

Dull Soap Opera in ‘Dawn of the Planet of the Apes’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 10, 2014 - 11:50pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes” just goes to show that you can have the most expensive and best looking visual effects money can buy, but it doesn’t mean a damn thing if you haven’t got a good tale to tell.

The apes themselves, and Andy Serkis’ Caesar in particular, remain technical wonders, but rarely has something so lifelike been in the service of a blockbuster so utterly lifeless. This long, slow-moving, self-important, unrelentingly dark and depressive picture is more butt-buster than blockbuster. Those looking for a good popcorn movie about talking apes are in for a monkey melodrama instead. It treats the family tensions inside the ape clan like Shakespeare, but it’s more like a simian soap opera that could have been called “All My Chimps,” or perhaps “The Apes Of Our Lives.”

Picking up 10 years after the events of the first movie, the human race has nearly been wiped out by the simian flu and all of society has collapsed, but small pockets of survivors are attempting to rebuild something resembling the society they once knew.



Ape Leader Caesar in ‘Dawn of the Planet of the Apes’

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

At the same time, the apes themselves have built a thriving ape colony in the mountains outside of San Francisco. They are led by Caesar, the

talking ape with a high IQ. They live off the land, hunt wild animals, swing from the trees and live in a massive tree house. I don't know if its brave, or just foolhardy but the film begins with nearly 20 minutes of ape grunting as it sets the stage and introduces us to Caesar, his sons, his advisors, the ape code they now live by ("Ape no kill ape") and his loyal but angry lieutenant Koba.

This relative peace is shattered when a scout team of humans (led by Jason Clarke) stumbles upon the apes in the mountains, and in a panic wounds one of them. They're up looking for an elusive power source to keep the lights on inside the rebuilt city. Clarke is a scientist and widower who attempts to make peace with the apes and wants to find a way to work together.

Meanwhile, Gary Oldman is holding down the fort back in the human colony ready to blast those damn dirty apes at the first sign of trouble. Keri Russell, Kirk Acevedo, and Kodi Smit-McPhee fill out the rest of human cast, but its motion-capture maestro Serkis who's the real star as Caesar. The effects are nearly flawless. These digitally created apes actually look to inhabit the same real place as the human actors themselves, and their movements have almost none of the herky-jerky movement that marred earlier computer generated creatures.



Dreyfus (Gary Oldman) in 'Dawn of the Planet of the Apes'

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

The Apes family drama (credited to Mark Bomback, Amanda Silver, and Rick Jaffa) is strictly boilerplate. There's a son out to prove himself after a setback in battle, a life threatening illness, betrayal, a lieutenant who lusts for revenge on humans and other assorted monkey business. None of this is terribly interesting, and when it's largely conveyed to the audience either with ape grunting, or simplistic sentences like "You friend" it's tedious at best, and maddening at worst. Some apes speak English inexplicably even when there are no humans around. The ape drama is only sporadically broken up by big action movie set-pieces. Some apes even get action movie catchphrases. But it's invariably caveman-speak; they make Arnold Schwarzenegger's delivery sound like Patrick Stewart.

"Dawn" subscribes to the default "gritty" reboot formula, but that formula is showing serious signs of wear and tear. It's all just so dreary, dark, and dull. And there's not a shred of levity to break the tension, and far less action than you'd expect from a movie about genetically superior talking apes. This is the kind of movie where a character must tell an injured ape "Try not to speak, you need to rest" and do it with a straight face.

"Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes" opens everywhere on July 11th, in 3-D. IMAX 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for show times and theaters. Featuring Andy Serkis, Jason Clarke, Gary Oldman, Keri Russell, and Judy Greer. Screenplay by Mark Bomback, Amanda Silver, and Rick Jaffa. Written by Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver and Mark Bombeck. Directed by Matt Reeves. Rated "PG-13"



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