

## **Lost in the Twilight Zone – Episode 157**

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For five astonishing seasons, from 1959 to 1964, Rod Serling's THE TWILIGHT ZONE blazed a trail, creating an amazing range of unforgettable tales of science fiction, fantasy and horror that were unlike anything seen before on television. Leading a pack of the most talented writers, directors and actors then working in the medium – among them, Richard Matheson, Richard Donner and Robert Redford – Rod Serling was able to forge a collection of stories that literally changed the way America, and the world, thought about the very nature of reality.

With each passing year, TWILIGHT ZONE's reputation has only grown, and it is now considered in the top rank of what has ever been produced on television.

Most published records relating to the landmark series record a total of 156 episodes shot, with a remarkable ninety-two written by Serling himself. But of this total, a handful did not make it into the initial syndication package and thus were not seen for many years, despite their high quality of writing and star-level performances. Among these were "The Encounter," starring STAR TREK's George Takei, "Sounds and Silences," with John McGiver, "A Short Drink From a Certain Fountain," featuring Ruta Lee and Patrick O'Neal, and "Miniature," with Robert Duvall in the lead. Generally, these were not syndicated due to ongoing plagiarism suits at the time, but one, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," was not included in the package because it was filmed initially as a French short and acquired by ZONE producer William Froug to air as a TWILIGHT ZONE episode in order to bring the fifth season's budget down to an

acceptable level. To this end, Rod Serling filmed an introduction and closing narration to the episode, and it ran only once. Interestingly, the film subsequently went on to win an Oscar for Best Short Subject, adding a further distinction to Serling's two Emmy Awards for TWILIGHT ZONE and Director of Photography George T. Clemens' one.

In recent years, thanks to the demands of its fans, all of these "lost" episodes of THE TWILIGHT ZONE have resurfaced, and are now available on DVD.

But one episode has been so suppressed, its history so completely erased, that even the show's most ardent fans and video historians don't know that it existed.

This is the story of that episode.

On October 4, 1956, Rod Serling adapted "Forbidden Area," a novel by Pat Frank, into the premiere episode of PLAYHOUSE 90, the notable drama series that would soon after debut Serling's groundbreaking "Requiem for a Heavyweight."

"Forbidden Area" starred Charlton Heston, renowned for such iconic movies roles as Ben Hur, and Moses in THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. Although Serling was a well-known liberal and Heston an arch conservative who would later lead the National Rifle Association, both valued the primacy of the rights of the individual, and they quickly struck up a friendship. Following their collaboration on "Forbidden Area," they eagerly looked forward to another chance to work together.

This opportunity didn't arise until 1964, during TWILIGHT ZONE's last season. Serling happened upon Les Planete des Singes, a novel by French author Pierre Boulle, who had previously written THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI. In previous seasons, Serling had attempted unsuccessfully to acquire certain well-known works by famous science fiction writers, among them "The Nine Billion Names of God" by Arthur

C. Clarke, “Imposter” by Phillip K. Dick, and “Lifeline” by Robert A. Heinlein. In this case, however, Boulle was not known as a writer of science fiction, and so Serling had little competition in securing the rights to what was then a little-known work by a foreign scribe.

Serling’s challenges were far from over. Although Boulle’s satirical work had many things to distinguish it, Serling felt it lacked the kind of punchy twist ending TWILIGHT ZONE was famed for. In speaking to a college class in 1972, Serling later remarked that he’d had to scrap many of his best TWILIGHT ZONE ideas when he’d been able to work out a beginning and middle, but no satisfactory ending; he advised the students that it was always best to come up with your ending first – then you were home free.

In this case, Serling was lucky, and almost immediately imagined an arresting visual image that provided quite a surprise punch for the finale. Initially, he thought it might only be the torch-holding arm of a certain world-famous statue sticking up out of the sand, but in the end some clever construction and a skillful matte painting allowed the entire copper Lady to be visible.

With this telling detail set, Serling could readily have set about drafting the entire teleplay himself – dictating his ZONE scripts into a tape recorder while he lounged by the pool, Serling could write a full teleplay in as little as a day -- but he seized on this occasion to invite a TWILIGHT ZONE newcomer to co-write the script with him.

Michael Wilson had enjoyed a lucrative and creatively fulfilling career as a screenwriter during the forties and fifties, working on such films as IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE and A PLACE IN THE SUN, but he had been sidelined by the

Hollywood Blacklist of the fifties (even having to write LAWRENCE OF ARABIA under a pseudonym). Although fervently anti-Communist (and against every other form of dictatorship, too), Serling was a vocal opponent of McCarthyism and happy to do whatever he could to end the cruel results of that notorious witch hunt. Wilson gratefully accepted Serling's invitation, and the two worked together smoothly and well.

The script completed, the segment was scheduled as episode 157, and assigned a production number. Serling brought aboard Franklin Schaffner, whom he'd originally met when they'd both worked in live TV on PLAYHOUSE 90 and STUDIO ONE, and who had now become a well-known feature director. For the music, ZONE composer Jerry Goldsmith, who had done notable work on such episodes as "Nervous Man in a Four Dollar Room" and "The Four of Us Are Dying," was given the nod.

As for the lead, Serling had only one star in mind. Charlton Heston readily agreed.

The rest of the cast fell readily into place, foremost among them Roddy McDowell, who had previously starred in Serling's ZONE episode, "People Are Alike All Over," and Kim Hunter, who had appeared memorably in the live PLAYHOUSE 90 broadcast of "Requiem for a Heavyweight."

One of the lead roles proved unfortunately problematic. Edward G. Robinson, who had starred opposite Heston in THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, was originally cast as the villainous Dr. Zaius, and makeup tests were even filmed with him acting opposite Heston. But when he fell ill prior to shooting, British actor Maurice Evans stepped in to play the part.

(Luckily for Robinson, he'd get to work with Serling and Heston again, at least individually, in Serling's NIGHT GALLERY episode "The Messiah on Mott Street" and Heston's SOYLENT GREEN.)

Shooting commenced on the soundstages of MGM in Culver City, with location filming at several sites along the Pacific Coast Highway and at Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino mountains east of Los Angeles. Like all episodes of TWILIGHT ZONE, filming took a total of three days.

The results, even for TWILIGHT ZONE, were extraordinary. Although running under thirty minutes, Serling, Heston and the others involved surpassed themselves. In truth, the episode had such depth and breadth of scope, it seemed almost like a movie unto itself.

In other episodes, Serling had opined movingly about race, politics and the human condition. Here, he found a proscenium for it all to coalesce into one grand statement about the very nature of existence, of our role here in the universe. And Heston proved the perfect spokesman for Serling's ideas – ideas which, for the time, were quite daring, verging on the scandalous.

One of Serling's most controversial notions didn't make it to the air, however, and was only seen by a handful of advertising and network executives when the final cut was screened prior to broadcast at CBS Television City (which still stands today at the corner of Fairfax Avenue and Beverly Boulevard in Los Angeles). Several key dramatic moments showed Heston fully naked from the back – a daring attempt at artistic expression decades before Dennis Franz would become a cause celebre and media darling for a similar rear view unveiling on NYPD BLUE. The ad execs from Johnson and

Johnson and American Tobacco insisted that the shots of nudity be excised, and Serling reluctantly complied.

“Planet of the Apes” aired as episode 157 of THE TWILIGHT ZONE, two weeks after “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” on March 13, 1964. Sadly, the evening of the broadcast, Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death in Queens, New York, while forty neighbors failed to take action. News stations across the nation interrupted programming to examine and comment on this tragic event. As a result, few stations across the country aired the episode. Only a handful of viewers saw this last – and some would say best – episode of the show.

Curiously, though, this very fact led to its unique rebirth.

That night, Twentieth Century Fox chairman Darryl F. Zanuck was at his home in Palm Springs recuperating from a bout of the flu and happened to see the broadcast. It was no surprise Zanuck’s resistance was down; he’d just survived the filming of Fox’s CLEOPATRA, the costly Elizabeth Taylor/Richard Burton debacle that necessitated the bulldozing of Twentieth’s back lot and sale of the land to build what would ultimately rise as Century City (seen so memorably in the movie DIE HARD).

Zanuck was favorably impressed by the feature-quality execution of “Planet,” and when he learned that only a smattering of viewers across the nation had seen the segment, an inspiration seized him, one that might help Fox’s fortunes further edge over from the red back into the black.

A call soon after from his West Los Angeles office invited to Serling to join him at a discreet entre nous meeting in a secluded corner of the Beverly Hills Hotel’s famed Polo Lounge.

There, Zanuck made a daring proposal – that Serling’s Cayuga Productions sell the episode to Twentieth, which would then shoot extensive added scenes, to be written by Serling and Wilson, and release the project as a theatrical feature film. Serling had already enjoyed success in recent years with the release of two films he’d scripted – SEVEN DAYS IN MAY (1964) and the movie version of REQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT (1962) – but he was eager to further solidify his reputation as a writer in what was then considered the more “respectable” venue of motion pictures. He readily agreed to Zanuck’s offer. The two pooled their resources to work behind the scenes in getting CBS to okay the deal, with Serling agreeing to script a further series pilot entitled THE LONER (which would debut in 1965) and Zanuck offering CBS favored treatment in securing rights to first-airing of a package of recent Fox films.

Zanuck had one further requirement: in order that the feature of PLANET OF THE APES not seem “used goods,” the original ZONE episode must never be aired again, and neither Serling, CBS nor its then-syndication arm Viacom (today ironically CBS’s parent company) could ever refer to the episode in print, radio or television advertisements or interviews.

The contract sealed, filming of the new sequences of PLANET OF THE APES began, with essentially the same creative team that has insured the sterling quality of the original episode. With one key difference – while the original had been shot in black and white, the new scenes were in color.

This presented Twentieth with a singular challenge – how to get the old footage to match the new? The process of colorization lay many decades in the future. (Ironically, in the late eighties, the “Miniature” episode of TWILIGHT ZONE had several scenes

colorized, leading many fans to erroneously conclude those sequences has originally been shot in color.)

Fox contacted Winston Engle, vice president of research and production at the animation company DePatie-Freleng Enterprises, to design a process to convert the existing APES footage to color. Long before digital colorization was possible, DePatie-Freleng utilized a comparatively low-tech but effective method. They blew up the footage frame by frame onto clear animation cels, which they then backed with hand-painted layers of color and re-photographed.

While time-consuming, this option was economical for cash-starved Fox, because DePatie-Freleng agreed to substantially reduce their fee in exchange for animated sequel rights. Ultimately, this proved a better deal for Fox than for DePatie-Freleng. Fox's own live-action film and television sequels left the animation studio unable to exercise their option until 1975, for the short-lived Saturday-morning series "Return to the Planet of the Apes."

This and other production delays postponed release of the finished film until 1968, but it was worth the wait – PLANET OF THE APES was a smash hit, both in terms of critical and audience response. Numerous sequels followed, including a television series starring Roddy McDowell, continuing his role as the most loquacious chimpanzee in the history of cinema.

As for the original TWILIGHT ZONE episode, it was generally lost to memory, and remained so for nearly forty years. Zanuck had required CBS to destroy all known prints, which it had done. Fortunately, Serling had taken home his own personal print of the episode – the original “controversial” cut that had been screened prior to broadcast for

the network and advertising executives. This sole surviving print languished among dozens of film cans of other TWILIGHT ZONE episodes in the garage of Serling's spacious Pacific Palisades home for a number of years. Then in the 1980s these prints were donated to the film archives at Ithaca College on the East Coast and UCLA on the West.

Unfortunately, the film can holding the "Planet of the Apes" episode had been mislabeled "Come Wander With Me" -- one of the worst episodes of THE TWILIGHT ZONE -- and so no one bothered to screen it for decades. Finally, Theo Siegel, a researcher for E! Entertainment Television, stumbled upon it while researching the Rod Serling episode of E! TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY and went public with his discovery. In late 2004, forty-five years after the debut of THE TWILIGHT ZONE, the final brilliant expression of Serling's masterwork at last re-emerged before the public in all its pristine glory.

In 1962, when it had looked like THE TWILIGHT ZONE would be cancelled, Serling had told a newspaper, "We had some real turkeys, some fair ones, and some shows I'm really proud to have been part of. I can walk away from this series unbowed."

Restored finally to its breathtaking original form, the long-lost last episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE proves itself something to be very proud of, indeed.