

# LA PLANÈTE DES SINGES

de Franklin J. SCHAFFNER

## FICHE TECHNIQUE

Titre original : Planet of the Apes

Pays : USA

Durée : 1h52

Année : 1968

Genre : Action, drama, sci-fi

Scénario : Michael WILSON, Rod SERLING based on the novel *La Planète des Singes* by Pierre BOULLE (1963)

Directeur de la photographie : Leon SHAMROY

Décors : Walter M. SCOTT, Norman ROCKETT

Costumes : Morton HAACK

Maquillage : John CHAMBERS, Ben NYE, Daniel C. STRIEPEKE

Montage : Hugh S. FOWLER

Musique : Jerry GOLDSMITH

Coproduction : 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox / APJAC Productions

Distribution : Carlotta Films

Interprètes : Charlton HESTON (George Taylor), Roddy McDOWALL (Cornelius), Kim HUNTER (Zira), Maurice EVANS (Dr Zaius), Linda HARRISON (Nova)

Reprise : 19 juin 2002

## SYNOPSIS

It is 2,000 years in the future and space explorer Taylor and his crew crash-land on a barren planet. Exploring the desert landscape they discover they are captured by a community of apes where humans are a mute slave class. The apes have a fully developed society of industry, architecture, military and culture. Two younger, highly educated apes, Cornelius and Zira, are intrigued by Taylor and recognize his intelligence. Taylor goes before a tribunal to explain and defend himself. The apes will not accept his identity and that he is from a culture that once superseded their own. Taylor attempts to escape but is always caught. He travels out to the coast and is shown an archaeological dig with seemingly human remains. Finally allowed his freedom, Taylor and the mute woman Nova leave the community of apes and Taylor is shocked and horrified when he finds an irrefutable sign that the planet he is on is Earth.

As much as *Planet of the Apes* is a straightforward futuristic film, it is also a social commentary that uses allegory to address issues like racism and class difference.

## AUTOUR DU FILM

### Background

*Planet of the Apes* was the first science fiction film to reach a wide audience, indicating a major shift in the taste of moviegoers (if not moviemakers). Released about three months before *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968, *Planet of the Apes* was the higher grossing film of the two, taking in \$15 million and finishing 7<sup>th</sup> on Variety's list of the year's box office winners.

The film is considered as a classic science fiction film, demonstrating the way in which the genre can deal with social issues. Its star, Charlton Heston, was known for starring in biblical epics such as *Ben Hur* (by William Wyler) and *The Ten Commandments* (by Cecil B. DeMille). He is politically conservative (and until recently was the Chairman of America's National Rifle Association which defends the rights of Americans to own firearms). The director, Franklin J. Schaffner, began as a director of TV drama and then moved into feature films. He frequently directed material with a political theme. His follow up film to *Planet of the Apes* was *Patton* (1970) about the role of this controversial American general in World War II. The film was so popular that it was followed by four sequels of wildly uneven, generally sinking quality: *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971), *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972), and *Battle for the Planet* (1973). Roddy McDowall

was the only actor to appear in all five films. Also spawned two TV series: a live-action show for half a season in fall 1974 (with McDowall again!), and a Saturday morning cartoon that ran from September 1975 to September 1976 called *Return to the Planet of the Apes*.

It may be interesting to compare Schaffner original version with the recent remake by Tim Burton (US, 2000).

### **Excerpt from the screenplay**

149 INT. A ROW OF CAGES – ANIMAL LABORATORY – TRACKING SHOT DAY

The cages are no larger than small jail cells. There are four of them. Bars, not walls, divide the cages, so that all four are visible. Each of the first three cages is occupied by a primitive male. At the moment the first two are quiet – dozing or scratching apathetically. The third occupant is stolidly regarding a half-dozen brightly colored hollow wooden boxes, or blocks. Of varying sizes and proportions on the floor of his cage. He is trying to stack the boxes in such a way as to reach a banana dangling from a cord twelve feet overhead. He has correctly selected the first two large, sturdy blocks for his tower under the banana – but the tall third block is too unstable on its small base to support the broad-based fourth block.

149-A CLOSE – TAYLOR

Taylor, looking much stronger, sits on a pile of dirty straw in the fourth cage. There is a clean bandage around his throat. He watches the block-building primitive with contemptuous amusement.

Both the third and fourth blocks tumble to the floor when the primitive tries to mount his tower. He stands there, staring dully at the scattered blocks, then up at the unattainable banana.

149-B MED. – THE LABORATORY

A door at the end of the aisle opens and a gorilla named JULIUS enters, dressed in a keeper's uniform. He quickly closes the door, snatches up a broom, starts sweeping. Julius is obviously late for work. Taylor struggles to his feet, moves to the bars of the cage, tries to call out.

**TAYLOR**

*(soundlessly)*

Hey! Hey!

The three other primitives move toward the bars of their cages. Julius barks at them.

**JULIUS**

Simmer down!

*(points at Taylor)*

You especially.

The third primitive goes back to stacking his blocks. Julius comes up to Taylor's cage, indicates a like set of blocks strewn across its floor, extends his broom handle to whack the banana overhead.

**JULIUS**

Better give it a try, stupid. Unless you like going hungry.

He returns to his sweeping. Taylor glowers at him. A moment later, the door at the end of the aisle opens and Dr. Zira enters.

**JULIUS**

Good morning, Dr. Zira.

**ZIRA**

Good morning, Julius. How's our patient today?

**JULIUS**

No change. The minute you open the door, he goes into his act.

She starts down the aisle toward Taylor's cage. He grasps the bars, awaiting her anxiously. As she passes the second cage, the primitive in it shakes the bars, jumps up and down. His tongue is hanging out. Zira smiles, stops, digs into the pocket of her smock.

**ZIRA**

*(playfully)*

Well, what do we want this morning? Do we want something? Speak! Come on, speak!

The primitive continues to jump up and down energetically. Zira takes a cube of sugar from her pocket, holds it up for his inspection.

**ZIRA**

Do we want some sugar, old-timer?

The man eagerly sticks his hand through the bars. She drops the cube in his hands. He jams it into his mouth.

**JULIUS**

*(concerned)*

You could get hurt doing that, Doctor.

**ZIRA**

Don't be silly. He's perfectly tame.

She moves toward Taylor's cage, Julius behind her.

**JULIUS**

They're all tame until they take a chunk out of you.

150 CLOSE SHOT – FEATURING TAYLOR – ZIRA AND JULIUS

Taylor starts to open his mouth as Zira comes up to the bars.

**ZIRA**

Well, Bright Eyes, is our throat feeling better?

**TAYLOR**

*(frantic mouthing)*

Listen, listen! I can speak.

He winces, puts his hand to the bandage.

**ZIRA**

*(sympathetically)*

Awww, it still hurts, doesn't it?

**JULIUS**

See? He keeps pretending he can talk.

Taylor glares at Julius, slams the bars.

**TAYLOR**

*(mouthing)*

I'm not pretending! I can talk!

Zira hurriedly takes a pen and notebook from the breast Docket of her smock, starts to scribble.

**ZIRA**

*(excitedly)*

Did you see that? It's remarkable!

**JULIUS**

Huh?

**ZIRA**

He's trying to form words.

**JULIUS**

Well, you know what they say. Human see, human do.

Taylor is staring in silent fascination at the open and notebook. He stops mouthing, points at them.

**JULIUS**

Now what?

Taylor gestures for Zira to come closer to the bars.

**ZIRA**

He seems to want something.

She advances tentatively toward the cage.

**JULIUS**

I'd be careful, doctor.

Taylor suddenly reaches through the bars, tries to snatch the pen and notebook from Zira. Julius instantly jabs his broom handle through the bars, hitting Taylor in the ribs.

**JULIUS**

What did I tell you!

*(to Taylor)*

Try that again, I'll break your arm!

Zira draws back, looking at Taylor in surprise.

151 CLOSER – TAYLOR

His face is twisted in frustration.

**TAYLOR**

*(mouthing)*

What's the matter with you? I can talk! Can't you see that?

### **Novel Plot summary**

The main events of the book are placed in a surrounding story, in which Jinn and Phillys, a couple out on a pleasure cruise in a spaceship, find a message in a bottle floating in space. The message inside the bottle is the log of a man, Ulysse Mérou, who believes that he may be the last human left alive in all the universe, but has written down his story in hopes that someone else, somewhere, will find it.

The message's writer, our protagonist, begins by explaining that he was friends with Professor Antelle, a genius scientist on Earth, who invented a sophisticated spaceship which could travel at nearly the speed of light. He and the professor fly off in this ship to explore outer space. They travel to the nearest star system which the professor

theorized might be capable of life, a red sun which would take them several centuries to reach. Due to time dilatation however, the trip only seems a few years long to him and the professor.

They arrive at the distant solar system and find that it contains an Earth-like planet. They land on the planet and discover that they can breathe the air, drink the water, and eat the local vegetation. They soon encounter other human beings on the planet, although these others act as primitive as chimpanzees and destroy the clothing of the professor and the protagonist. The protagonist and the professor live with the primitive humans for a few days, hoping to civilize them and learn their language.

At the end of this time, they are startled to see a hunting party in the forest, consisting of gorillas, orangutans, and chimpanzees using guns and machines. The apes wear human clothing identical to that of 20<sup>th</sup> century Earth, with the exception that they wear gloves instead of shoes on their prehensile feet. The hunting party shoots several of the humans for sport, including the professor, and capture others, including the protagonist.

Ulysse is taken off to the apes' city, which looks exactly the same as a human city from 20<sup>th</sup> century Earth, with the exception that some smaller furniture exists for the use of the chimpanzees. While most of the humans captured by the hunting party are sold for manual labor, the protagonist winds up in a research facility doing experiments on human intelligence. The apes perform experiments on the humans similar to Pavlov's conditioning experiments on dogs, and the protagonist proves his intelligence by failing to be conditioned.

He is taken in by one of the researchers, Zira, a female chimpanzee, who begins to teach him the apes' language. He learns from her all about the ape planet. Eventually, he is freed from his cage, meets Zira's fiancé, Cornélius, a respected young scientist. With Cornélius' help, he goes to make a speech in front of the ape President and several representatives, and is given specially tailored clothing. He tours the city and learns about the apes' civilization and history. The apes have a very ancient society, but their origins are lost in time. Their technology and culture have progressed slowly through the centuries. The society is divided up between the violent gorillas, mystical orangutans, and practical chimpanzees.

Although the protagonist's chimpanzee patron is assured of his sentience, the society's leading orangutan scientists believe that he is faking his understanding of language, because their philosophy will not allow for the possibility of sentient human beings.

The protagonist falls in love with a primitive human female, Nova, whom he met in the forest at the beginning of his visit to the planet. He impregnates her. This proves that he is the same species as the primitive humans, which lowers his standing in the eyes of many of the apes. However, their derision turns to fear with a discovery in a distant archaeological dig and analysis of memory in some human brains. Evidence is uncovered which fills in the missing history of the apes. In the distant past, the planet was ruled by human beings, who built a technological society, and enslaved apes to perform their manual labor. Over time the humans became more and more dependent upon the apes, until eventually they were so lazy and degenerate that they were overthrown by their ape servants and fell into the primitive state in which our protagonist found them.

While some of the apes reject this evidence, others take it as a sign that the humans are a threat and must be exterminated. In particular is an old orangutan scientist, Dr. Zaius. The protagonist gets wind of this, and escapes from the planet with his wife and newly-born son, returning to Earth in the professor's spaceship.

Again, the trip takes several centuries, but only a relative time of a few years to the protagonist. The protagonist lands on Earth, millenia after he had originally left it, and lands outside the city of Paris. However, once outside the ship, he discovers that Earth is now ruled by sentient apes just like the planet from which he has just fled (this is where his story on paper ends). He immediately blasts his ship off into space once more, writes his story, places it in a bottle, and launches it into space for someone to find.

The book concludes by returning to the couple who had found the bottle, who are revealed to be apes themselves. They scoff at the unlikelihood of humans having been advanced enough to build spaceships, and conclude that the story must be someone's idea of a joke.

### Science Fiction (from *New Flying Colours Term*)

Science fiction is a literary genre with a background of science or pseudo-science. Although fantastic, it is concerned with the impact of change on people, often with its consequences for the human race.

The most common subjects for science fiction are the future, travel through space and time, life on other planets and crises created by technology or alien creatures or environments.

Science fiction can be divided into several trends:

- speculative fiction: the future of our inventions, robot-related fiction
- space operas: star wars, encounters with aliens
- hard science: stories with a highly credible scientific and technological background
- political allegory: criticism of political regimes of our planet, pretending that they occur on other planets
- heroic fantasy: mixture of medieval or even feudal background with advanced technology

Science fiction began with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century work of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. Famous names include Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke. Pierre Boulle seems to be more famous in the USA than in France.

### PISTES PÉDAGOGIQUES

#### Themes evoked

- Discrimination and races
- Justice and human rights
- Our understanding of intelligence
- Freedom, oppression and slavery
- Language and communication
- ...

#### Teaching materials

- *Ways and Means 2<sup>nd</sup>e* p. 101, 102, 103: text “The Creature” by J. Wyndham *The Man from Beyond* (1934), illustrated by a still from Schaffner’s film (Taylor in a cage, watched by apes)
- *Wide Open 1<sup>ère</sup>* p. 180-181: film genres
- *Keys Terminales* p. 60-61: sci-fi book covers
- *Insight Term* p. 111 to 128: unit “Science and Fiction” with several sci-fi texts
- *Voices Term L, ES, Sp.* 108-109: milestones “Brave New Worlds” (utopias and dystopias)

#### Teaching suggestions

- While watching the film, try to spot illogical plot elements:
  - If the humans are so dangerous, why are some in the wild?
  - If the Forbidden Zone is so embarrassing for the apes, why didn’t they destroy it?
  - Why is ape technology in the future advanced in some areas and not in others?
  - Why doesn’t Taylor believe he is on Earth although all apes speak English?
- Comment on this quote by Dr. Zaius: “Dr. Zira, I must caution you. Experimental brain surgery on these creatures is one thing, and I’m all in favour of it. But your behaviour studies are another matter. To suggest that we can learn anything about the simian nature from a study of man is sheer nonsense. Why, man is a nuisance. He eats up his food supply in the forest, then migrates to our green belts and ravages our crops. The sooner he is exterminated, the better. It’s a question of simian survival”.
- Art and Design: examine how costumes and set help convey meaning; compare this version with Tim Burton’s version: what differences are there which reflect the impact of new technologies?
- Final shot of Taylor as he finds the remains of the Statue of Liberty crumbling on the shore:
  - What is the significance of this shot in the film?
  - Which planet is the Planet of the Apes?
  - What does the decaying statue reveal about previous generations of humans and their abuse of the environment?
  - Why have the filmmakers used the Statue of Liberty?
  - Where is it located in real life?
  - What does it symbolize?

- What do the book and the torch represent?
- How might the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have changed the way audiences interpret the ending of the film?
- Sequence when Taylor attends the tribunal: what issues about the legal and human rights that underpin society are raised in this scene?
- The following questions can be used as a starting point to focus discussion before generalising the issues that the film raises.
  - What is the basis of the apes' discrimination against the humans?
  - How do the apes justify their mistreatment?
  - Why are Cornelius and Zira sympathetic to the Taylor and Zora?
  - What does the ending of the film imply about the ultimate value of intelligence?
  - The General is conservative and scientists are liberals. Who is ultimately "right"?
  - How does this film affect your understanding of animal rights? / environmental issues?
- Simulation: ask students to write a 50-word pitch or shooting script for a new film with animals as the protagonists. They should consider how they could use the science-fiction or fantasy genre to address serious social and political issues more easily than stating them directly.

### **MORE INFORMATION**

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/film/>
- <http://www.theforbiddenzone.com/>: an excerpt from the novel
- <http://www.videodetective.com/>: watch the trailer