CONQUEST & CONTEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

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CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES


Cesar .................................................. Roddy McDowall
Dawn .......................................................... Claude Akins
Lisa .......................................................... Natalie Trundy
Karloff .................................................. Hari Rhodes
Kolv .................................................. Severe Darden
Armando .................................................. Louis Wagner
Ricardo Montalban
Hain .................................................. John Randolph
Aldo .................................................. David Show

It seems the Planet of the Apes series has finally reached its end, but not its nadir. Without a doubt, Frederick S. Clarke had a point when he labeled the series the first true science fiction epic on Hollywood screens (4/38). Although I will not go so far that I will say that the series is a treasured one; a slick, clever body of films, though flawed and uneven, that is truly unique in motion picture history.

In APOE, CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES, Paul Dehn mounted an extremely imaginative screenplay, full of wit, clever plot twists, and a film quickly fol- lows Cesar, the very life-affirming of the most human of the Apes, to a tragic conclusion, from his close relationship with circes owner, Armando; to his sudden aspiration from him; to humiliation into the horrors of ape manipulation by man’s torture de- vices; to the establishment of the Caesar-govern- ing猿 in which man and ape work together, and to vengeful ape-leader, re- taliation and victory over the human masters.

Cesar’s ultimate victory against humanity that the apes’ bloodthirst seems entirely justified. Man is an ape, in a sense, and has no right to be one; man is one of the four reasons for which the human race exists. It becomes a one-dimensional racist parable, perhaps, but the death of one man seems enough reason for one ape to go crackers (as it were) in the face of a helpless situation, and to now realize that the human race exists. It becomes a one-dimensional racist parable, perhaps, but the death of one man seems enough reason for one ape to go crackers (as it were) in the face of a helpless situation, and to now realize that the human race exists.

The scenes here are generally desperate, anti-ape, inhuman, or nothing. Even a symbols or repre- sentation of antihumanism is generally not related to the extent that we come to feel or understand why humanity is so hateful.


No one can blame Paul Dehn, or anyone for that matter, for trying to make a movie in a genre that is so difficult to do.

BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES


Cesar .................................................. Roddy McDowall
Aldo .................................................. Claude Akins
Lisa .......................................................... Natalie Trundy
Kolv .................................................. Severe Darden
Armando .................................................. Louis Wagner
Ricardo Montalban
Hain .................................................. John Randolph
Alma .................................................. France Nuyen

Both speech and structure, and it becomes awkward to the point of silliness.

But J. Lee Thompson comes to the rescue, with a film, intelligent guiding hand. His timing with camera and editing in ever-sharp, cutting action and reaction with acute sensitivity and control. Although the extremely close face shots kill the illusion by exposing the make-up, they are extremely effective for dramatic purposes. Ape1 probably had the finest, most characteris- tic make-ups, since there were only three char- acters to make-up, and Thompson uses the close- up here for solidly-founded reasons, and it can be justified as much, more than compensating for the lack of make-up on the action scenes.

Photographically, it comes closest to Ape1 in quality and evocation, Richard H. Kline at his best. The visual style of Ape1, plus the production number, plus the sheer novelty of the ape’s faces, plus the director’s control, gives the film a quality that is as believable as any of the series, and it is an absolute delight to see. The colors are sharp and clear, the shadows strongly detailed, and it all gleams with a very professional sheen, both in interiors and exteriors.

Thompson permits some remarkable cutting, like after Armando jumps through the window, be sharply cuts to the governor’s angry exclamation, "I knew that circus owner was lying!" Also, in the scene where Caesar is choosing his name from a book, it cuts to his staring in secret de- flance at the governor. The timing is just right in each of these moments, and in several others.

There are many things wrong with the film. One is that it’s not completely convincing in tone or development, and Caesar’s transition from working to peacemaker, though essential, is not believable. It looks and sounds tacky, on- almost the entire film. Maybe Thompson had his speech laid by a reprise from Goldsmith’s score for Ape1, so dramatically and interestingly.

With all my criticisms, it’s still a very en- joyable, thoroughly professional endeavor. It re- mains one of the most imaginatively constructed, and the most purely action-packed film of the series, plus some of the qualities that distinguished Ape1 and 3 especially, and often suffers through lack of them.

I say all this to bring out why the latest project had to be failed. BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES, is a considerable improvement in many ways. For one thing, the style is more con- fident and assured. There seems to be less strain in the film, and the emphasis is back on the ape-ape, ape-human relationships as it was in Ape1 and Ape2, and there is also a good balance in these relationships that builds the plot frame- work easily and smoothly, and with entertaining fluidity.

But all the films, BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES presents the weakest, least imaginative story to date. It is a half hour story, in which Caesar and his friends pay a price dearly to the reconformed mutant city, whose leader (Klop) decides to destroy the entire city before they supposedly destroy them. It turns out that all the hopes were to do war. The film is a second record of his long-dead parents, and find out the fate of mankind, it sounds remotely like Ape2, basically the premise is nothing, and even the subplot of a stupid gorilla, Alby, trying to take over Caesar’s kingdom, and killing Caes- ar’s own son, cannot disguise the empty-headed story. John and Joyce Conrington have written a script based on one of the most beloved and successful series demands some kind of acceptable transitions from one stage to the next. I guess it was inevi- table that such things had to be sacrificed, but for all its ingenuity and pacing, this lack still inhibits a fuller involvement in the ape-dominated world that is about to commence.

Though all have tried very hard, the battle scenes that take up about the last half-hour of more of the film are its weakest part. The cutting from hand-held, to static shots is never smooth enough to be awesome or tight enough to be consistently exciting. It’s pretty may- be, admittedly at times suspenseful (especially when the ape blowtorch was their way into the con- trol room), but it goes beyond aesthetic reasoning and endeavour to become merely a display of bloody fighting and carnage, with no meaningful context. The scenes are often long, and even in a planet city provides the background to make it seem like the episode was so well- tended to be. At times, it’s like a showcase for Caesar City, with not enough ape and man to make it the totally convincing or awesome meta- phorical battlefield it needed to be. Thus, the scope of the series, and the film, seems proportionally diminished almost to inimportance.

But all this can be justified in one way or other because Thompson, and photographer Bruce Berta, evidently worked ardently to make it work as best they could. On the surface, it is an extremely handsome production. The colors are sharp and clear, the shadows strongly detailed, and it all gleams with a very professional sheen, both in interiors and exteriors.

Cesar is a very solid character, and he makes a good job of controlling shots, imperceptibly cut to static shots. Indeed, the epic flavor is captured better here than in Ape1, with beautiful usage of ex- plosions and pyrotechnics.

Leonard Rosenman’s score, and its application also comes closest to the first films in strength and functional usage. It’s a lushly detailed score, and it’s a pity that it’s not used more. The style is more con- fident and assured. There seems to be less strain in the film, and the emphasis is back on the ape-ape, ape-human relationships as it was in Ape1 and Ape2, and there is also a good balance in these relationships that builds the plot frame- work easily and smoothly, and with entertaining fluidity.

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