

'War for the Planet of the Apes' delivers a fitting finale

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Rating: ««« out of 4

Running Time: 140 min.

I'll admit that I can be somewhat dismissive of remakes and reboots from time to time. More often than not, they don't hold up nearly as well as the films they are attempting to emulate. There are, however, exceptions, like the redo of the *Planet of the Apes* series. Unlike most summer flicks, these films provide thrills as well as plenty of deeper themes and ideas to digest.

Apes

finishes this series on a strong note.

War for the Planet of the
is no different and

Set some time after the events of the previous film, Caesar (Andy Serkis) and the apes have found themselves battling human military forces and suffering great losses. None more so than a tragic attack at the hands of a cruel and extremist Colonel (Woody Harrelson), who wants to wipe apes off the face of the planet for good. Battle-hardened and filled with a desire for vengeance, Caesar develops tunnel-vision and decides to leave his clan and kill his nemesis. Traveling with a few close simian friends, the group head out on a suicidal mission that doesn't go according to plan.

While the movie's title may conjure thoughts of elaborate, full-scale battles between the two groups, this is actually a smaller and more intimate film in many respects. In fact, a lot of the film is played on the base in a prison camp... kind of a simian take on *Spartacus*. Caesar has plenty to grapple with, including grief, loss and rage as well as hanging guilt from the previous episode over causing the death of a compatriot - which has resulted in splinters among his kind. This chimp is dealing with a lot of personal strife, resulting in a more somber and grim tone (further emphasized by a locale switch move to a snowy cold mountain where the military outfit are set

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up).

Harrelson is also solid as the icy Colonel. This guy is particularly unpleasant, expressing some radical ideas based on his own fears and anger issues. The character even forces captured apes to labor to their deaths building a great wall for his compound and employs gorillas who have left Caesar’s lead to do menial tasks for the soldiers. It’s another new and interesting wrinkle to the formula.

What’s most remarkable about this feature is the work of Serkis and the other cast members playing apes. Using motion capture, these characters are essentially created digitally. While the previous films boasted some incredible effects, they’re even further developed this time out, allowing numerous close-ups and facial expressions that look flawless in execution. In a story with so much dark material, the emotional heft still translates through the CGI characters to the audience. It’s a remarkable accomplishment, really.

Don’t worry, though, the film isn’t completely without some lightness. One chimp referred to as Bad Ape (Steve Zahn) offers a few moments of comedy to the proceedings. And on a purely visual level, one gets a lot of amusement out of his costume. This is an ape who feels the chill and insists on wearing a human winter vest and hat. It isn’t deep, but he does provide a chuckle or two. As for fans of the entire *Apes* series, they may also enjoy plenty of small nods to the original 1968 film. Admittedly, the movie doesn’t go out of its way to connect them in an explicit way, but there are some subtle links.

War of the Planet of the Apes isn’t the lightest movie at theaters right now, but it aspires to be a great deal more than your average forgettable summer blockbuster and hits the right notes most of the time. If you’ve liked any of the previous installments, this finale provides an appropriate and fitting close.

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***By Glenn Kay
For the Sun***