

# Cry "Havoc," and let slip the Apes of War

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Tim Burton's 2001 reboot of the seminal 1968 science fiction classic, "Planet of the Apes," was for the most part a middling affair, which is now mainly remembered for Rick Baker's make-up designs turning Helena Bonham-Carter into the spitting image of Michael Jackson, except not quite as creepy.



So, when news of yet another reboot - this time telling the saga's previously untold origin story - hit a while back, most film fans expectantly greeted it with a general sense of "meh". But against all expectations, relative unknown director Rupert Wyatt, has managed to pull a monkey-suited rabbit out of his hat, and turned in that increasingly rare blockbuster film that is emotionally engaging as well as being a visceral thrill ride.

Eschewing the aforementioned traditional make-up techniques, Wyatt instead turned to WETA Digital - the folks most recently behind the visual wizardry of James Cameron's Smurfs / Pocahontas mashup, "Avatar" - to bring all the film's simians to life. And what a job they did.

## Caesar, star of the show

You see, despite what the film's posters and trailers may have you believe, the bland James Franco is not the star of this show. That spot is comfortably, powerfully and irrevocably held by Caesar the CGI chimpanzee. Through the genetic engineering of Franco's pH-neutral scientist, Will Rodman, Caesar is turned into a hyper-smart chimp as part of Rodman's quest to find a cure for his Alzheimer's stricken father; played by John Lithgow, in one of the film's few human performance standouts.

Through the course of the first two acts, Caesar is transformed - through the brilliant motion captured performance of Andy Serkis (he, of Gollum and King Kong fame) - from an adorable and curious super-chimp to an angry simian revolutionary. This dark metamorphosis brought about by equal parts misunderstanding - as Caesar finds himself trapped in a human world, where he is the intellectual superior to some, but still reviled by others as just a common animal - and that ages old, favourite human pastime: animal cruelty.

Said cruelty is primarily provided by actor Tom Felton, the sour-faced youth most famous for playing spoilt Harry Potter bully, Draco Malfoy (Typecast much?). His malicious animal keeper, Dodge Landon, sneers and scowls his way through every scene, nearly bordering on caricature. If Felton had some facial hair, he would have been twirling his moustache so vigorously that he'd be in danger of developing static electricity super powers.





With the exception of Rodman's neighbour from hell, played by David Hewlett, the rest of the cast are veritable wall flowers, instantly forgettable the instant they exit stage left. But this movie is not called Rise of the Planet of the Supporting Actors for a reason.

## **Tale of empowerment and emancipation**

The digital simians are simply a wonder to behold, and are filled with more nuanced character than all of Michael Bay's "Transformers" robots combined. As such, it's easy to be caught up in their tale of empowerment and emancipation, despite the fact that Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver's rousing script is light on logic and heavy on holes in a few places. But these flaws are minute in comparison to the spot-on pacing, great character moments and satisfying final act action set pieces.

One scene in particular - involving a memorable interaction between Caesar and Dodge Landon - is a prime example of how director Rupert Wyatt is able to take a moment, potentially laden in the best cinematic gorgonzola around, and instead turn it into something truly astounding and jaw-dropping. I don't think there was a single viewer in my cinema that wasn't either caught mouth agape or mouthing a four letter expletive under their breath for this scene. If you've seen it, you'll know exactly which one I am talking about.

Even the end-credits are deftly used to tell the final part of the story in the most simplistic manner possible, which once again shows the hand of a talented individual at the helm. This is a star-making vehicle for Wyatt and I for one will be very interested to see what he does next.

## **Caesar's reign has just begun**

More importantly though: I am now eagerly anticipating the inevitable sequel. The script did a great job of subtly foreshadowing a continuation of the story, through the use of background news stories, hinting at the possible start of a new franchise without blatantly screaming out that it's another convert to the Church of the Great Monetary Bovine. And with the critical and commercial success the movie has been receiving the world over, it would seem that Caesar's reign has just begun.

8/10



## ABOUT KERVYN CLOETE

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