

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING FOR AUGUST 13-19, 2011

TV The Journal view



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'Tanked' shows there's plenty of fishy business in Las Vegas

Wayde King (left) and Brett Raymer
star in "Tanked," premiering Friday
on Animal Planet.

See Page 4 for more details.

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Double Take: *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*

Matt: Risible story, awesome ape action;
Josh: Doesn't rise to its potential

Matt: It's hard to complain if the movie is called "Rise of the Planet of the Apes" and you go anyway. Fortunately, "Rise" knows how to exploit its premise through action — a skill that makes it distinct from buyer-beware titles like "Transformers" and "Cowboys and Aliens." As a film where apes run amuck it's engaging and exciting, and even its stupider elements can be as fun as a barrel of apt metaphors.

First, the stupid. While the story creates a plausible-enough premise for the apes' first steps to supplanting humans, the specifics mostly work as camp. I'm not sure it's quite the tone the filmmakers were aiming for, but it isn't dull. This is a film where "scientists" and "businesspeople" talk loudly and vaguely about their jobs but never explain them, let alone are shown doing them. Where drug cures aren't so much "developed" as conjured into the world fully formed by lone geniuses, who administer them to their own relatives for years without anyone else noticing. Where a veterinarian can date a researcher for five years before she asks him



**Josh
Moniz**

**&
Matt
Voigts**

how he acquired the super-intelligent chimpanzee they've been raising.

James Franco's uninvested, can-I-go-home-yet performance as lead human is well pitched to the cheesier parts of the drama, just as Andy Serkis' characteristically nuanced performance as head ape Caesar fits the monkey business. Serkis (who also played Gollum and King Kong) is amazing at investing subtlety in characters who spend a lot of time raving, mumbling, and/or smashing things. He, the effects team, and other motion-capture actors bring a depth to their creations that ensure that of all the ridiculousness on screen, the apes seem convincing as characters. To be sure, they don't look real — but they don't look bad, either — and boy howdy is it fun to watch them wreak havoc on San Francisco, leaving behind massive property destruction and an improbably low human body count.



What makes a man? Is it the monkey business he does?

Josh: "Rise of the Planet of the Apes" is an original idea that was written in a dull way for general audiences, but saved in filming by excellent direction.

The concept — another species challenges humans' position as the dominate species — has plenty of potential and the film does a good job with it. The apes' development of society is relatively plausible, and it's easy to see our own ascent as species in them. The film also rocks the portrayal of Cesar, the main ape, as a being torn between humans and animals. The motion capture performance of Caesar by Andy Serkis and the realistic ape special effects both deserve an Oscar, and they really care the heart of the film.

The film's problem is its script. The script is a laundry list of clichés are forced

into the plot, even though they don't fit the style of the film. Only the bad guys die in the battle. Someone has to say "Nature was not meant to be tampered with." The apes have to get away "Free Willy" style, despite the fact it means the doom of the human race. Not to mention awkwardly using "Planet of the Apes" quotes in distracting ways. It's easy to tell these pieces are crammed in to make a producer feel better, because really original stories are harder to gauge for financial potential.

The film would have been better if they had approached it as a tragedy where the human and the ape's nature makes them enemies.

Luckily, the direction mostly saves the film. The sight of the balconies filled with apes, or the leader apes

riding a tram in the middle of the revolution, is fascinating. The close ups of Caesar's humanistic expressions are compelling. Not to mention, the direction effectively shows the apes' communication despite the lack of dialogue.

Like Matt said, the action is also spectacular. The apes' fighting skills are a little too effective, but you can care for the danger they're not super heroes. Not to mention, the havoc they wreak is just plain fun to watch.

Matt: If taken at face value, the movie's theme of "not meddling in God's domain" is offensively and/or hilariously crude. "Rise" doesn't seem to take issue with the specifics of animal testing or the pharmaceutical industry so much as object philosophically to

"progress." Humanity's sin appears less to be mistreating creation but rather attempting to cure Alzheimer's disease. How dare we, right?

Josh: Matt's is correct that the "don't meddle" message is totally off-key. But, it has more to do with pushing tired concepts into movie for the sake of familiarity than it has to do with the filmmakers saying anything. A tone deaf approach like that is always going to be out of sync.

Matt: 7.5/10, **Josh:** 7/10

Synopsis:

Researcher Will Rodman (James Franco) develops a serum that may cure Alzheimer's disease, testing in it on both his stricken father and Caesar, a young ape he is raising. Caesar grows in intelligence, ultimately leading his fellow captive primates on an escape from San Francisco and humanity.

Director: Rupert Wyatt
Writers: Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, Pierre Boule (novel)
Starring: James Franco, Andy Serkis, Frieda Pinto, John Lithgow

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