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by
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If destiny were femme fatale that lures fate, then passing away of 84 years old Charlton Heston on 5th April 2008 out of Alzheimer related complications drove this irony all the bit closer in the film noir that is life! On April 3,2008, two days before Heston's death, Marlon Brando would have celebrated his 84th birthday!



Above: Charlton Heston as Mark Antony 1950

No two actors united by death and life in the month of April were such diverse practitioners of their craft or political activists of causes they held dear to their heart. And yet there were remarkable similarities in their lives that compel a look.HOLLYWOOD DIARY – Colonel Kurtz vs. Moses

Marlon Brando was born April 3,1924 (the very same day Doris Day, the all American sweetheart of 50s and 60s was born) to alcoholic parents as the youngest of three children in Omaha, Nebraska. His mother Dorothy Brando was a community theatre actress and mentor to a very gifted Henry Fonda, then in his teens, when not drunk! It was this troubled legacy that moulded Brando into an enigmatic rebel in real life or on screen!
Charlton Heston was born as John Charles Carter on October 4,1923 in Evanston, Illinois.His mother remarried a certain Chester Heston, and the ten year boy was rechristened Charlton Heston. Brando's parents

separated, when he eleven, and Dorothy Brando moved to her mother's home with her three children in California. Though the Brandos reunited after two years, but the young boy was fast becoming a discipline problem, something Marlon acknowledged in his 1994 autobiography, "**Songs that my mother taught me,**"-"…when you are a child who is unwanted or unwelcome…you look for an identity that will be acceptable!" so young Brando experimented with alternate identities, pretending and thus acting to deal with demons in his teen years.

Heston had no such demons, instead the young boy developed a robust sense of confidence as a defense mechanism, that contributed his charismatic sense of self on screen in the good roles he played or the over the top performances he delivered.



Above:Brando as the iconic Don Vito Corleone in The Godfather (1972).

Brando's abusive father in order to curb Bud Jr. sent him to the same military academy, where he had been educated. Marlon excelled in theatre but in his final year he was expelled for insubordinate and delinquent behaviour! He retuned home to dig ditches as a summer job arranged by his father, whereas Charlton at 17 won a drama scholarship to Northwestern University. Brando went to New York, where one sister was trying to be a painter and the other had appeared as an actress on Broadway. In New York, Brando plunged headlong into New School Dramatic Workshop with Stella Adler and later at Actors' Studio with Lee Strassberg, honing his techniques of the 'Stanislavski System', or 'The Method'. This new acting style by proposed and developed by Russian dramaturg, Konstantin Stanislavski; exhorting its disciples to call upon one's internalized memories and emotions as means to express truth in a portrayal.In 1944,a knee injury exempted Brando from

active duty in world war II, but Heston spent two years as a radio operator & gunner with a B-25 Bomber squadron in Alaskan Aleutian Islands. He married his Northwestern classmate, Lydia Marie Clarke; his wife for next 64 years till death did them part.
In 1948,the Hestons move to New York (leaving behind managing of a playhouse in North Carolina) where Charlton was offered supporting role in a Broadway revival of Antony and Cleopatra, Marlon was by now already big time as Stanley Kowalski in **Streetcar named Desire**, written by Tennessee Williams and directed by Elia Kazan.Brando was the third choice for the role after John Garfield and Burt Lancaster had turned down Kowalski.Brando wore tight fitting blue jeans and torn T-shirt for the part of a brute, which has left its singular impact on fashion and glamour industries of America, and in turn the entire world! To this day, Brando's animal cry of "Stella-aaah!" twice in the play resonates in the mind of every actor, trained or untrained.
In 1950,Heston moved to TV, seeing him in CBS production of **Wuthering Heights**, producer Hal B.Wallis of **Casablanca**fame offered hi a movie role. Heston's idealistic wife reminded him that they were in the big city to pursue theatre and TV, not movies! Heston cajoled her,"…well maybe for one film to see what it is like…." Meanwhile Brando was preparing with real paraplegics in a hospital ward to gain first hand experience for his debut in Stanley Kramer's **The Men**, the public was astonished to learn that the actor was not a paraplegic but paid actor. Heston was also lauded for his debut in film noir **Dark City**, which brought him to the notice of CecilB.Demille.

But now for next 4 years every actor alive would dwarf in front of Brando, as he would be successively be nominated for Oscars. His first hammer blow was screen adaptation of **A street car named Desire** (1951), where the rest of his co-actors, Vivien Leigh, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden walked away with Oscars! Bogart beat Brando for his role in **The African Queen**. The film also bagged the award for art Direction, out of the 12 nominations it got. Brando in reality hated Kowalski,"…he had the brutal aggressiveness…I hate…I am afraid of it…" But in his long career people were going to confuse the man with the sensational characters he created, it was something Kazan had mentioned to Williams,"In addition to his gifts as an actor…he has great physical appeal and sensuality." Brando would become a prisoner in his own gilded cage. Brando was brilliant as Emiliano Zapata in **Viva Zapata** (1952) and as Marc Antony in **Julius Caesar** (1953), he snagged the

usual nominations, but the Oscar evaded him. Then came his role as Terry Malloy in **On the Waterfront**(1954), not only did he win his first Oscar, but bagged the golden Globe, Cannes Film Festival Prize, BAFTA and New York film critics award. He still remains the only American actor to have won BAFTA thrice consecutively, from 1953-55. Marlon Brando had not only arrived, but was now the premier acting talent in the world!



Above: Charlton Heston (left) with Marlon Brando, James Baldwin, and Harry Belafonte at Civil Rights March 1963

Charlton Heston meanwhile essayed a circus manager in 1952 best picture Oscar winner **The Greatest Show On Earth**, lost the Oscar winning role of Sefton in **Stalag 17** to William Holden but hit pay dirt in 1956, portraying Moses in Demille's classic T**he Ten Commandments**. Demille gave him the iconic role because 6ft3in tall square jawed Heston, resembled Michelangelo's Moses! Heston played larger than life heroes, who led masses, whereas Brando played the loner, the protagonist who was an anti-social. His characters had no code, except a commitment to style of life, in which he was betrayed by those he trusted, his own! Remember the improvised back of taxi scene with Rod Steiger in **On the Waterfront**, where his Terry Malloy laments:"oh Charlie, oh Charlie! You don't understand, I could have had class….I could have been a contender…I could have been somebody…instead of a bum…which what I am!" He struck a universal chord because Brando lamented for all our failed hopes. The Brando mystique grew from the persona of the gangster leader and outlaw with vulnerability of a Byronic hero. He was the first angry young man, the delinquent and tough rolled into one. be it Terry Malloy or Stanley Kowalski. If there were any doubts about his charismatic acting, they were put to rest in Kramer's **The Wild One** (1954) essaying Johnny Strabler. It would be another 18 years when Brando would pull a coup like that.

In **The Wild One**, Brando gave birth to rebel mixed up teenager in a first motorcycle film, where his leather clad bike gang leader terrorizes a small town with the tagline,"…nobody tells me what to

do!" When a mom in the movie wonders what Brando's rebelling against, he fixes her between the eyes with the response , "..Whaddya got?" Not only crew cut T-shirts, jeans and leather jackets sold like never before but an entire bad boy brigade sprang up that aped and copied Brando-James Dean, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, Albert Finney and John Osbourne whose play Look back in anger, gave rise to the "Kitchen Sink" movement on the English Stage.

In 1958,Brando giving credo to his unpredictability in playing honest roles accepted to portray a confused Nazi officer in **The Young Lions** and turned down the role of Judah Ben-Hur so did Burt Lancaster and Rock Hudson. Heston had previously purveyed historical roles as diverse as Buffalo Bill in **The Pony Express** (1953) and Andrew Jackson in **The President's Lady** (1953), so after completing **The Buccaneer** (1958) Heston stepped in as fourth choice as lead in **Ben-Hur** (1958). The rest is history! The film went to gross $37 million in 1959, and Heston would like Brando would be identified with the biblical epic, bagging the best actor Oscar out of the eleven awards the film got. In 1958, Heston portrayed a righteous Mexican detective against Orson Welles, in the film noir **Touch of Evil,** helmed by Welles; critics hail it as Heston's best role ever. But **Ben-Hur** meant that Heston was going to be one-person Hollywood trek through the pages of World History. His solid frame, granite carved profile and voice to match intimidated opponents with a glare. His was righteous anger commanding respect and conveying integrity even in villainous roles. He glorified the power of the individual in sync with Middle America's vision of how the world should be.



Above:Marlon Brando as Colonel Kurtz in Apocalypse Now (1979).

The epics with Heston in lead flew thick and fast; **El Cid** (1961) **55 Days at Peking** (1963) as Michelangelo in **The agony and the ecstasy**, as John the Baptist in **The greatest story ever told,**along with Major Amos Dundee in **Major Dundee** (all in 1965) and General Gordon in **Khartoum**(1966). French critic Michael Mourlet infamously rhapsodized- "… Charlton Heston is an axiom of the cinema!" Heston crowned of 1965 by becoming the President of Screen Actors' Guild for next 6 years, when only 42.Brando was now burning his candle at both ends and was dissipating fast. He snagged another Oscar nomination for **Sayonara** (1967) but the 60s were a whole new ball game for Brando. He started

the decade by forming Pennebraker named for his mother; and produced, directed and starred in psychological revenge western **One eyed Jacks** (1961).
But Brando was in a hurry to kill his rebel image and thus followed **The Ugly American** (1963) and the brilliant **Reflections in a golden** eye (1967), where John Huston directed him as the stifled homosexual Major Penderton.But he also did movies like **The Appaloosa** (1966) summed up by late Pauline Kael as"…. the dog of a movie about a horse." for money. Brando's two failed marriages, numerous affairs and a new penchant for quarrelling with old time friends such as Sam Spiegel, who had produced On the Waterfront, during the shooting of **The Chase** (1968), kept him in tabloids, but his crown was gone. He had been voted as the top box-office star from 1953-59,now in the late 60s, Brando was a had been.
Heston was brilliant as Colonel George Taylor in **The Planet of the Apes** (1968) as Marc Antony in technicolour **JuliusCaesar** (1970) science fiction film of apocalyptic horror in **Soylent Green** (1971). And while Brando's epitaphs were being carved by critics, starting with Truman Capote (way back in 1957), Hollis Alpert, David Susskind and Dwight MacDonald for not returning to stage and abandoning craft for money. Then came the year 1972; Brando declined a young Francis Ford Coppola to portray Don Vito Corleone in **The Godfather**. Brando said, "It is about mafia…. I wont glorify mafia!" Mario Puzo sent a letter to Brando to reconsider as the author felt that only Brando could do justice to the job. Coppola convinced Brando for a make-up test, which Brando did himself. The results of the audition left Paramount chief, Charles Bludhorn, stumped! Brando boycotted the ceremony, becoming the second actor after George C.Scott to refuse an Oscar for best actor. He sent a Native American activist Sacheen Littlefeather to read his protest against stereotypical portrayal of Red Indians by Hollywood and TV. Brando was in the eye of storm once again, on 14th October 1972. **Last Tango in Paris**, premièred. Bertolucci's masterpiece had a 20-year-old Jeanne (Maria Schneider) entering into a no questions asked sexual relationship with 45 years old American expatriate Paul, grieving after his wife's suicide. The film's so called eroticism overshadowed Brando's academy award nominated performance. An embittered Brando limited by his burgeoning weight now became ever more contemptuous of his profession and worked infrequently.
Heston continued to deliver blockbusters **The Omega Man** (1973) **Earthquake** (1974) and an ever-increasing number of cameos, supporting roles and also on theatre. In 1978, Brando became Jor-El in **Superman**, as he got a pay cheque of $3.7 million for just two weeks work. In 1979, Coppola tried to give Brando's uneven career a lift by offering him the role of iconic Colonel Walter Kurtz in **Apocalypse Now**,

fashioned on Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. An overweight Brando would parade around the set, little knowing about the book or his lines. Coppola shot him in shadows with improvised dialogues in the cult classic. To utter the tagline of the character with a close-up, Coppola had to shell out the$75,000 for an hour's work in which the cranky Brando just had to say, "The horror! The horror!" Brando argued on his part in his 1994 autobiography that Coppola had agreed to let him rewrite the script, but it was Brando's insight that Kurtz have a bald pate and lighting be so devised that the maniacal colonel's eyes were emphasized. In 1980, Brando retired after locking horns with temperamental George C.Scott in the thriller The Formula.

Both Brando and Heston spoke openly against racism and were active supporters of civil rights movement. Heston campaigned for Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy; and during the civil rights march held in Washington D.C. in 1963,Heston, Brando, Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier, James Garner, Burt Lancaster and Paul Newman represented Hollywood. In 1968, Brando cancelled his lead role in The Arrangement, due to Dr. King's slaying and his express desire to devote more time to civil rights movement. The assassination of Robert Kennedy that year, saw Heston the liberal democrat support President Johnson's Gun Control Act and oppose Vietnam War. Brando even funded Black Panthers Party and stopped when the radical group advocated indiscriminate violence for the revolution.



Above:Brando as Emiliano Zapata in a trailer for the 1952 film Viva Zapata!

By 80s, Heston opposed affirmative action, supported gun rights and became a Republican from Democrat and campaigned for Reagan, Bush Sr. and Bush.Jr. But his indignation remained righteous; in 1992 he stunned a Time Warner Annual meeting by reading Rapper Ice-T's lyrics aloud from the song 'Cop Killer', from an album released by the

company. The song preached killing police and sodomizing women. Heston stood tall, like Moses and asked, “If Adolf Hitler came back with a hot movie synopsis, every studio in town be after it…would Warner’s be among them?” Warner Bros. pulled the song from the album. He was the patriarch of being politically incorrect, and wont bow down!

Brando was attacked for his anti-semitism in 1996 on Larry King Live, telling the host “Hollywood is owned by Jews,” and yet in 1946, Brando was in Ben Hecht’s Zionist play **A Flag is born**, fought for Israel’s establishment and smuggling of holocaust survivors to Palestine.

Hollywood’s Jew bosses looked the other way at Don Corleone. Family problems and ambivalent sexuality was not Heston’s cup of tea, in 1990, Brando’s look-alike eldest born Christian shot and killed the Tahitian lover of his half-sister Cheyenne. Christian was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years, but the great mumbler spoke for an hour in a rambling account of how his ex-wife and he had failed Christian! Cheyenne in 1995, hanged herself at 25 in Tahiti and Brando’s third wife and the dead girl’s mother Tarita went public with her memoirs Marlon, my love and torment, accusing Brando of sexually abusing Cheyenne! Saddened by these incidents Brando returned to screen despite his obesity, difficulty to memorize his lines and childish demands on set, he continued to turn Oscar nominated **A dry white season** (1989) **The Freshman**(1990) **Don Juan DeMarco** (1995) and as Max in The Score (2001) with his disciple DeNiro, where he was unduly tough on the director Frank Oz, the legendary co-producer of **Seasme Street**, as ‘Miss Piggy.’ Heston remained in demand from his cameo in Wayne’ World 2 till Tim Burton’s remake of **Planet of the Apes**. But Heston had been defending the redneck and political incorrectness as President of National Rifle Association from 1998,fighting hip replacement and prostrate remission despite Chemotherapy. In 2000 convention of NRA, Heston Moses like raised a rifle over his head and dared democrat presidential candidate Al Gore to take it away, “ from my cold dead hands!” Gore lost the blue-collar votes to George Bush in an election so close that any set back was perilous! Obama and Clinton 8 years later are still asserting the right to bear arms, despite countless school and university campus shootings. Moses was an ardent supporter of Second Amendment, and who defy Moses!

In 2002, Heston went public with his Alzheimer’s disease and yet a year later received Presidential Medal of Honor from the President at White house. Till Brando called it quits on 1st July, 2004 at 80, he was to be further maligned in Brando Unzipped by Darwin Porter, as being lover of Christan Marquand, Laurence Olivier, Cary Grant, Wally Cox, Rock Hudson, Stewart Granger and Marilyn Monroe. But Brando’s neighbour Jack Nicholson had summed up his influence, “ There’s no one before or since like Marlon Brando….enormous and flawless…like

Picasso! He changed my life!”

Heston survived unkind intellectuals like Michael Moore who ambushed him on tape while filming for Bowling in Columbine, or that babe eye candy George Clooney who joked about his Alzheimer’s, with his Moses like dignity. But in former First lady Nancy Reagan’s eulogy sums up the kind of a person Chuck was, “ I will never forget Chuck as a Hero on the big screen…but a hero in life…in whatever he was doing!”

Heston played great roles whereas Brando was the greatest actor alive, and as these old world heroes finish one by one in this world of mediocrity, I mourn for them, for they were part of my childhood