

PLANET OF THE APES: THE TV SERIES

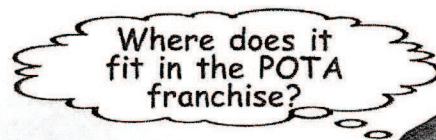
BY JAMES AQUILA

For many years 'Planet of the Apes' fans have debated exactly where the TV series fits within the greater Apes franchise. Is it a continuation of the movie series? If so, in what timeline does it take place? Or is it just another adaptation of Boulle's novel (like the Animated series and Tim Burton's movie) which belongs in its own self-contained universe? There are good and valid arguments to be made on every side of this debate. So where does the TV show fit?

ITS OWN UNIVERSE

A convincing case can be made that the TV show is, in fact, an independent adaptation of Pierre Boulle's original novel with no connection to any previous or subsequent version of the concept. Other than Roddy McDowall, no major figure from the production of the five films were involved in the TV series. Arthur P. Jacobs, the producer of the films, had died and his estate sold the rights to FOX. Series Producers Herbert Hirschman and Stanley Hough had only the most of peripheral involvement in the films. Nor is anyone from the films mentioned in the TV series credits. There is the familiar "Based on characters created by Pierre Boulle" at the end of each episode. But unlike the 2001 remake, which credits the 1968 screenplay by Rod Serling and Michael Wilson, there is no mention of them in the TV show's credits. This is unusual because much of the show's look, style, setting and background story is taken more from the film than from the novel.

In addition, Rod Serling had written the series outline and two scripts for the show. The scripts were never used and much of the outline, which included or referenced film characters, was excised from the show when it went into production. Instead the show featured a whole new set of human and ape characters. Taylor and Brent were replaced by Virdon and Burke as the astronauts on the 20th Century. Cornelius and Zira were gone with Galen taking their



place as the astronauts' Chimpanzee ally. Gorilla General Ursus became Chief of Security Urko. Only the Orangutan Zaius remained but in the show he is Head of the Apes High Council rather than Dr. Zaius, the Minister of Science as he was in the film.

Whether these changes were made for creative or financial reasons is unknown but certain elements were retained. Like the film, the Planet of the Apes is Earth after mankind has destroyed itself in a nuclear war. The hierarchy of Ape Society is the same with Orangutans as the ruling bureaucrats, Gorillas as the military and Chimpanzees as the intellectual class. The TV show also retained the rustic Ape world of the films (rather than the high-tech 20th century-like culture featured Boulle's novel) as well as costumes, props and Ape make-ups from the films. But that is where the similarities end.

Many elements from the films were also missing. There was no Forbidden Zone or Mutants. Nor was there any mention of the Lawgiver or Sacred Scrolls or any of the characters and events from the films. Virdon and Burke never mentioned Cornelius and Zira, who would have presumably arrived on Earth in 1973 before their mission was launched. When Zaius tells them of other astronauts who had landed 10 years before, neither Virdon nor Burke speculate that those astronauts might have been Taylor or Brent who had presumably been lost before them. And the biggest difference of all is that the indigenous humans on the planet could talk in the TV series while those in the films were mute animals.

Also, the TV series is set in the year 3085, separated from the events of any of the films by a thousand years. There was also a geographical separation. Taylor's Ape City was located on the East Coast while Virdon and Burke's adventures took place on the West Coast.

IT'S PART OF THE ORIGINAL TIMELINE

Many fans contend that the film series is broken into two distinct timelines. An *original* timeline seen in the first two films (*Planet* and *Beneath*) and a second, *altered*, timeline created by Cornelius and Zira traveling into the past which is depicted in the final three films (*Escape*, *Conquest* and *Battle*).

In this scenario the TV series fits into the original timeline later experienced by Taylor and Brent and this would explain why Virdon and Burke have no knowledge Cornelius and Zira.

It also jibes with the history of the original timeline as related by the Ape-o-nauts in *Escape*. According to Cornelius and Zira after a plague killed all dogs and cats, humans took primitive apes as pets. After three centuries the simian pets had evolved into slaves and after two more centuries the apes had started to rebel and learn to speak which then leads to the downfall of man. Assuming that this 500 year history started in the early 21st century would mean that Human civilisation lasted until about early 26th century. This is consistent with the picture of New York in the year 2503 seen in the first episode of the TV series, *Escape from Tomorrow*.

IT'S PART OF THE CIRCULAR TIMELINE

Of course while there are many fans that believe in two timelines there are just as many that believe the films represent a circular one. However, to fit the TV series into the circular timeline is a bit harder to do. More involved explanations are required to resolve the discrepancies between the films and the TV show.

The hardest to explain is why Virдон and Burke don't remember Cornelius and Zira. Maybe Virдон and Burke's mission was launched before the Ape-O-Nauts arrived on Earth. All that is known from the dialogue in the show is that Virдон and Burke's ship was approaching Alpha-Centauri when their ship hit radioactive turbulence and they lost control. It is never stated in any episode of the show when this occurred. The opening credits show the year as 1980. But that would be the year they were approaching Alpha-Centauri, not the year they were launched. Alpha-Centauri is almost four light-years from Earth. A ship traveling at the speed of light would take four years to get there. Taylor states in the first film that his ship was traveling at nearly the speed of light. While "nearly" is never defined it is slower than the speed of light. If Virдон and Burke's ship was capable of the same speed as Taylor's it would still take five years to reach Alpha-Centauri. But maybe Alpha-Centauri was the first destination on their mission and they were just passing by Alpha-Centauri on their way back to Earth. Or maybe they were traveling at much slower speed than Taylor's ship, only 60% the speed of light. Thus, it would take much more time to get to Alpha-Centauri. In *Planet*, Taylor states that his mission was man's first journey to a star. But Virдон and Burke's could have been the second launched a few months later. Brent's rescue mission in *Beneath* doesn't preclude this nor does the reference to the two missing ships in *Escape* since presumably Virдон and Burke's ship had not gone missing yet.

The picture of New York in 2503 is easier to explain because the picture shown in the episode was not a photograph, it was a drawing. Thus, it can be explained as being an artist's conception of what New York might look like in 2503. Because none of the other pictures of human civilization in the same book appear to be futuristic but are more reflective to the 20th Century technology, this explanation seems reasonable. It is also reinforced by ruins of two human cities, San Francisco and Oakland, seen in later episodes appearing more 20th Century than 26th.

In, *The Trap*, Burke and Urko are trapped in an old BART subway station. While the station has some slight futuristic touches to it, Burke is clearly familiar with everything there, including the advertising on the station's walls.

In, *The Legacy*, the astronauts find a futuristic projector that reveals the location of a hidden cache of computers. Virдон comments that the technology of the projector is beyond their time, but it is not made clear how far beyond. It could be centuries or it could be only decades. Later in the episode when the computers are discovered, Burke is easily able to operate them indicating that they are not from far beyond his time.

EAST VS. WEST

One consistency between the different timeline advocates is why there are no references to the Lawgiver and Sacred Scrolls in the TV show. Both were core elements of the movie series but are totally absent from the show.

It is argued that both were only part of the history and culture of the East Coast ape society that Taylor and Brent encounter. The ape society in which Virдон and Burke find themselves marooned is on the West Coast which has a different history and culture. While one community may have been an offshoot of the other, accounting for similarities in ape fashion and architecture, they eventually lost contact. However, some argue that because small statues of the Lawgiver were seen on tables in ape homes and offices on the TV show; the Lawgiver was indeed part of the West Coast's culture but just never referenced.

Either way it is curious the TV show producers did not include any of the rich background and characters created for the films. Perhaps they wanted maximum creative flexibility and didn't want to be constrained or contradict anything that had been presented in the films. Setting the TV show centuries away and thousands of miles from the films freed them to do their own thing. It does not tie them to the film universe nor does it preclude the show from being a part of it. Ultimately it is up to each fan to decide where the TV show fits in their own personal canon.

