

Monkey Business

By Reg P. Wydeven
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This summer I really want to see ‘Dawn of the Planet of the Apes.’ The movie is a sequel to 2011’s ‘Rise of the Planet of the Apes,’ which is actually a prequel to Charlton Heston’s 1968 classic.

‘Dawn’ follows Caesar, a chimp who gained super intelligence after being exposed to an experimental drug designed to reverse Alzheimer’s disease. Caesar gives the drug to the other apes at his preserve who have similar results. In the sequel, a virus has nearly wiped out humanity while Caesar and his fellow apes thrive in the wilderness.

When the humans and apes inevitably collide, a battle for dominance of the planet ensues. The humans know their days are numbered when they realize the apes have begun emulating people by riding horses, using guns and even talking.

Well, if life truly imitates art, we better get ready to be enslaved by our monkey overlords.

In 2011, David Slater, a British wildlife photographer, traveled to Indonesia to snap some photos. While there, he prepared to take a picture of a crested black macaque. As Slater was setting up his equipment, the monkey snatched his camera and immediately began snapping selfies.

With the skills of a Kardashian, the macaque caught some priceless shots of herself grinning at the lens. Of course, people went bananas over the photos, and they spread like wildfire over the Internet.

One place they landed was Wikimedia Commons, which is a website that hosts photos that are in the public domain, and thus, are free to use. Upon learning this, Slater immediately told the site to take their stinkin’ paws off his photographs and to take them down. He claimed the photos were his, and therefore should only be used with his permission and if he was paid. Wikimedia refused, claiming the photos belong in the public domain.

Earlier this year I wrote about the copyright of the selfie taken at the Oscars of Ellen Degeneres and several other celebrities. The photo set records for being retweeted across the globe. Although the camera belonged to Ellen, established case law indicated that the copyright for the valuable picture actually belongs to Bradley Cooper, as he was the photographer.

Wikimedia’s lawyers researched the issue and ultimately concluded that like the picture at the Oscars, the copyright belongs to the photographer. Because a monkey is considered property and not a person, the monkey could not own the copyright to the photo. Therefore, Wikimedia concluded the picture belonged in the public domain.

For the copyright to belong to Slater, Wikimedia claims he would had to have made substantial contributions to the final image, which he did not. Even if he had, Slater would still only have copyrights to those alterations, not the original photograph.

Slater purportedly responded by saying, “You maniacs! Damn you! Damn you all to hell!” Tired of Wikimedia’s gorilla tactics, he further plans to sue the site over the copyright to the photos.

The trial will allegedly be covered by former ‘Entertainment Tonight’ host Leeza Gibbons.

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