with hits like "The Longest Day" (1962), "The Chapman Report" (1962),

and “The Agony and the Ecstasy” (1965). Anxious to follow in his father’s footsteps, Richard Zanuck sought out prestige projects with popular actors and successful directors to further the profits of the studio. Heston and Schaffner were certainly two Hollywood professionals that he was interested in working with, but he expressed serious doubts about “Planet of the Apes.” He and the other executives at Fox thought that it would be impossible to convey intelligent simians realistically on film, and that no one would take it serious if they did. The biggest fear was that the motion picture would get laughed right out of the theaters.

Jacobs, Heston and Schaffner pushed Zanuck to reconsider his decision. For him and the Board of Directors at Fox, “Planet of the Apes” was a very risky undertaking. Science fiction films had not yet become the blockbusters of today, but were still very expensive in terms of special effects, costumes, and settings. Zanuck thought about his decision, and finally agreed to put fifty thousand dollars into developing a test of actors in simian make-up. The task of developing the complex make-up was first assigned to Ben Nye Sr., a favorite at Fox, then later delegated to John Chambers, who had done some extraordinary work on The Outer Limits television series. Zanuck had specifically asked for a make-up test, nothing more. But Schaffner and Heston thought they could do better than just a test, and allied with Jacobs, they shot a full scene from the movie with proper costumes and a set. The trio hired Edward G. Robinson as Zaius, James Brolin as Cornelius, and Zanuck’s then girlfriend Linda Harrison (who would eventually play Nova) as Zira. At the Fox Ranch, they filmed a five-minute sequence, which consisted of the confrontation scene between Heston as the astronaut Thomas (later renamed Taylor)

and Dr. Zaius in the cave with the human doll, with the dialogue by Rod Serling from one of his early drafts.

While the test proved that the simian make-up would work on a realistic level, Zanuck and his Board of Directors still believed that the science fiction film, which was projected to cost \$5 million, was too risky a gamble. Zanuck turned Jacobs down, and refused to talk to him further about the project. Then Twentieth Century-Fox released the special effects extravaganza “Fantastic Voyage” in 1966, and it shot right to the top of the box office charts. A science fiction film had proven to Richard Zanuck and his Board of Directors to be a viable force in the industry. With the help of Mort Abrahams, a long-time friend and associate, Jacobs lobbied Zanuck for the funds to make the movie, and finally Zanuck agreed.

Production Details

Immediately John Chambers was recalled from Madrid, where he was working on the television series I Spy, and asked to begin work on a more refined and permanent look for the simians in “Planet of the Apes.” Arthur P. Jacobs had learned through a mutual friend that producer-director Stanley Kubrick was shooting a sequence in his “2001: A Space Odyssey” involving primitive apes, and asked for permission to send Chambers to Shepperton Studios in England. Kubrick initially agreed, but then later rescinded his invitation when he learned that Jacobs was also making a science fiction film with apes. Chambers was forced to work on his own, and that was okay to him; he actually didn’t want to go to England because he knew that much of the work that was being done there was far removed from work in Hollywood. Instead, he took the very primitive work of Nye, added some of the techniques Jack Dawn had used with the

Cowardly Lion in “The Wizard of Oz”(1939), and improvised his own ideas to produce some of the finest make-up work in film.

With the problems over the complex make-up finally resolved, Arthur P. Jacobs hired the rest of his cast and crew. Charlton Heston was set to headline the picture as the human astronaut named Taylor, and Linda Harrison, as a favor to Richard Zanuck, would play the role of Nova, the primitive woman. Edward G. Robinson, who was suffering with a terminal heart condition (and would later die during filming of “Soylent Green” (1973), also with Heston), gave up his role as Dr. Zaius, somewhat reluctantly, to Maurice Evans, a noted Shakespearean actor. Julie Harris and Rock Hudson were considered for the pivotal roles of Zira and Cornelius, the simians who befriend and later free Taylor, but eventually those roles went to Kim Hunter, the Academy Award-winning actress of “A Streetcar Named Desire” (1951), and Roddy McDowell, the former child star from England. Other roles went to Lou Wagner, Jeff Burton, Bob Gunner, James Daly, and James Whitmore.

Production began on May 21, 1967, with some of the first sequences shot on location at the Grand Canyon and Page, Arizona, detailing the arrival of Taylor and his crew of fellow astronauts on the monkey planet. The area around Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell, which was pretty remote, had been used before by George Stevens to convey the holy land in “The Greatest Story Ever Told” (1965), and Charlton Heston felt right at home. A few years earlier, he had been standing in the same location, pretending to be John the Baptist in the Jordan River; now he was a modern day astronaut marooned on a hostile world where apes ruled. The irony did not escape him or other members of the crew, especially when the special effects team and the art department, headed by

William Creber, brought in sections of the wooden spaceship that would represent Taylor's crashed ship. Because of the roughed terrain and foreboding landscape, they all felt that God had transported them to another world.

Hundreds of locals from the small, sleepy town of Page were hired for \$25 a day to play apes or primitive humans in the scenes involving the discovery of the primitive human culture and the ape round-up of humans. Because Page, Arizona, was also near a local Indian reservation, Mort Abrahams invited members of the local tribe to participate as extras as well. This invitation triggered some unfortunate confrontations between the local townspeople, who were terribly racist against the Native Americans, and Indians from the reservation. Again, the irony of the situation did not escape the cast and production crew. "Planet of the Apes" was all about the issue of racism, and when local whites treated the native peoples with hatred and disdain, they were reflecting the central metaphor of the screenplay.

On June 7, 1967, the production moved to the Fox Ranch. The Fox Ranch, which was essentially Twentieth Century-Fox's backlot, functioned as the home of Ape City, including all of the interiors and exteriors. The tensions between the white and the Indians in Page, Arizona, were nothing compared to the problems of heat and heat exhaustion they faced in California. Many of the actors and actresses, including Kim Hunter and Roddy McDowall, struggled with heat stroke under the many layers of prosthetic make-up and costumes. At the close of shooting each day, McDowall would literally tear off his make-up with his fingertips, or would jump into his air-conditioned car and ride home with full make-up, literally scaring fellow passengers on the freeway. Heston also struggled with the elements, and came down with a nasty cold, while filming

the firehose sequence in prison. The hoarse voice that screams out, “Take your sticking paws off me, you damned dirty ape,” was not due to his years of training as an actor, but Charlton Heston suffering with strep throat.

During the first week of August of 1967, the climax of the film, in which Cornelius’s archeological discovery in the cave reveals the truth about the monkey planet, was shot on a soundstage at Fox. With the end of the production less than a week away, most members of the production crew and the actors were all tired, but satisfied with the work that they had done. Mort Abrahams and Arthur P. Jacobs were both very pleased that the production was on schedule, but Heston was having a problem with one of the scenes they still had to shoot. In the scene, that takes place just prior to their discovery of the doll, Lucius notices that Nova is sick, and Zira reveals to Taylor that she is pregnant with his child. Charlton Heston opposed that particular direction to the story, and fought the idea of Nova’s pregnancy. The producers convinced him to shoot the two-minute scene, including all of the coverage, with the proviso that they would decide later whether to use it or not. Schaffner filmed the scene, but later it was one of the first sequences cut from the finished film; in the end Heston won out.

The last scene to be filmed was also the last scene in the movie, in which Taylor and Nova ride away from the cave and discover the remains of the Statue of Liberty. That scene was shot on a stretch of California coastline located between Malibu and Oxnard, where the cliffs tower above the water some one hundred feet. In the original script, Taylor is killed by an ape sniper just after making his discovery, but no one like the way that played out, especially Heston. Fox was also pressuring Abrahams to cut the obscenities from Taylor’s final speech, but Heston felt that it was essential for his

misanthropic character to ask God to damn mankind for destroying the world. Mort Abrahams tried to offer a compromise, and asked Schaffner to shoot several different versions of the ending. In the end the director relented, and shot the scene only once, as it appears in the final film.

When Charlton Heston collapses in front of the shattered remains of the Statue of Liberty and realizes that the planet of the apes is actually Earth, audiences were stunned, and the sequence was forever immortalized in our collective consciousness. No other ending to the film would have worked as effectively, and that was due in a large part to the courage and determination of Franklin Schaffner. “Planet of the Apes” wrapped production on August 10, 1967, and then, after the addition of Jerry Goldsmith’s haunting score, it waited for its release.

The Film’s Release

Arthur P. Jacobs and Twentieth Century-Fox showed “Planet of the Apes” to critics on January 30, 1968, and were pleased by the almost overwhelming support of their project. Chicago’s American called the motion picture “thoughtful and exciting”; The Bulletin said that it was “the most interesting of the futuristic films we have had to date,” and The Denver Post declared that it “has to be one of the best science fiction films to have been done in a long, long time.” Not all of the reviews were positive, however. The Courier-Journal called the movie “a ponderous allegory,” while The Guardian wrote that the film had “a promising idea, and yet ultimately too cute.” But these reviews represented the minority opinion. Most of the other critics seemed to echo what Pauline Kael had written in the New Yorker: “‘Planet of the Apes’ is a very entertaining movie, and you’d better go see it quickly, before your friends take the edge off it by telling you

all about it. They will, because it has the ingenious kind of plotting that people love to talk about. It's just good enough to be worth the rush."

The film debuted to select audiences in some of the larger cities on February 15, 1968, following the premiere in New York City, and it became an overnight success, with each new weekend's grosses topping the previous weekend. By April of 1968, in part to squash the opening of rival production "2001: A Space Odyssey," "Planet of the Apes" opened wide to theaters around the country. People lined up around the block at many theaters and waited several hours to be among the first to see the film. By the end of the year the film had become one of Twentieth Century-Fox's all-time top grossing films, making \$22 million, and plans for a sequel were already under way.

At the Academy Awards celebration in 1969, the film was honored with a special achievement in make-up award—years before the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences formally created an award for make-up—and John Chambers accepted the Oscar on behalf of all of the people who had contributed so much to the success of the motion picture. Ironically, the make-up of the apes in Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey," a make-up design that Chambers had initially asked to see for inspiration, was completely overlooked by the Academy.

Critical Commentary

The strength of "Planet of the Apes" lies not in its award-winning make-up or top notch performances but in its use of allegory and metaphor. The central allegory, not unlike George Orwell's Animal Farm, shows us a snapshot of our world filtered through the lens of social satire. The class separation and prejudice of twentieth century America is represented by the distinct class structure of Ape society and its hatred of primitive

man. The orangutans, as best illustrated by Dr. Zaius, are the politicians and rich elite; they make the laws as the legislative branch of their government, and maintain control over the sacred texts; they hold sway the court systems, as evidenced in the tribunal that finds Taylor on trial for being human, and they rule the executive branch, deciding whether to allow another expedition to the Forbidden Zone. Their class is comprised mainly of older apes, and they seem to have lost touch with the wants and needs of the other classes. In many ways, they reflected the older leaders in the U.S. government who have lost touch the youth in the 1960's and had pushed the buttons to wage war in Southeast Asia for their own political purposes.

The chimpanzees, as illustrated by Zira and Cornelius, represented the scientists and intellectuals. They have no real political power of their own, and they are treated by the orangutans as second class members of society. They are also the ones who make the technological breakthroughs that challenge the stability of the established order. Like Einstein and Oppenheimer, they represented the scientists who first delivered the atomic bomb and then tried to limit its use; like the college and university professors, they were the ones who first protested against racism and Vietnam, and helped raise the level of awareness of the war and civil rights among their students who, in turn, carried on the fight. In "Planet of the Apes," the chimpanzees are portrayed as sympathetic figures who find their livelihood and very existence threatened when they try to protect Taylor (and what he represents) from the orangutan elite. Like so many university professors and college students before them, they are squashed by those who find their radical ideas to be a threat to the natural order.

The gorillas, as depicted so brilliantly by General Urko (in “Beneath the Planet of the Apes”), are the military enforcers and laborers. Blindly, with total obedience to the orangutan elite, they carry out the laws, and do the grunt work that none of the other classes would do. The gorillas occupy the lowest class in ape society, but they also have no fondness for chimpanzees. Like the lower classes of American society, they are wary of individuals who are educated, and treat them as supercilious fools and nitwits. They also follow the ruling elite without question for they represent the electorate who elected Richard Nixon to two terms in office. Likewise, the human primitives in the film, for whom Nova represents, are the slaves and mindless rabble who run naked, fornicate, and destroy the jungles of the world. They are the Africans who were captured by Europeans and sold into slavery in the Americas. They hold no place in Ape society except as the soulless primitive that must be domesticated or exterminated.

With their biting allegory in place, the filmmakers were able to make pointed observations about human society. Metaphors about religion, science, politics, racism, and prejudice abound in “Planet of the Apes.” While the apes clearly worship one god (presumably an Ape god) in a traditional monotheism, the orangutan elite makes no distinction between religion and science. Science, in ape culture, must support the foundation of their religious beliefs (as stated in the Sacred Scrolls) or it is simply not true science. For instance, when Cornelius attempts to offer an alternative theory to their creationist account of their universe, he is put on trial for heresy, and the evidence to prove his theory is sealed forever in a cave in the Forbidden Zone. Ape society has no tolerance for theories about evolution in a clever metaphor that reflects the twentieth century’s own struggles with evolution and creation theories. Similarly, when Taylor is

put on trial for being human, he doesn't stand a chance with a court, or rather inquisition, that has already made up its mind. The Catholic Church formed its own inquisition to stamp out radical new ideas, and likewise the McCarthy hearings in the 1950's had already determined the innocence or guilt of those accused of being Communists before they had a chance to speak; Michael Wilson who wrote the final version of the screenplay was one of those blacklisted writers, and Taylor's hearing reflects the kind of injustice Wilson and so many others faced.

At its best, science fiction always has a way of presenting controversial material without being attacked as controversial. The social statements and commentary in "Planet of the Apes" were particularly critical of America's development and deployment of the atomic bomb. For years, following the use of the bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, scientists and intellectuals warned the government about the consequences of nuclear war. A nuclear exchange with the Soviets or some other nuclear power would bring about the end of civilization as we know it. But the leaders in Washington did not seem to be overly concerned, and practiced a peculiar kind of nuclear diplomacy with the enemy during the cold war that always found the world mere moments from total annihilation. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the world came to the brink of nuclear war, but thankfully cooler heads prevailed. The world of "Planet of the Apes" was not as fortunate. Taylor and his fellow astronauts arrive two thousand years after a nuclear war has devastated the world, and caused an inversion in the natural order of things. At first, Taylor doesn't know that he has returned to Earth through some improbable time warp in space, but when he discovers the shattered remains of the Statue of Liberty—in one of the most memorable and enduring scenes in

all of cinema—that realization becomes clear. The American hero standing in front of the ruined icon of all of America’s aspirations and expectations sends a powerful message about America in the 1960’s. That apocalyptic vision of the Statue of Liberty, once a beacon of hope now laid waste, is a haunting one that stays with the audience long after the film is over.

“Planet of the Apes” is clearly one of the top science fiction films of the twentieth century, and not simply because of its huge entertainment value. The film holds up a mirror to its audience and asks us to look at ourselves, our hopes and fears, our dreams and nightmares. That is truly powerful cinema.

Final Thoughts

“Planet of the Apes” proved to be a surprisingly successful motion picture, and inspired four sequels, a short-lived television show, a Saturday morning cartoon series, a whole collection of tie-in books, comics and toys, and an inferior remake in 2001. The film was very well directed, and provided winning performances from Charlton Heston, Kim Hunter, Maurice Evans and Roddy McDowall. It also demonstrated that science fiction films could deal with very difficult and often profound subjects, and still be extremely entertaining. In retrospect, in spite of its singular major flaw (that all the apes seem to speak perfect English), “Planet of the Apes” is a classic work of cinema. Credit for its enduring legacy belongs clearly with the original novel by Pierre Boulle, the bold determination of producer Arthur P. Jacobs and the inspired screenplay by Rod Serling and Michael Wilson. The film endures today because it was one of the first films to explore relevant themes such as the threat of nuclear war, the nature of man himself and the direction in which humanity is headed as a species. At the time when it was released,

most science fiction was characterized by films like “Fantastic Voyage” and “Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea.” But “Planet of the Apes” proved that audiences were ready for intelligent and well thought-out entertainment.

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