

## Planet of the Apes: now and then

Story by Thomas Phillips

Photos courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox

Science fiction and symbolic storytelling collide in *Planet of the Apes*, whether it is the 1968 original or the 2001 version. Fanatical costumes, scenery and poignant themes appeal to viewers' imaginations and hearts throughout both renderings.

Based on Pierre Boulle's novel, who also wrote *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, each film is the unique interpretation by its respective director. Franklin J. Schaffner directed the 1968 film and Tim Burton (*Batman*, *Edward Scissorhands*) directed the 2001 version.

*Planet of the Apes* 1968, starring Charlton Heston (*The Ten Commandments*, *Ben Hur*), premiered during the turbulent days of the civil rights movement, which made the film's timeless anti-racism message even more powerful.

That movie spawned four sequels — *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* — a cartoon series and a merchandising bonanza that would be rivaled by that of *Star Wars* nine years later.

With a \$5.8 million budget, Schaffner produced what soon became a favorite among science-fiction fans and grossed nearly \$26 million at the box office. In comparison, Burton's 21st century rendition carried a budget of almost \$100 million and grossed \$68.5 million opening weekend.

Using that \$100 million budget, Burton employs a cast of rising stars and an experienced crew to put his spin on the upside-down ape world. Mark Wahlberg (*Fear*, *The Perfect Storm*), who received \$10 million for his services, Helena Bonham Carter (*Fight Club*) and makeup artist Rick Baker (*Star Wars*, *The Nutty Professor*) muster creative forces in a film that is neither a remake nor a sequel to the original.

In the original movie, astronaut Taylor (Heston) and his space crew of fellow Earthlings crash land on a mysterious planet after traveling ahead through time. Through a barren landscape, the trio searches for inhabitants only to reach a lush jungle and be captured by intelligent apes.

Characters develop, and an imprisoned Taylor finds a pair of advocates in Zira and Cornelius, two chimps with no affection for the oppressive gorillas and orangutans that rule ape society.

Zira and Cornelius argue on behalf of Taylor to their superior Dr. Zaius, the film's antagonist. However, their plea for interspecies equality falls on deaf ears and narrowed vision as Zaius will have no part of that kind of civilization.

Not-so-subtle imagery makes obvious the film's depiction of race relations in the United States at the time of the film's premiere. In one scene Taylor remarks to Dr. Zaius, saying, "You're afraid of me, and you hate me. Why?" Dr. Zaius responds, "Because you're a man."

The plot moves on and climaxes with a surprising and ironic twist, which raises further awareness of yet another issue appropriate to that time.

The social elements expressed in

Schaffner's *Planet of the Apes* can be appealing to all viewers, even those with little taste for science fiction. Laura Crozier, a senior interdisciplinary studies major, has seen the movie only once but still appreciates its moral point.

"The political statements that it made brought to light the fear and ignorance associated with racism," Crozier said. "You also have to take into consideration the time that the original came out, what was going on then with the civil rights movement."

None of that pertinence has been lost in the newest telling of the *Planet of the Apes* story.

Burton continues the socially-minded themes while making use of a familiar plot, unique characters and exceptional visual elements to make a blockbuster.

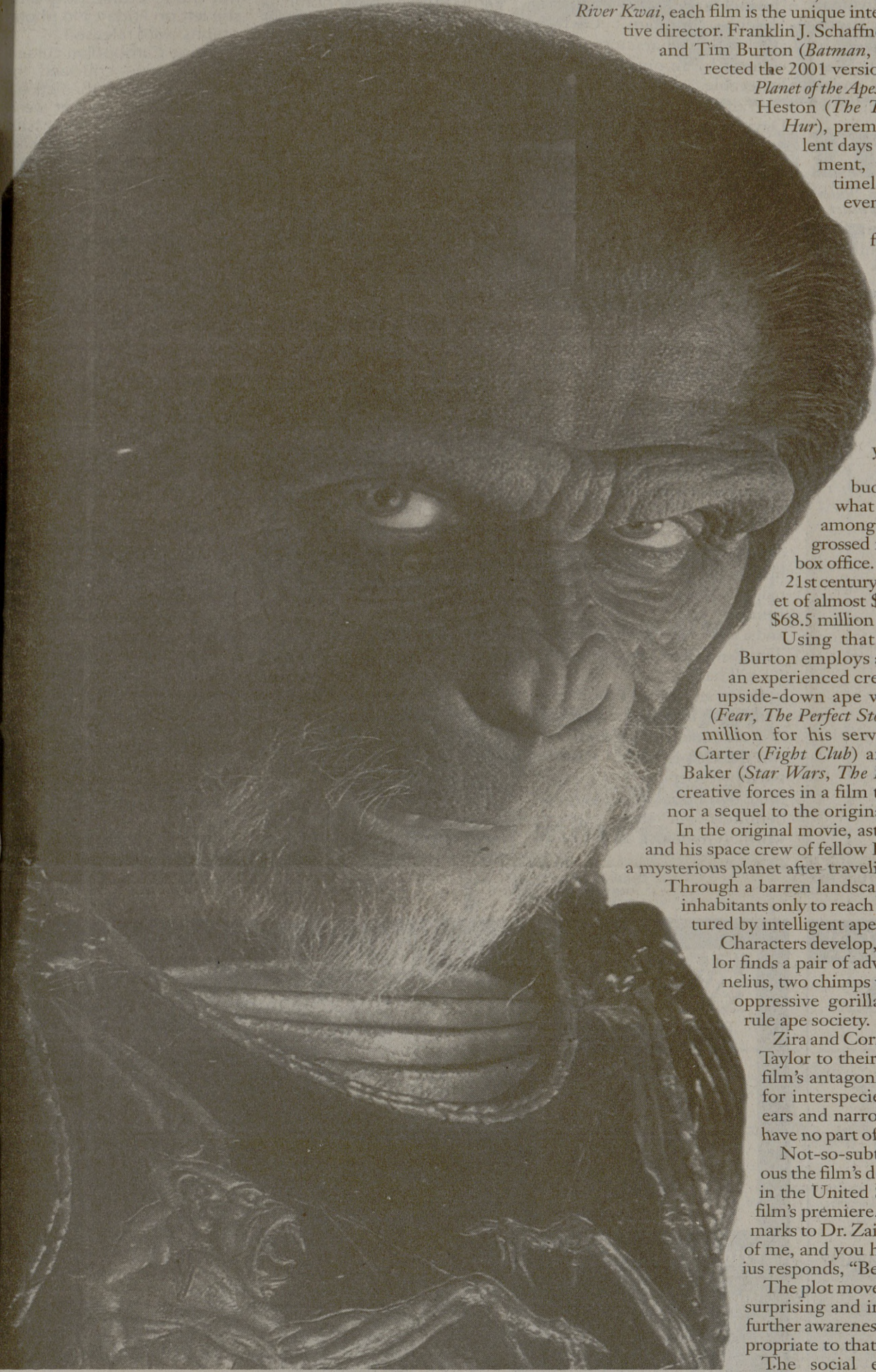
In this reinvention of the idea, Capt. Leo Davidson (Wahlberg) crash lands on, yes, a mysterious planet and must survive his way through one calamitous scenario after another. Leo, like Taylor, finds help along the way in a mischievous, disillusioned ape—this time in Ari (Bonham).

Michael Clarke Duncan (*The Green Mile*) and Paul Giamatti (*Saving Private Ryan*) play the supporting characters Attar, a soldier and Limbo, a slave trader. Tim Roth (*Rob Roy*) leads the ape army as the villainous Gen. Thade.

Burton, like Schaffner, also uses intriguing plot twists and action sequences to thicken the story and add dimension to the ape world.

"I enjoyed the first one," said Travis Matthews, a senior wildlife and fisheries sciences major. "The new one looks much more visually appealing than the original, but the concept and the story carried that one. It didn't need a whole lot of fancy eye candy to make its point."

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