

Planet of the Apes

Film review

Thomas Haroldson

1968

“Planet of the Apes” may turn out to be the “Bonnie and Clyde” of 1968.

Many film critics, after giving the picture an unfavorable review, are beginning to have second thoughts about it.

Richard Schickel, of *Life* magazine, said in a recent retraction: “I should have trusted my instincts, stood up and proclaimed my affectionate regard for the thing right off.”

Schickel, after much soul searching, finally admitted that “Planet of the Apes” was the best American movie that he had seen so far this year.

I agree with his final appraisal of the picture, but I can fully understand why “Planet of the Apes” turned a lot of critics off.

After all, anything starring Charlton Heston and Roddy McDowell can't be all good. And much of the dialog IS atrocious. The first part of the picture seems to use lines left over from an old war movie, while the second part appears to have borrowed its dialog from a vintage Western.

And it's also true that much of its so-called humor falls completely flat. In fact, it could even be argued, as many have, that the premise of the film is too thin to successfully sustain a full-length motion picture.

But all these valid objections, and many more, melt away when the movie is seen. “Planet of the Apes” turns out to be a surprisingly good flick, and I think the term “flick” is the best way to describe the picture.

It is neither a pretentious “film,” nor is it an arty movie. It is the kind of production that Hollywood used to turn out before it was intimidated by foreign film-makers: the acting is broad, the humor is heavy, the theme is laid on the line, and there are enough chase scenes to fill three movies.

But the final result of all this is a thoroughly enjoyable picture that will probably satisfy anyone who goes to see it. In this day and age of dull, but “meaningful” films, it is no small accomplishment to produce an enjoyable flick.

This is not to say, however, that the picture lacks thematic significance. On the contrary, it gives us a more profound view of our society than almost any movie made in recent times.

Interestingly enough, “Planet of the Apes” takes up where “2001” leaves off—that is, the picture begins, rather than ends, with American astronauts reaching a strange planet.

Like some of the astronauts in “2001” they have traveled in a state of suspended animation in order to survive the 18 month voyage. However, because of a time warp, they have actually been asleep for two thousand years.

After a long trek across a wilderness (the only dull episode in the movie) they come upon a group of semi-wild humans foraging for food in a cornfield.

If you've ever seen a field of jackrabbits rounded up and slaughtered, you are familiar with what happens next. Only this time the slaughter is seen through the eyes of the animals.

From this point on, the audience is forced to look at the world in a new way. One suddenly realizes that the Apes are really us. Their society of the future is our society today.

One is forced to see (perhaps for the first time) what it means to be considered an inferior race, what it means to be persecuted because one is different, what it means to be humiliated and tortured by the “elite” members of society.

The real shock of seeing “Planet of the Apes” comes when one realizes that it isn’t science fiction after all. For example, in the movie, the Apes look upon a male human with disgust. They call him a “man” and castrate him if he doesn’t behave.

The picture also demonstrates how such attitudes of superiority come about, and how they are sustained by religion, law, science and armed force. In many ways, “Planet of the Apes” is nothing less than a comprehensive condemnation of the entire present-day civilized world.

On the surface, the picture is merely an enjoyable flick, but at heart it is a serious film—and a pretty damn good one at that!

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #55, June 4-18, 1968

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